Her appearance is deceptive. When I first met her, she was very troubled. She wet her pants and was on medication to control the problem. She behaved sexually toward boys and could get verbally and physically aggressive. She threatened suicide a couple of times and mutilated herself, pulling out her hair or banging her head against a wall during tantrums. With intensive therapy she has learned to better manage her anger.

I am Mary's Court Appointed Special Advocate—a voice speaking up for her in court. I'm neither a social worker nor a lawyer, but a trained volunteer assigned by a family-court judge to look out for Mary's ''best interests'' so she doesn't languish in protective custody.

I became a CASA after a friend asked me to get involved. She felt that I could empathize with these kids because of the complexities of my own childhood. I agreed to do it and went through 30 hours of training, because as a mother of three healthy kids, I felt I could not ignore other children who are in greater need. My only hesitation was the time commitment. I'm a freelance writer, and I was concerned about juggling two jobs.

There are some 37,000 advocates like me across the country. We telephone and visit families, gathering facts to track kids and their parents who get lost in the labyrinth of foster care. CASAs report their findings to judges who often have just minutes to decide where a child will live and for how long.

The importance of our work is underscored by the highly publicized death of Elisa Izquierdo, 6, in New York last month. Elisa, living with her father, was returned to her mother after his death last year. Her mother allegedly smashed the child's head against a wall. How do these youngsters fall through the cracks? In my district, social workers may be assigned more than 50 cases, supervisors twice as many. CASA volunteers are assigned only one. We serve, at no cost to taxpayers, as an additional safety net, working alongside a multitude of professionals to try and ensure that children like Elisa do not return to unsafe homes.

Elisa's tragedy has spurred me to fight harder to help Mary. Since I took on her case, I've had unique access to a family file filled with incidents of abuse that would sicken the hardest heart.

In a summer hearing, the court brushed aside the mother's poor choice of companion and her lack of parenting skills, and moved toward reunifying mother and daughter. The mother's psychological evaluation suggested that she should have her child back as long as they both continue therapy and Mom attended parenting and life-skills classes. Mary was then staying with her mother every other weekend. The judge decided to increase visits by one day a week and assess the case in two months.

In September the judge ruled that Mary should return home full time under the legal, watchful eye of the Division of Family Services. Early next year the case will be reviewed for the mother to regain permanent custody. I worry that this decision will be based not only on what's best for the child but on the need to clear an overcrowded docket of a case that has gone on too long and is costing too much.

I'm not convinced living with her mother is the safest place for Mary. Mom is a good person who loves her daughter, Mary loves her mother and wants to remain home. But Mom has displayed poor parental judgment in the past. Once she failed to get medical attention for Mary when she injured herself seriously on a visit.

From the beginning, I knew reunification was the goal. But I really hoped it might not happen. Those handling the case, including the social worker, therapists, lawyers and I, charted Mary's future: where she'd be safest, have friends and someone to help with her homework. In my opinion, she should be with a paternal aunt who clearly loves her niece and wants to help.

In my area, there are some 800 kids who've been removed from their homes and placed in care. Before I became an advocate, I had no idea what happened to these youngsters and never considered how I could help. As more of us fight for these abused and neglected children, perhaps the level of public awareness will be raised and we'll be able to protect more before they're lost forever.

I'm still aghast at the judge's recent decision to send the child home full time with Mom pending the final court ruling next year. The county's family services will continue to insist Mary and her mom attend therapy and have intervention services until that time, and I'll continue to monitor the whole family.

For the next few months I have a fighting chance to keep my one CASA child safe, if they let me. At least I can comfort myself with the knowledge that as long as I'm on this case, I will do the best that I can with the worst that I have to deal with.●

UNITED STATES CONGRESS-GERMAN PARLIAMENT STAFF EXCHANGE

● Mr. LIEBERMAN. Mr. President, since 1983, the United States Congress and the German Parliament, the Bundestag, have conducted an annual exchange program for staff members from both countries. The program gives professional staff the opportunity to observe and learn about each other's political institutions and convey Members' views on issues of mutual concern.

A staff delegation from the United States Congress will be chosen to visit Germany May 19 to June 1 of this year. During the 2 week exchange, the delegation will attend meetings with Bundestag Members, Bundestag party staff members, and representatives of political, business, academia, and the media. Cultural activities and a weekend visit in a Bundestag Member's district will complete the schedule.

A comparable delegation of German staff members will visit the United States for 3 weeks this summer. They will attend similar meetings here in Washington and visit the districts of congressional Members over the Fourth of July recess.

