prospered for the last 16 years under the excellent leadership of James Shelby who was instrumental in raising the funds needed to build its current home. With the leadership of Mr. Shelby and chairwoman Susan Irwin, I am confident the Greater Sacramento Urban League will continue to provide invaluable programs for our community.

Madam Speaker, I am honored to pay tribute to the Greater Sacramento Urban League's distinguished commitment to our community and Sacramento's residents. The Greater Sacramento Urban League's dedication to equality, civil rights and workforce development has helped thousands of Sacramentans when they most needed it. We all are thankful for their efforts. As the Greater Sacramento Urban League's employees and partners gather to celebrate 40 years of service to the Sacramento region, I ask all my colleagues to join me in wishing them continued success in the future.

RECOGNIZING ISRAEL'S RIGHT TO DEFEND ITSELF AGAINST ATTACKS FROM GAZA

SPEECH OF

HON. TODD TIAHRT

OF KANSAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, January 9, 2009

Mr. TIAHRT. Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of H. Res. 34, a resolution recognizing Israel's right to defend itself against attacks from Gaza, reaffirming the United States' strong support for Israel, and supporting the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. I applaud Speaker PELOSI and Leader BOEHNER for bringing this resolution to the floor.

We stand in solidarity with those praying for real and lasting peace and an end to the terrorism brought upon the people of Israel. I am confident the acts of aggression carried out by those seeking the destruction of the State of Israel will not end in success. Peace will come to the land of Israel once again.

Born out of genocide and conflict, the modern State of Israel has developed into a free, democratic and prosperous country. I have been to Israel several times and I have seen how they make the desert bloom. I have witnessed their corporate compassion to take care of people in need. I have heard their pleas for peace. An unfailing ally of the United States, Israel is a beacon of freedom and religious tolerance in the Middle East.

Israel understands the dangers of terrorism all too well. From suicide bombers to thousands of incoming rockets and mortar shells, the people of Israel have experienced mass casualties of enormous and unacceptable proportions.

As Israel currently undertakes military efforts in Gaza, I stand with the Israeli Government and the Jewish community as they seek to establish peace and protect its citizens from terrorism. Hamas and radical Islam must be defeated.

No nation can sit idly by while its people are killed, its children are traumatized, and the daily life of its people is severely disrupted by terrorism. Ask yourself, would America tolerate more that 3,000 rockets launched against our homeland in just 1 year? No, we would protect our people. Israel has the responsibility to protect its citizens, as well, and that is what it is doing in on-going operations in Gaza.

Americans look forward to peace in Israel and the Middle East, but until Hamas and its terrorist allies relinquish its arms and renounce violence, the hope for peace can not be attained.

Madam Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this important resolution.

CONGRATULATING GREGORIO KILILI CAMACHO SABLAN ON HIS ELECTION AS THE FIRST DELEGATE TO CONGRESS FROM THE COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS

HON. MADELEINE Z. BORDALLO

OF GUAM

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, January 13, 2009

Ms. BORDALLO. Madam Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Mr. Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan on his historic election as the first Delegate to Congress from the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). His election comes twenty-two years after the U.S. Government first granted the residents of the CNMI U.S. Citizenship and 12 years after my predecessor, Congressman Robert A. Underwood, introduced the first bill to provide for a CNMI Delegate in the 104th Congress. Born on the island of Saipan on January 19, 1955, Mr. Sablan graduated from Marianas High School and attended the University of Guam, the University of California, Berkeley, and the University of Hawaii at Manoa.

Mr. Sablan has a long record of public service to the people of the CNMI beginning with his election to the third Commonwealth Legislature in the CNMI House of Representatives. While in that office, he worked with the Assistant Secretary of the Interior to secure funding for the CNMI. Mr. Sablan returns to the halls of Congress as a Delegate after previously working as a Special Assistant to Senator Daniel Inouye of Hawaii. Mr. Sablan then returned to the CNMI to work as a Special Assistant for Management and Budget under Governor Froilan Tenorio and most recently, he worked as the Executive Director of the Election Commission.

This historic event for the people of the CNMI and the U.S. Congress marks the first time the CNMI will have representation in the U.S. House of Representatives. The 110th Congress passed legislation that was signed into law by the President on May 8, 2008, and that among its other provisions, authorized the election to Congress of a CNMI Delegate (Title VII of U.S. Public Law 110–229). The addition of the CNMI Delegate seat marks the first time membership in the House has expanded since Congress provided for the election of a Delegate to represent American Samoa in 1980. The addition of the CNMI Delegate seat brings the total number of Delegates representing the territories and the District of Columbia in the House of Representatives to six.

