

Service involvement at over 30 park units. Secretary Babbitt is studying transferring parks such as Redwoods National Park, Great Basin National Park, and Lake Clark National Park to different Indian tribes. In the mean time, the Resources Committee, on a bipartisan basis, has sought to set up a nonpartisan Commission to study our Park System and make recommendations to help save our Parks.

After Secretary Babbitt's first two choices for Director of the National Park Service—Robert Redford and Tom Brokaw—turned him down, Babbitt has filled more key park service positions with political appointees than the last three administrations combined. These are simply political favors for people who never worked a day in a park. The Resources Committee has moved legislation requiring that the National Park Service Director possess professional qualifications and be subject to Senate approval.

Secretary Babbitt is in charge of the waste, fraud, and abuse that runs rampant in the National Park Service. The Interior inspector general and the General Accounting Office found the Park Service's books unbalanced for 3 years and no method to ensure that the highest priority programs are funded. Instead of taking care of our parks, Secretary Babbitt has spent money on a \$1.6 million personality inventory, a multi-million dollar reorganization with no benefit to the parks, and a \$20,000 redecoration of the Director's hallway. While Secretary Babbitt is spending money on interior decorating—literally—the Resources Committee initiated these reports by the inspector general and the General Accounting Office to improve the operations of the Park Service, improve accountability and to help prioritize funding. Thus far, Secretary Babbitt has ignored those reports and has made few changes in his management of our Nation's parks.

Recently, Secretary Babbitt has been traveling around the country saying we need concessions reform and that we need to return more to the Federal Government. Unfortunately, the legislation Mr. Babbitt supports would exempt 80 percent of the concessionaires from competition and the Congressional Budget Office says will cost the American taxpayer \$79 million over the next 5 years. The Republican proposal would open all 660 National Park Service concessions contracts to competition and will return \$12 million back to the parks while providing \$84 million to deficit reduction over 5 years. If Secretary Babbitt wants real reform then the Republican proposal is the only alternative.

Housing for Park Service employees has been described as third world conditions in many instances. After a photo-op and the construction of three housing units, the Secretary has dropped any further efforts to resolve this problem. Republicans in the mean time have moved legislation that would encourage private sector solutions and investments for park housing. Secretary Babbitt would rather ignore the problems that don't make political hay for him. I guess taking care of his employees is just not a priority for Secretary Babbitt.

Secretary Babbitt alleges that our National Parks are broke, yet while overall visitation has been level for the past 8 years, appropriations have increased by nearly \$300 million over that same period. Where did the money go Mr. Secretary? Where did you spend it? We love our parks and so do the citizens of

this country and we expect Secretary Babbitt to manage these treasures in a responsible and protective fashion. Instead, Secretary Babbitt would rather gallivant across the Nation doing political fund raisers, going fishing, and politicizing our National Parks than stay home and manage our national treasures. Our parks need our help and the goal of this Congress is to identify the problems and find creative solutions to solving those problems. Americans don't want to just throw money at the problem, they want the problems fixed. Mr. President, we need a Secretary of Interior will actually work for our National Parks and not just travel around and fish in them.

TRIBUTE TO HECTOR PEREZ GARCIA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California [Mr. BROWN] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. BROWN of California. Mr. Speaker, today I pay tribute to the life of Hector Perez Garcia. Dr. Garcia, a Texas physician who led the fight for equal treatment of Hispanics and who founded one of the Nation's most influential civil rights organizations, the American GI Forum in 1948, passed away on Friday, July 26 at the age of 82 in Corpus Christi, TX.

Dr. Garcia was born in the Mexican village of Llera, Tamaulipas, on Jan. 17, 1914, to a college professor and a school teacher. His family emigrated to Mercedes, in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas, in 1918 to escape the Mexican Revolution. He was one of seven children, six of whom became doctors.

He often told interviewers that he had decided to get an education soon after his family moved across the border where a high school teacher told him, "No Mexican will ever make an 'A' in my class." He graduated from the University of Texas and the University of Texas Medical School in Galveston in 1940. In 1942, he volunteered for Army duty and served in Europe as an infantry officer, a combat engineer, and a medical corps officer before being discharged as a major. He was awarded a Bronze Star with six battle stars. He met his wife, Wanda Fusillo, in Europe during the war.

Dr. Garcia founded the American G.I. Forum in 1948 to help Mexican-American veterans of World War II gain access to services of the Veterans Administration and admission to V.A. hospitals. His organization first gained widespread attention in 1949, when it took up the cause of Army Pvt. Felix Longoria, a native of the small south Texas town of Three Rivers, whose remains were returned from Luzon, in the Philippines, for burial 4 years after World War II ended. Mr. Longoria's widow had been denied use of a hometown funeral chapel because the Longorias were Mexican-American.

After several stories about Dr. Garcia's efforts were published, Lyndon B. Johnson, then a U.S. Senator, arranged for Mr. Longoria to be buried in Arlington National Cemetery with full military honors.

President John F. Kennedy asked Dr. Garcia to negotiate a defense treaty between the United States and the Federation of the West Indies. In September 1967, Johnson, then President, appointed Dr. Garcia a delegate to the United Nations with the rank of ambassador to focus on promoting better relations with Latin America and Spain. A year later, President Johnson made Dr. Garcia the first Mexican-American to serve on the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. In 1984, President Ronald Reagan awarded Dr. Garcia the Presidential Medal of Freedom. In 1990, he received the Equestrian Order of Pope Gregory the Great from Pope John Paul II.

Upon hearing about his death, President Clinton released a statement calling Dr. Garcia a national hero who "fought for half a century for civil and educational rights of Mexican-Americans."

I ask my colleagues to join me in extending our condolences to the family of Hector Perez Garcia, his wife Wanda, and his three daughters, Wanda, Cecilia, and Susan. Dr. Garcia was a true American hero whose accomplishments are a testament to his humanitarian spirit.

□ 1730

REPUBLICANS INCREASE SPENDING ON MEDICARE AND VETERANS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. LATOURETTE). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Florida [Mr. STEARNS] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. STEARNS. Mr. Speaker, our efforts to balance the budget by the year 2002 have been a long and hard-fought process. As a party, we did not choose this fight, Mr. Speaker. The American people sent a message in the 1994 election. They made it perfectly clear that they wanted to change business here in the House, the business that has been going on for 40 years.

This weekend I held town meetings back in my district, in the State of Florida, central Florida. There were two issues that came up continually. The first, of course, was Medicare. We have a lot of seniors there, and a lot of the seniors were confused. They thought we were cutting Medicare. Of course, that is false. I will tell the Members later on why that is false.

They were also concerned about the veterans budget. Of course, we have increased the veterans benefits and the budget for the RECORD. We are not cutting Medicare, and we are not cutting veterans benefits. In both cases, they are going up over last year. President Clinton finally admitted this in an interview with Wolf Blitzer on CNN that Republicans are not cutting Medicare. He is right about that, because spending on this program will increase at twice the rate of inflation, which means that spending will rise from