

and the local Red Cross worked around the clock to ease the suffering of those forced from their homes.

Recognizing our State's emergency situation, on June 18, 1998, President Clinton declared the State of Florida a major disaster area, paving the way for over \$32 million in Federal aid to reach Florida's fire-ravaged areas.

More recently, Secretary Glickman declared Florida eligible for Department of Agriculture assistance. That was very good news for Florida's family farmers, who sustained significant production losses. Agricultural interests in Florida suffered \$100 million in damages just from El Nino events, and then lost more than \$400 million in the following droughts and fires.

As grateful as we are in Florida for this Federal assistance, it comes at a 25 percent State cost. FEMA has initiated \$60 million worth of missions to help Florida, but that means that Florida must contribute \$15 million of its own. Add that to about \$45 million in State and local costs, and the State's price tag of this natural disaster really begins to mount.

Fortunately, FEMA policy allows 100 percent Federal funding for direct Federal assistance emergency work. Recently Florida requested that the President authorize 100 percent funding for essential Federal assistance provided to date and thereafter.

I hope that the 100 percent assistance will be granted, as this is the fifth disaster declaration Florida has faced in 5 years, and that it comes on the heels of the El Nino floods earlier this year. Florida disaster resources are nearly exhausted. By reflecting on our response to this natural disaster, we can prepare for future fire outbreaks.

As a member of the House Fire Service Caucus, I recognize that a coordinated effort of all available resources is necessary to battle these blazes. On June 25, I joined fellow caucus members at a press conference highlighting our new task force and initiative on wildland fires.

□ 1245

We contacted the Secretary of Defense, Mr. Cohen, requesting the cooperation and the assistance of the Department of Defense to identify assets he could make available for firefighting purposes. Additionally, we asked the U.S. National Guard to examine its past deployments in firefighting efforts and then offer recommendations as to how these assets can be most effectively administered.

Luckily, I say to my colleagues, recent rains have provided some relief, and those who helped us through the worst deserve our praise and thanks. As we have seen, this difficult situation revealed our country's good character. This was evident in the valiant firefighting efforts that began on the first of June. I am confident that through a continued coordinated effort we will completely extinguish these fires threatening Florida and begin the long process of recovery.

Madam Speaker, I am here today to applaud all the efforts of all Floridians for all the hard work they have done to put out these fires. God bless them all.

#### TRIBUTE TO WATKINS M. ABBITT, SR.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mrs. JOHNSON of Connecticut). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 21, 1997, the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. SISISKY) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. SISISKY. Madam Speaker, it is my sad duty to inform the House that former Congressman Watkins M. Abbitt, who formerly represented the 4th District of Virginia, died yesterday at the age of 90.

Congressman Abbitt was a true son of the south. He was born in Lynchburg, Virginia, 1908, graduated from the Appomattox Agricultural High School in 1925, and earned a law degree from the University of Richmond in 1931. He served as Commonwealth's Attorney in Appomattox from 1932 to 1948 and was a member of Virginia's Constitutional Convention in 1945.

He was a delegate to Democratic State conventions from 1932 to 1952, Chairman of the Democratic Central Committee from 1964 to 1970, and delegate to the Democratic National Convention in 1964. He also became a director of the Farmers National Bank.

He was elected to Congress in 1948 and served until he retired in 1973.

I will be the first to tell my colleagues that the 4th District has changed since Wat Abbitt served in Congress, and the great thing about Wat Abbitt was that he saw changes coming and was ready to change with it. Nevertheless, the rural character of Southside is still there; the peanut and tobacco farmers and families are still there.

After he retired, Wat Abbitt said his biggest accomplishment had been looking after the interests of the farmers in his district. I hope they can say that about me.

