

providers and reining in discretionary spending, the agreement was basically made possible by the sudden discovery of \$225 billion in new revenue from the strong growth of the U.S. economy.

Many taxpayers will benefit from the tax breaks in the budget package. A new individual retirement account, the Roth IRA, was established and regular IRAs were expanded. Most families with children under 17 got a \$400 per child tax cut rising to \$500 in 1999. Eleven new educational tax cuts will become available. Capital gains taxes will be lower and the amount of inheritance exempted from estate taxes will rise for family farms and small businesses to \$1.3 million.

Although the budget package was disappointing in pushing off the whole question of decisive entitlement reform, it did improve the short-term outlook for Medicare—keeping it healthy for the next decade. Medicare beneficiaries will have the option of enrolling in a managed care plan, will receive expanded preventive care benefits, and face somewhat higher premiums for doctor services. In addition, the budget package provides \$24 billion to states to expand their health coverage to low-income uninsured children.

Other Measures Passed: The 105th Congress started with an explosion of activity on ethics. Speaker Gingrich was reprimanded and fined—the strongest punishment ever given by the House to its presiding officer. The House simply did not look good in the way it handled the investigation.

The Senate approved a treaty to ban the production and use of chemical weapons, and the House rejected an attempt to punish China by ending its normal trade status. Some of the welfare benefits that were cut to illegal immigrants were restored, and Congress avoided deportation of Central American refugees who fled during civil strife.

Congress passed legislation to overhaul Amtrak, clearing the way for the release of \$2.3 billion in subsidies. It also approved legislation to speed adoption of children in foster care and to speed up Food and Drug Administration approval of new drugs and medical devices. It also passed a ban on “partial-birth” abortions, which the President vetoed. It took on some of the cost burdens of the District of Columbia while reducing local powers, and it approved a new gold-colored dollar coin and 50 new quarters commemorating each state. The President and Congress struck a compromise on the 2000 census, allowing the Administration to experiment with statistical sampling while giving opponents opportunity to challenge it in court. This session Congress did manage to process and negotiate all of its fiscal year 1998 appropriation bills without vetoes or threatened government shutdowns.

Unfinished Business: Further action is needed on a bill passed by both houses to loosen federal controls over public housing. The House approved a bill to create an outside management board for the IRS and to strengthen taxpayer protections, but the Senate has not yet taken it up. Congress delayed field testing of President Clinton’s proposal for national math and reading tests while alternatives are considered.

As usual, the first session of Congress left a long list of bills not acted upon. In a stunning defeat to the President, Congress shelved fast-track trade negotiating authority in the face of likely defeat by the House. Neither house passed campaign finance reform or legislation to implement and possibly broaden the proposed deal reforming the tobacco industry. Both houses put off until next year a six-year reauthorization of transportation policy.

Congress did not pay overdue U.S. dues to the United Nations, provide new credit for

the International Monetary Fund, or reorganize the U.S. foreign policy agencies. Other measures awaiting action are Superfund reform, Social Security privatization, tax reform, product liability, clean air, nuclear waste, endangered species, education savings accounts, NATO expansion, and troops in Bosnia.

Conclusion: With the huge to-do list awaiting Congress when it returns in January, any grade after the first session has to be “incomplete.” The actual accomplishments of the session are modest, perhaps even below average. Even the budget agreement does less than proponents claim. The large tax cut was mainly for better-off taxpayers. And to balance the budget, Congress mainly coasted on a very strong economy and postponed many of the specific spending cuts for another day. That’s always the easy way to cut the budget.

The closing weeks of the session saw a return to sharp partisanship, as the extreme elements of each party got fed up with the cooperation that marked the first half of the year. As we begin the second session of the 105th Congress, that partisanship might well continue, making action on the important issues facing Congress all the more difficult.

TRIBUTE TO JAMES EDWARD HARPE

HON. BRAD SHERMAN

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, January 28, 1998

Mr. SHERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to James Edward Harpe, who will be honored for his service as the 1997 President of the Conejo Valley Association of Realtors.

During his term as President, Ed has worked to ensure that the Conejo Valley Association of Realtors is up-to-date on the latest technological advancements. A strong advocate of technological training for the Association and its staff, Ed has introduced educational seminars, specialized computer training classes, e-mail and faxing capacity to the office. The creation of a web page has made the Association more accessible to the general public.

Ed has also worked with the Equal Opportunity committee to produce a Forum on Fair Housing, which is televised on the local government channel in our community. As a result of this effort, realtors, businesses and members of the Conejo Valley community will be better educated about issues involved with fair housing.

In addition to the work Ed has done as President, he has played an active role in the Association for several years. These activities include: Chairman of the Long Range Planning, Blue Ribbon and Building/Property advisory committees; participation on Professional Standards Panels and others.

I would like to commend Ed for this distinguished list of accomplishments throughout his career. With a clear vision and strong initiative, Ed has implemented programs which will positively impact the Association for years to come. Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleagues, please join me in paying tribute to James Edward Harpe for his leadership efforts and dedication to our community.

CONGREGATION BETH SIMCHAT TORAH

HON. ELIOT L. ENGEL

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, January 28, 1998

Mr. ENGEL. Mr. Speaker, Congregation Beth Simchat Torah is New York City’s only, and the world’s largest, gay and lesbian synagogue, and on February 7th is celebrating its 25th anniversary.

This remarkable congregation started with barely enough for a minyan (ten people) in a borrowed room at a neighborhood Episcopal Church. The Kiddush cup, some candles and challah used in the ceremony were carried to the services in a shopping bag.

The congregation grew by word of mouth and small ads in the local weekly newspaper. Slowly, at first, the number of congregants grew so that it was large enough to have to move to another church in the neighborhood for the High Holy Days. By 1975 it was clear that they needed still more space so a large loft was rented and the congregation moved into it that year. The following year it got its first Torah on “permanent loan” from a Bronx congregation. In 1977 Congregation Beth Simchat Torah hosted the Second International Conference on Lesbian and Gay Jews and that year a second Torah was acquired.

Talmud and Hebrew classes were expanded and over the next few years the High Holy Day crowds approached a 1,000. By 1992 Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum was hired and more than 2,200 people attended Yom Kippur services.

This dynamic congregation has served its community with distinction. With Rabbi Kleinbaum, it looks forward to greater community involvement, future growth and a continuance of its traditional/creative liturgy.

HONORING THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF BAYTOWN, TEXAS

HON. KEN BENTSEN

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, January 28, 1998

Mr. BENTSEN. Mr. Speaker, I rise to congratulate the citizens of Baytown, Texas, which Saturday celebrated its 50th anniversary. Approximately 400 citizens, including Mayor Pete Alfaro and former Houston Mayor and Baytown native Bob Lanier, celebrated that event in the Baytown Community Center. Also present were current and past mayors and members of the City Council and other distinguished and longtime Baytonians for what was described as a family reunion for the City of Baytown.

There was much to celebrate for, in fifty years, Baytown has steadily grown into one of the most vibrant communities in Texas.

The roots of the town go back more than half a century to three rival communities—Baytown, Pelly, and Goose Creek—huddled on the north shore of Galveston Bay around the Humble Oil refinery, one of the largest refineries in the world. The feud peaked in 1945 when Baytown, then an unincorporated community, was annexed by Pelly, angering some