As a neighbor in the Western Pacific and a fellow territorial Delegate, I welcome my new colleague, Mr. Sablan, to Washington, D.C. as the first Delegate to represent the CNMI in Congress. The historically close ties between the people of Guam and the people of the CNMI will provide for a solid foundation on which to work together toward common goals in Washington, D.C. I look forward to strengthening these ties with Mr. Sablan and working together toward sensible and effective Federal government in the Mariana Islands. This momentous occasion renews the promise of the founding principles of American democracy, that of representative government by its citizens. As we move forward in the 111th Congress, I extend my warmest welcome and congratulations to the people of the CNMI.

BAY PINES VA HEALTHCARE SYSTEM RECOGNIZED NATIONALLY FOR EXCELLENCE IN SERVICE

HON. C. W. BILL YOUNG

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, January 13, 2009

Mr. YOUNG of Florida. Madam Speaker, the Bay Pines VA Healthcare System, which I have the honor and privilege to represent, has been honored by the Department of Veterans Affairs with the very prestigious Robert W. Carey Performance Excellence Award.

This is the highest honor given to a medical facility by the Department of Veterans Affairs and recognizes organizational excellence which translates in the highest quality of care for our nation's veterans and in this case those who receive their medical care through Bay Pines.

This award confirms what I have always known—that the dedicated staff and volunteers at Bay Pines are the best in the VA system and provide our veterans with the quality of care we would expect and they so richly deserve.

The Bay Pines VA Healthcare System is the 4th busiest of the 153 VA Medical Centers and provides services to 94,000 veterans per year at the Bay Pines medical center and at nine linked clinics. Based on the VA's performance criteria, including customer satisfaction surveys, Bay Pines ranks first among like sized facilities nationwide, first among Florida VA facilities, and fourth best in the nation for quality of care, access to care and customer satisfaction.

Bay Pines is the only facility in Florida to receive the Carey Award, which is based on the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Criteria used by thousands of government and private organizations worldwide to assess and improve performance.

Wallace M. Hopkins, the Director of the Bay Pines VA Healthcare System, leads a team of dedicated health care professionals and selfless volunteers who care for our veterans. They continually strive to improve the quality of care our veterans receive and are working on several projects which my colleagues and I on the Appropriations Subcommittee on Veterans Affairs have supported. These include the opening of a new and larger emergency room that will more than double the capacity for emergency care for veterans including emergency mental healthcare; a new radiation oncology center to provide veterans with state-of-the-art cancer treatment; a mental health center of excellence to include inpatient, outpatient and PTSD programs; a new and larger eye care clinic; and a new and larger ambulatory surgery center.

As the veterans population of Florida and the Tampa Bay area continues to grow, the staff at Bay Pines seeks to respond quickly to meet the increased demand for veterans medical care.

Madam Speaker, representing Bay Pines and the veterans its serves is a great honor but also a great responsibility. It is reassuring to know that with receipt of the Carey Award for Excellence that Bay Pines continues to provide the highest level of care and that they never rest on their laurels as the staff and volunteers continue to search for new ways to improve the services they provide to our nation's heroes and their families. It is my hope that my colleagues will join me today in expressing to the staff and volunteers at Bay Pines our thanks and appreciation for a job well done.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. JOHN CONYERS, JR.

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, January 13, 2009

Mr. CONYERS. Madam Speaker, on January 9, 2009, I inadvertently cast a ''yea'' vote for H. Res. 34. I intended to vote ''present.''

PAYCHECK FAIRNESS ACT

SPEECH OF

HON. CHET EDWARDS

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, January 9, 2009

Mr. EDWARDS of Texas. Mr. Speaker, the Paycheck Fairness Act is about far more than the size of a paycheck. It is about our commitment to the American values of hard work and equality of opportunity.

The story of America is our never-ending march toward the highest ideals of equal opportunity for all our citizens.

Today, we write a new chapter in that great American story. Today, we say to women and young girls all across our land, that if you work hard and play by the rules, you will be rewarded fairly. You will reap what you sow.

From our founding days, that promise has motivated parents to work hard to improve the lives of their families and the future for their children. It has inspired generations of immigrants to leave their homelands to make America their home.

Fulfilling the promise of equal opportunity for American women will lift millions of our families and children out of poverty. That's not just progress for their families; it is real progress for the American family. And, by fairly rewarding the hard work of America's women, we make our Nation more competitive in the world economy.

Some will say this step forward will be inconvenient. I say that knocking down barriers to equality of opportunity has never been the convenient thing to do, but it has always been the right thing to do.

My wife and I try to teach our two young sons every day that if they will work hard, they will do well in life—that their work will be rewarded fairly.

I am supporting this bill, because I want the parents of every little girl in America to be able to teach that value, to make that promise to their daughters. It is the promise of America.