The Congress-Bundestag Exchange is highly regarded in Germany, and is one of several exchange programs sponsored by public and private institutions in the United States and Germany to foster better understanding of the politics and policies of both countries.

The U.S. delegation should consist of experienced and accomplished Hill staff members who can contribute to the success of the exchange on both sides of the Atlantic. The Bundestag sends senior staff professionals to the United States. The United States endeavors to reciprocate.

Applicants should have a demonstrable interest in events in Europe. Applicants need not be working in the field of foreign affairs, although such a background can be helpful. The composite United States delegation should exhibit a range of expertise in issues of mutual concern in Germany and the United States such as, but not limited to, trade, security, the environment, immigration, economic development, health care, and other social policy issues.

In addition, U.S. participants are expected to help plan and implement the program for the Bundestag staff members when they visit the United States. Participants are expected to assist in planning topical meetings in Washington, and are encouraged to host one or two staff people in their Member's district over the July Fourth break, or to arrange for such a visit to another Member's district.

Participants will be selected by a committee composed of U.S. Information Agency personnel and past participants of the exchange.

Senators and Representatives who would like a member of their staff to apply for participation in this year's program should direct them to submit a resume and cover letter in which they state why they believe they are qualified, and some assurances of their ability to participate during the time stated. Applications may be sent to Kathie Scarrah, in my office at 316 Hart Senate Building, by Friday, March 15.●

TRADE DISPUTE WITH RUSSIA

● Mr. BIDEN. Mr. President, I rise today to address a recent trade dispute which threatens tens of thousands of American jobs and hundreds of millions in American exports.

On February 19, the Russian Government notified us that it will soon stop importing poultry products if its complaints about American food safety standards are not met. On top of this, what little will enter Russia these next few weeks will be subject to a sharp increase in their taxes on imported poultry.

American poultry exports to Russia—our largest poultry export customer—total more than $700 million a year and represent over 20 percent of all American exports to Russia.

Mr. President, the Delmarva Peninsula is home to 21,000 poultry workers, produces more than 600 million birds per year, and is a major supplier to the Russian poultry market. Last summer, for example, Allen's Family Food, of Seaford, DE, exported 1,300 tons of frozen poultry to Russia.

At one time or another, I have probably met with every poultry grower and processor in my State of Delaware. I've seen every step in the process, from the poultry house to the packaging plant to the freezers at the Port of Wilmington. I'll put the Delaware poultry industry up against any foreign or domestic challenger in terms of sanitary standards, particularly any Russian plant.

But teams of Russian inspectors have come into our country, into our poultry processing facilities—including plants such as Manor Farms and Allen's Foods in my own State of Delaware—and have failed each and every operation. Literally a 100 percent failure rate.

I find this simply unbelievable. This tells me that their real agenda is not health and safety. We demand the same standards for the poultry we ship to Russia as we do for poultry which shows up in American supermarkets and on our kitchen tables every day.

That's why in recent years, Russia's consumers, particularly in the great urban centers such as Moscow and St. Petersburg, have bought more and more poultry products from America. They recognize a good value when they see it. We can produce better tasting, more nutritious, less expensive poultry in America, and ship it to Russia, for a lower price than the current Russian poultry industry can. They are still struggling to get out from under the inefficiencies of the old economic system.

If this ban goes into effect, Mr. President, the Russian people will lose a major high-quality supplier for a popular staple of their diet, and their food bills will go up.

The last thing that the Russian economy needs now is an increase in the price of an important food commodity. It is largely because of inflation that the ruble, and with it the Russian economy, is in so much trouble already.

And if this ban goes into effect, Mr. President, American poultry growers and processors, in Delaware and in the rest of the country, will be denied access to an important market. They have earned their place on the shelves of Russian stores through their hard work, know-how, and efficiency. They should not be shut out by some bureaucrats' arbitrary ruling.

Now, Mr. President, I understand that there are a lot of things going on behind the decision to ban American poultry exports. There is the still powerful pull of the old bureaucratic ways—old habits are hard to break, especially when it comes to protecting domestic industries from the new experience of foreign competition.

Here is a good example of how our domestic industry, which has grown up in a highly competitive environment, can do well in international markets. It's no wonder the Russian domestic poultry industry wants some protection, even if it means higher costs and lower quality for Russian consumers.

Mr. President, here in the United States, arguably the freest market in the world, we are in the midst of a heated national debate on international trade and competition. Just imagine what they are going through in the states of the former Soviet Union, where competition on the basis of quality and price is a new concept.

And this is a Presidential election year over there, too. I know that I don't have to explain how the elimination of a major foreign competitor could fit into an election year agricultural policy.

