

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. BRENDA L. LAWRENCE

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 23, 2017

Mrs. LAWRENCE. Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, on March 22, 2017, I was not able to cast my votes during the second series. Had I been in attendance, I would have voted:

YES on the Democratic Motion to Recommit on H.R. 1101

NO on H.R. 1101—Small Business Health Fairness Act of 2017

YES on H.R. 1238—Securing our Agriculture and Food Act

SMALL BUSINESS HEALTH FAIRNESS ACT OF 2017

SPEECH OF

HON. DOUG COLLINS

OF GEORGIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 22, 2017

Mr. COLLINS of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 1101, the Small Business Health Fairness Act of 2017.

Small businesses are the backbone of our economy, providing economic opportunity and employment for millions of Americans across our country.

Too often, we have seen the economic engine stall due to intrusion and overregulation that come courtesy of the federal government. There are few places where this is more obvious than in the staggering health care costs small businesses face, costs which Obamacare have only driven up.

Obamacare's burdensome mandates have driven premiums up and insurance providers out of the market, and small employers have found themselves increasingly unable to cover their employees. The big picture for small businesses is that the ACA has smothered patient choice and patient-centered care in the process of overregulating our job creators.

In the House, we are empowering small businesses to fight back by increasing their bargaining power with insurance providers and leveling the playing field that they share with larger companies. The Small Business Health Fairness Act will help lower health care costs for employees by allowing small businesses to join together through association health plans.

Ultimately, this bill will bring relief to American employees and their families by making insurance more affordable and accessible.

H.R. 1101 is an important step toward empowering small businesses to care for their employees while prioritizing the job creation that strengthens our communities. At the same time, this bill would contribute to a patient-centered, competitive, and low-cost health care system for all Americans. I am proud to support this legislation as we return choice to our businesses and loved ones.

HONORING THE LIFE OF CONGRESSMAN ELIGIO "KIKI" DE LA GARZA

HON. HENRY CUELLAR

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 23, 2017

Mr. CUELLAR. Mr. Speaker, I rise today along with Congressman FILEMON VELA Jr. and Congressman VICENTE GONZALEZ to commemorate the life of Congressman Eligio "Kika" de la Garza of Texas' 15th district.

Congressman de la Garza was born on September 22nd, 1927, in Mercedes, Texas and raised in Mission, Texas. When he was 17 years old, he enlisted in the United States Navy, where he served during the final months of World War II. Upon his return home, he enrolled in Edinburg Junior College, and later transferred to St. Mary's University in San Antonio. Eventually, he would serve during the Korean War as a second lieutenant with the Army's 37th Division Artillery. After his service, he went on to earn a law degree from St. Mary's University in San Antonio.

At 24 years old, Congressman de la Garza was elected to the Texas House of Representatives. He was an important leader in his community, who served as delegate in the Texas House for six consecutive terms. In 1965, Congressman de la Garza was elected to the United States House of Representatives, where he spent the next 32 years advocating for civil rights, food security, affordable health care, and access to education for all citizens. He was first a member, and later the chairman of the U.S. House Agricultural Committee. He and his committee crafted legislation focused on rural economic development, improved nutrition, and environmental protection. His legislative programs often brought together farmers, ranchers, consumers, and other interest groups. During his career in the House of Representatives, he also advocated for improved U.S. and Mexico relations including the North American Free Trade Agreement. For his efforts, he later received the Order of the Aztec Eagle, the highest honor Mexico can give to non-citizens.

Congressman de la Garza was a pioneer who paved the way for more Hispanics to participate in our nation's legislative process. For a time, he was the only Hispanic member of the Texas House, and later became the second Hispanic member of Congress from the state of Texas. His dedication to the Hispanic community is evident in his role as a founding member of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus. Congressman de la Garza was an inspiration for the Hispanic community, and has empowered others to become active in our legislative process.

His memory will be honored by his family, his friends, and the communities which he served. He is survived by his loving wife of 63 years, Lucille, as well as his three children, eight grandchildren, and one great-grand child. He will also continue to be honored at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, where they have the E. "Kika" de la Garza Endowed Scholarship Fund.

Mr. Speaker, we are honored to have the opportunity to remember the legacy of Congressman Eligio "Kika" de la Garza. His dedi-

cation to his country, and his community, will not be forgotten.

H.R. 1259, VA ACCOUNTABILITY FIRST ACT OF 2017

HON. GERALD E. CONNOLLY

OF VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 23, 2017

Mr. CONNOLLY. Mr. Speaker, the VA Accountability First Act of 2017 (HR 1259) represents an attack on collective bargaining at federal agencies and an attempt to dismantle the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 (CSRA, Pub. L. 95-454). The VA Accountability First Act of 2017 would strip Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) employees of personnel procedures that they developed through collective bargaining with the VA. It would also close the window of notice provided to employees facing adverse personnel actions from 37 to only 10 days. By infringing on activities authorized by the CSRA, this bill would make it easier to fire an employee without good cause.

We should remember that one-third of VA employees are veterans themselves. H.R. 1259, as written, would harm some of the very people we are trying to assist. The elimination of merit-based principles for workers facing adverse action could allow management to target the same whistleblowers who are trying to help us eliminate waste, fraud, and abuse at the VA.

The bill guts the right of VA employees to use union protest mechanisms to effectively address hostile actions. The current grievance procedure is granted by statute and included in the contract negotiations between labor and management. The bill proposes a rushed management-run appeals process that does not allow good employees who are treated unfairly enough time to develop the requisite supporting information to defend their jobs. The reduced timeframe for agency review would be even more severe for medical professionals facing adverse actions related to professional conduct or competence, particularly because their cases typically involve complex medical issues.

H.R. 1259 also strips front-line employees of their rights to appeal to the Merit System Protection Board (MSPB) by reducing the adjudication period following their dismissal and removal from the payroll. Employees lose 80 percent of the time at the MSPB and would now only have seven days to prepare their case for the United States Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit.

A thoughtful approach to these issues at the VA would strike a balance of promoting employee accountability and protecting employee rights. Unfortunately, this bill does not strike that balance, and so eviscerates employee protections that it could discourage whistleblowers from exposing waste, fraud, and abuse at the VA. I strongly oppose the VA Accountability First Act because of the destructive effects it would have on the VA workforce and veterans alike.