INTRODUCTION OF WORKER RELIEF LEGISLATION

HON. JOHN M. McHUGH

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, January 13, 2009

Mr. McHUGH. Madam Speaker, on January 6, 2009, I introduced three measures that are designed to provide relief to millions of unemployed American workers. These proposals are H.R. 155, the Suspension of Federal Income Tax on Unemployment Benefits Act of 2009; H.R. 154, the Workers Severance Tax Reduction Act of 2009; and H.R. 153, the Worker Savings Account Act of 2009.

From December 2007 to December 2008, the national unemployment rate has risen from 4.9 percent to 7.2 percent and 2.6 million jobs have been lost. In fact, from November 2007 to November 2008, the number of those seeking work has risen in 49 States and the District of Columbia, including New York, which has seen its rate increase from 4.6 percent to 6.1 percent during that time. As of November 2008, in New York's 23rd Congressional District, which I have the privilege of representing, 9 of my 11 constituent counties had unemployment rates that significantly exceed the national rate. With my support, the 110th Congress enacted legislation (P.L. 110–252 and P.L. 110–449) to provide up to an additional 20 weeks of unemployment benefits to workers who have exhausted their 26 weeks of regular benefits. However, there is more we can and should do to help those without a job.

In the first instance, we should enact H.R. 155, the Suspension of Federal Income Tax on Unemployment Benefits Act of 2009. Many Americans are unaware that they must pay Federal income taxes on any unemployment compensation benefits they might receive. This has not always been the case; between 1979 and 1986, those payments were excluded from Federal income taxes. It is time to once more provide this relief to unemployed Americans, which could provide up to $117 in additional income to the average beneficiary. In this manner, Congress can both help those individuals who are most in need and inject billions of dollars into the economy through paid rents, mortgages, utilities, groceries, and other necessities.

We should also enact H.R. 154, the Workers Severance Tax Reduction Act of 2009, which would allow laid-off workers to exclude up to $40,000 from any severance pay, provided that it is less than $150,000 and is received between December 31, 2007, and December 31, 2010. Studies have indicated that roughly 60 percent of businesses offer their employees some kind of severance pay. While these totals can vary from business to business, in many cases it is remitted as a lump sum. Unfortunately for many workers, the IRS takes a substantial bite out of these benefits. Specifically, under current law, severance pay is treated as regular income, thus often driving people into higher tax brackets at the very time they are losing their jobs.

From the start of the current economic slump in December 2007 through November 2008, there have been 20,712 mass layoffs involving nearly a quarter of a million Americans. While not all of them received severance pay, those who did needed all those monies to better support their families, go back to school, or otherwise find a new job or career. Congress can and should help these citizens during this difficult time by allowing them to retain more of these much-needed monies.

Finally, to help Americans enhance their personal safety nets, Congress should enact H.R. 153, the Worker Savings Account Act of 2009. This measure would allow people to establish Worker Savings Accounts (WSAs) to supplement the benefits they might otherwise receive while unemployed.

Like traditional Individual Retirement Accounts (IRAs), WSAs would have an annual contribution limit of $5,000, indexed to inflation. However, employers would be able to provide matching contributions of up to $5,000 annually. Contributions to WSAs would be permitted until the account owner actually elects to take Social Security retirement benefits. At that time, WSA account holders could choose to rollover their WSA funds into a 401(k) or IRA; alternatively, the WSA funds could be withdrawn without penalty but subject to taxation. Prior to a WSA account owner's decision to take Social Security payments, WSA funds could be withdrawn without penalty and tax-free as long as employment was lost through no fault of the worker or they had become disabled.

To encourage lower-income Americans to take advantage of the opportunity to contribute to this benefit, the Worker Savings Account Act would provide a refundable tax credit of up to $1,000 for eligible individuals. This tax credit would be indexed to inflation and recipients could receive up to $5,000 over the course of their career.

Madam Speaker, by enacting the three bills described above, the 111th Congress can help millions of unemployed Americans. Accordingly, I ask my colleagues to work with me to enact these important measures.

HONORING CADET COLONEL ROBERT J. WILSON

HON. FRANK R. WOLF

OF VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, January 13, 2009

Mr. WOLF. Madam Speaker, it is my privilege to honor my constituent, Cadet Colonel Robert Wilson of Chantilly, Virginia, for his remarkable achievements as a member of the Civil Air Patrol. At a Pentagon presentation and award ceremony on January 5, Cadet Wilson was presented with the General Carl A. Spaatz Award. The Spaatz Award is the Civil Air Patrol's highest cadet honor, presented to cadets who demonstrate extraordinary leadership, character, fitness, and aerospace knowledge.

For every 1,000 cadets, only 2 achieve this distinct honor. Robert first joined the Civil Air Patrol in January 2004 where he served with distinction in the Fairfax Composite Squadron of the National Capital Wing. Upon graduation from high school, he chose to attend Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Prescott, Arizona, to obtain his bachelor's degree in aerospace engineering.