Mr. Speaker, it is my distinct pleasure to recognize the Clarion Area Jaycees on this milestone. Once again, I want to thank them for all of their devoted service and my best wishes for continued success.

REPUBLICANS SHOULD SUPPORT THE COMMUNITY SERVICE BLOCK GRANT

HON. BARNEY FRANK

OF MASSACHUSETTS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 15, 1995

Mr. FRANK of Massachusetts. Mr. Speaker, I think it useful for me to share with my colleagues a brief but very pointed letter from Mark Sullivan, who is the head of the community action agency in the city of Fall River, Citizens, Inc. Mr. Sullivan is one of the outstanding leaders in the fight to improve the quality of life for people in the lower economic brackets, and he has been doing it long enough to have considerable perspective. Thus, he points out that the arguments in favor of the creation of the community action agency, and their subsequent inclusion in a community service block grant, grew from concern that we bypass bureaucracy and provide help directly to the people most in need. Citizens for Citizens is one of the organizations that exemplifies the success of this approach. And because the point Mr. Sullivan makes about the relevance of that experience to much of the rhetoric we are now hearing from my Republican colleagues, I ask that this letter be printed here.

CITIZENS FOR CITIZENS, INC.,
Fall River, MA, January 31, 1995.

DEAR BARNEY: I just finished watching a 30 year history of the War on Poverty on PBS and the irony of history repeating itself became crystal clear.

The basic concept of all the programs in the War on Poverty was the empowerment of local citizens to make decisions and help design economic programs that affect their lives.

Thirty years later, the new majority in Congress headed by Speaker of the House Gingrich, is talking about designing government so that citizens will be empowered to make economic decisions on the local level for policies that affect their lives.

It seems to be redundant to reinvent the wheel when there is a Community Service Block Grant which serves all of the purposes and meets all of the criteria as established by the new leadership; albeit, it deals with low-income people who need the economic empowerment the most.

I believe that Speaker Gingrich, with his background as a historian has a knowledge and appreciation of these programs for economic empowerment.

I welcome him as a spokesman for the need to extend and expand the Community Action Agency through increased funding for the Community Services Block Grant, and wish you would thank him for his generous forthcoming support.

COMMITTEE FUNDING RESOLUTION

HON. RON PACKARD

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 15, 1995

Mr. PACKARD. Mr. Speaker, I want to commend Chairman THOMAS for his hard work and diligence in bringing the committee funding resolution to the floor today. This bill represents the new Republican Congress commitment to downsizing and accountability.

On the very first day of the 104th Congress Republicans voted to cut our own committee staffs by one-third. We proved to the American people that we are serious about keeping our commitment to giving them the smaller, more effective Government they voted for.

This bill before us today shows the American people that we are keeping our promise. Chairman THOMAS has introduced a funding request that reflects the change we voted for just a few short months ago. It represents the largest decrease in committee funding ever.

Spending the taxpayers' money wisely is important. Chairman THOMAS' bill not only downsizes Congress but introduces a new level of accountability. Changing the way committees pay for staff and supplies forces them to justify every penny they spend.

Congress must now publicly authorize all committee spending every 2 years and fund all staff salaries out of a single account. For the first time, committees will have to account for all of their operating expenses. Congress will no longer hide long distance phone call charges or paper costs in extraneous accounts. The American people will see just how we spend their money.

Mr. Speaker, as chairman of the Legislative Branch Subcommittee of Appropriations I am responsible for funding congressional operations. Mr. THOMAS' bill offers guidelines to my subcommittee—guidelines which I am proud to accept.

He and I both share a commitment to the American people who work hard for the tax dollars they have to send to Washington. The least we can do is spend those dollars wisely.

TERM LIMITS

HON. JAY DICKEY

OF ARKANSAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 15, 1995

Mr. DICKEY. Mr. Speaker, I have been a supporter of term limits since my initial election to the House in 1992, and I continue to support term limits today. Due to provisions added to House Joint Resolution 2 during the February 28, 1995, House Judiciary Committee markup, I can no longer support this bill.

In its current form, House Joint Resolution 2 preempts State term limit laws, like amendment No. 73, passed by the voters of my home State of Arkansas. The amended bill also removes the lifetime cap for service in the House. Specifically, it would allow a Member to serve six terms, sit out one term, then serve six terms more. That is not real term limits.

LEGAL REFORM

HON. LEE H. HAMILTON

OF INDIANA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 15, 1995

Mr. HAMILTON. Mr. Speaker, I would like to insert my Washington Report for Wednesday, March 15, 1995, into the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD.

LEGAL REFORM

The House last week approved three bills that would effect wide-ranging legal reforms in civil lawsuits. The measures respond to a public perception that the legal system has become burdened with excessive costs and long delays and that the growing number of lawsuits, particularly frivolous suits, are swamping the courts. These bills seek to curb lawsuit abuse which weakens the economy, eliminates jobs, and injures our global competitiveness.

I supported two of the three bills, albeit with some reservations. The civil justice system needs reform—and these bills are a first step in the reform process—but the bills considered in the House were poorly drafted and hastily considered and they overreach. My greatest concern is that their impact would be to tilt the courts in favor of large companies at the expense of individual plaintiffs. My expectation is these problems will be addressed during Senate consideration.

PRODUCT LIABILITY REFORM

This measure, which I supported, would for the first time create a uniform product liability law (covering state and federal actions) in three areas: punitive damages; joint and several liability; and fault-based liability for product sellers. First, the bill caps non-economic and punitive damages for all civil lawsuits. Punitive damages are awarded to punish negligence, rather than to compensate a victim, and non-economic damages are for things such as pain and suffering. Non-economic damages would be capped at $250,000, and punitive damages would be capped at three times the claimant's award for monetary losses (such as lost wages and medical bills) or $250,000—whichever is greater. Second, the bill restricts ''joint and several liability'' by allowing non-economic damages only up to the level of a defendant's responsibility. In other words, someone who is only 20% responsible would pay only 20% of the non-economic damages. Third, the bill prohibits product liability suits for injuries caused by products that are more than 15 years old, unless the product is expressly guaranteed for a longer period, or if the product causes a chronic illness that does not appear for more than 15 years (such as asbestos).

It is probably necessary to narrow the risk of manufacturers' and sellers' liability in certain cases involving defective products. Juries are sometimes confused and sometimes come in with awards that are neither reasonable nor justified by the evidence. In many cases, judges routinely reduce those jury awards drastically, but perhaps not in all cases. The restrictions on joint and several liability also make sense. The important link is between behavior and responsibility, and the bill limits a defendant's liability to the share of damages caused by his own actions.

Capping punitive damages, however, has to be approached with great care. This bill represents a federal encroachment on well established state authority and responsibility. Furthermore, high punitive damages serve to keep a manufacturer on his toes.