

the Department of State, he served in the U.S. Army as a commissioned officer in post-war Japan. He has been inducted into the Hall of Fame of the U.S. Infantry School at Fort Benning, Georgia. On behalf of the people of the Virgin Islands who I am privileged to present, I extend heartfelt congratulations to Ambassador and Mrs. Todman.

ON THE PASSING OF DR. JOHN LONG

HON. MICHAEL BILIRAKIS

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, October 27, 2005

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today with great sorrow to mourn the loss of one of Pasco County's finest citizens and public servants, Dr. John Long. While on a hunting trip with his wife Marsha in Montana, John unexpectedly passed away from an apparent heart attack on October 26. He was 59 years old.

Born in Wauchula, Florida, John dedicated his life to serving the residents of Pasco County and improving the quality of education that its students received. His passion and reputation would lead him to serve as a state representative and eventually to be appointed as the County's Superintendent of Schools, a position he held until his retirement last year.

John's career in public service began shortly after he completed his masters degree and doctorate in education at the University of South Florida. John seized the opportunity to work for the Pasco County School District and during heightened tension in the District in 1976, he was hired as the County's Director of Personnel. Known as a problem-solver, John quickly garnered respect and trust from the teacher's union and ironed out their labor grievances. His ability to compromise and find the middle ground would follow him throughout his career.

In 1986, John ran successfully for a seat in the Florida House of Representatives. He quickly rose to prominence within the Democratic Party and was poised to become the Speaker of the Florida House. However, another institution took precedence: his family. John retired from state politics to spend more time at home with Marsha and his two daughters, Jennifer and Jessica. Soon after stepping down, the late Governor Lawton Chiles appointed John as Pasco County Schools Superintendent in 1995.

After winning a second term in 2000, John was named Florida's Superintendent of the Year by the Florida Association of District School Superintendents, a distinction he greatly cherished. John also facilitated the enactment of the Penny for Pasco program in March 2004, which he considered one of his proudest accomplishments.

Mr. Speaker, too often in this extremely partisan business, we lose sight of the things that really matter. John looked past party politics. He placed his family ahead of his promising political career. He was a breath of fresh air in an occupation that can suffocate integrity. I am truly saddened by the loss of John, and my thoughts and prayers are with the Long family. May God bless them as they remember this great man.

ON THE LOSS OF AMERICAN LIVES IN IRAQ

HON. MICHAEL M. HONDA

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, October 27, 2005

Mr. HONDA. Mr. Speaker, this week, the U.S. Department of Defense acknowledged that the number of U.S. military deaths in Iraq has reached 2,000. Sadly, Californians represented the majority of these deaths, with 215 falling victim in the conflict. I, along with all other Americans, mourn the loss of these brave American patriots and insist that we all continue to support those courageous men and women who bear the burden of this military action in Iraq.

As we pause to remember the 2,000 patriots who gave their lives and console the families they left behind, we must demand that the remainder of our troops begin their journey home. This unfounded war began with the false belief that Iraq was in possession of weapons of mass destruction and has continued under a shortsighted and flawed military strategy. While the Administration chooses to "stay the course" and insists that there is significant progress in Iraq, the insurgency continues unabated and too many of our soldiers are returning to their families as only a memory. Others return with emotional and physical wounds that may never heal.

Let this week's grim milestone not slip away without a renewed demand that the President provide to the American public, as well as the U.S. soldiers in Iraq, a clear strategy for success. Only through the creation of a coherent and realistic plan can this Administration begin to stem the loss of American life.

INTRODUCING THE "ELIMINATION OF BARRIERS FOR KATRINA VICTIMS ACT"

HON. ROBERT C. SCOTT

OF VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, October 27, 2005

Mr. SCOTT of Virginia. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to join my colleagues, Congressman CONYERS of MI, Congressman RANGEL of NY, Congressman THOMPSON of MS, Congressman JEFFERSON of LA, Congressman FRANK of MA, Congresswoman JACKSON-LEE of TX, Congressman PAUL of TX, Congresswoman JOHNSON of TX, Congresswoman LEE of CA, Congressman HASTINGS of FL and Congressman AL GREEN of TX in introducing the "Elimination of Barriers for Katrina Victims Act". We are pleased to be joined by a coalition of almost 100 national, state and local organizations who have expressed their support for the legislation, such as the American Academy of Addiction Psychiatry, American College of Mental Health Administration, Drug Policy Alliance Network, League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), NAACP, NAADAC—The Association for Addiction Professionals, National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, and the National Urban League, and the list is growing as word of the legislation gets out.

Millions of Americans were displaced from their homes due to Hurricane Katrina and Hur-

ricane Rita and hundreds of thousands have not been able to return and may never be able to do so. Having lost their homes, their communities, their jobs and other support systems, most have required emergency food, clothing, shelter, medical, or monetary assistance. According to FEMA reports, an estimated 2.1 million Americans have already applied for federal aid. Unfortunately, many of these individuals and their families are in desperate need, but, due to a prior drug conviction, will not be able to receive certain federal assistance available to other victims in need. While it is impossible to know for sure how many families will be denied public assistance because of drug convictions, it is likely in the tens of thousands.

More than 1.5 million Americans are arrested for drug offenses every year. Several federal laws disqualify those with felony convictions to receive certain federal benefits. A recent GAO report commissioned by myself and Congressman RUSH of IL reveals that these disqualifications are having a huge impact on receipt of federal benefits for which those with prior drug convictions would otherwise receive. For example, an estimated 41,000 students were denied college assistance during the 2003/2004 academic year because of drug conviction.

While the GAO was only able to collect data from 15 public housing agencies, out of more than 3,000, those 15 agencies denied housing to almost 1,500 families because of past drug violations in 2003 alone. That indicates that there are thousands of families and tens of thousands of individuals unable to receive housing benefits because a family member has a drug conviction.

The drug conviction ban on eligibility for federal benefits also applies to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, or the TANF program. TANF eligibility applies to families with minor children. One study reflected that almost 25 percent of drug offenders released from prison in 2001 were eligible for TANF benefits, but were permanently barred from receiving it due to their state's application of the federal ban for a drug conviction. While some states do not apply the federal ban completely, other states, such as Alabama, Mississippi, Texas and Virginia, where many of the displaced families are staying, have fully applied the ban.

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita have inflicted suffering on millions of people. The suffering will fall even harder on victims denied aid because of past drug offenses. Parents who have lost everything and are struggling to feed themselves and their family will be denied TANF and food stamps; students who have lost their school, tuition, fees, room and board, but could continue their education in another school willing to accept them, or who were in school elsewhere when their parents lost the ability to continue paying for their education, will be denied student loans; and entire families that have lost everything in the disasters will be denied housing—all due to the federal bans for a past drug conviction.

The "Elimination of Barriers for Katrina Victims Act" applies only to past drug offenses, some of which were many years ago, and suspends the disqualification for only a 3-year period. This temporary adjustment period in federal disqualifications would allow families affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita a chance to put their lives back together through