But that is no excuse for the Russian Government's action against American poultry producers. We cannot allow this decision to stand.

I have spoken to Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman directly, and I applaud the effort he and his negotiating team have made to resolve this dispute.

The Russian Government must be made to understand that these steps against the United States poultry industry are steps away from the international economic community they tell us they are eager to join.

The IMF has just announced another loan to Russia, worth $10.2 billion. This money is intended to smooth the transition from the old Communist command economy to a more efficient, open, market economy. The terms of the loan include requirements that the Russians continue to reform their economy.

And as the Russians are well aware, the terms of the loan provide for monthly installments over those 3 years. Evidence of backsliding, of reneging on commitments to open the Russian economy, could be grounds for terminating the loan at any point.

Russia tells us that they want to join the World Trade Organization and America has supported their application to join the WTO. As a matter of fact, right now the United States has a representative on the WTO working group that must approve Russia's trade practices.

Our representative must make crystal clear to the Russians that actions like the bogus ban on American poultry imports violates the spirit and the letter of international agreements, such as the WTO.

I can't imagine they would want this stain on their record when they come to argue that they are ready to undertake the responsibilities of full participation in the international trading system.

But, because this review process could take up to a year, I am asking President Clinton to appoint an interagency working group to investigate immediate retaliatory trade actions against the Russians.

I sincerely hope that before any such retaliation becomes necessary, we can convince the Russian Government to turn back from the course that they have announced.●

TELL THE TRUTH ON THE BUDGET

● Mr. HOLLINGS. Mr. President, I would like to draw everyone's attention to a column written about 2 weeks ago by Washington Post writer William Raspberry. In ''The Awful Truth About a Tax Cut,'' he outlines chapter and verse on how America simply cannot afford a tax cut at a time that a fiscal cancer is eating away the country. While pollster politicians are talking about a tax cut, the debt grows and interest payments on that debt are spiraling out of control.

We have to wake up and take responsible action to kill this fiscal cancer. Otherwise, the America we know will cease to exist.

Mr. President, I ask that Mr. Raspberry's February 12 column be printed in the RECORD.

The column follows:

[From the Washington Post, Feb. 12, 1996]

THE AWFUL TRUTH ABOUT A TAX CUT

(By William Raspberry)

If telling unpalatable truth is political suicide, Sen. Ernest F. Hollings must have a death wish. He's not just figuratively shouting from the rooftop the politically unspeakable—that there can be no balanced federal budget without a tax increase; he's threatened to throw himself from the rooftop if anybody proves him wrong.

''If anybody comes up with a seven-year balanced budget without a tax increase,'' he said again the other day, ''I'll jump off the Capitol dome.''

But surely that's an empty threat. Aren't the White House and congressional Republicans both claiming to have achieved what Hollings says is impossible? Isn't the only substantial difference between them the size of the tax cut? So why isn't Hollings jumping?

''None of the plans they're talking about balances the budget—or comes near it,'' the South Carolina Democrat told me. ''Just the service on the debt is growing so fast it's just not going to be possible without a tax increase.''

What masks this painful truth, he says, is a ruse practiced by Democrats and Republicans alike: counting the Social Security trust fund as an asset that reduces the apparent size of the budget shortfall.

With the huge ''baby boom'' cohort now paying more in Social Security taxes than current retirees take out, the system is running a theoretical surplus. But this surplus is being spent along with the general revenues for current government expenses. The trust fund gets an IOU that must eventually be redeemed by—guess who?—taxpayers.

The point Hollings wants to make, though, is not just that this amounts to dishonest bookkeeping. It is, he insists, also illegal.

He ought to know. It was legislation he wrote (along with the late John Heinz ''who did the work on this'') that made it illegal. Nearly six years ago, Congress passed—and President Bush signed into law—Section 13301 of the Budget Enforcement Act that includes this language:

''The concurrent resolution shall not include the outlays and revenue totals of the old-age, survivors and disability insurance programs established under title II of the Social Security Act or the related provisions of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 in the surplus or deficit totals required by this subsection...''

''That says in plain language they can't use the trust fund to cut the deficit,'' Hollings observes. ''And yet they keep doing it. The president and the Congress like to spend the Social Security money because it makes the budget look like it's moving toward balance. Wall Street likes it because if we don't come scurrying in to borrow from Wall Street, interest rates don't go up.

''But it's illegal, and they know it. I complain, they shrug their shoulders; they call it a 'unified budget,' as though that changes something. If they don't like the law, why don't they change it? The truth is they're