Among many of my constituents, Wat Abbitt is still the standard by which they measure an effective Congressman. I can tell my colleagues this about serving in Congress: I have worked hard to get the job, and I think I would have been elected even if Wat Abbitt had not helped me, but it sure made things easier for me that he did. I suspect there is 40 years worth of Virginia's governors, from both parties, and Congressmen who could say the same thing. He was one of the rare politicians who combined fidelity to the past with respect for the future. That ability helped change Virginia from the way it used to be to the way that it is today.

Madam Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. GOODE).

Mr. GOODE. Madam Speaker, it is my pleasure to join my colleague, the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. SISISKY) in expressing sadness at the passing of

former Congressman Watkins M. Abbitt of Appomattox. He served with distinction in this body for over 24 years. He represented the 4th District, but from 1972 on, he was a resident of Virginia's 5th District.

He first came to Congress in the winter of 1948 when he won an overwhelming victory over four opponents. In the years that followed, he rarely faced opposition because of his outstanding reputation and his leadership in the United States House of Representatives.

As Chairman of the Democratic Party of Virginia, he fought hard to bring our party into a position of prominence. In 1946, he had the distinction of being the only Statewide campaign manager for two Statewide campaigns, those of U.S. Senator Harry Byrd and U.S. Senator A. Willis Robinson. Both were overwhelmingly successful.

In 1972, Wat Abbitt retired from Congress though not from politics or life. He left all of us who knew him with many legacies, but I should mention three of the hallmarks of his legislative years: support for tobacco, fighting for peanuts, and warnings about rising deficits. In his later years he remained active. This last year he sold more tickets to the Appomattox County Democratic Fish Fry than any other person.

He gained renown as a great speaker, and I fondly recall his remarks and his speeches on my behalf in the nomination process for the U.S. House of Representatives.

I join many others in extending condolences to his wife; to his son, Watkins M. Abbitt, Jr., who is following in his father's footsteps and who is a member of the Virginia House of Delegates; to his two daughters; to his two brothers; and to his sisters. May we all remember his enthusiasm, his zest for living, and his willingness to fight for causes that were just and may he always serve as a model for us in the years ahead.

#### JUSTICE AND EQUITY FOR FILIPINO VETERANS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 21, 1997, the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER) is recognized during morning hour debate for 5 minutes.

Mr. FILNER. Madam Speaker, what I want to do this afternoon is to bring to the attention of my colleagues and the American people a glaring injustice that has existed in this country for more than half a century, an injustice that was caused in 1946 and that we in this Congress in 1998 have a chance to remedy.

Recently, this Congress passed a resolution of support and congratulations for the 100th anniversary of the independence of the Republic of the Philippines. We celebrated that anniversary as true partners in the world with the Philippine Republic. I said at that

time a few weeks ago that a better way to give honor to our allies in the Pacific, a better way to celebrate this 100th anniversary of our close partner, would be to remedy an injustice that was perpetrated on the brave veterans of the Philippine armed forces who fought side by side with the American Army in the liberation of the Pacific in World War II.

The Philippine soldiers were drafted into World War II by our President Franklin Roosevelt. They fought side by side and helped to win the battle of the Pacific; and yet, after the war, all the benefits of being a veteran were taken away by the Congress of 1946.

There is legislation in this House that is cosponsored by almost 200 of us, legislation introduced by the distinguished Chairman of the House Committee on International Relations, the gentleman from New York (Mr. GILMAN) and myself, H.R. 836, called the Philippines Veterans Equity Act. Thanks to the Chairman of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. STUMP), we will be having a hearing on this legislation next week on July 22nd, a hearing on H.R. 836, the Filipino Veterans Equity Act. That hearing promises to give the American people a living history lesson of past bravery and courage, much of it long forgotten by our current generation.

The American people will hear from brave participants in the battles of Bataan and Corregidor. They will hear from survivors of the famous Bataan Death March in which thousands of Filipinos and Americans died. They will hear from guerilla fighters who, for 4 years in the Philippines, both held up the advance and the consolidation of power by the invaders and helped prepare the way for the return to the Philippines by General Douglas MacArthur. The story after that is well known, with MacArthur retaking the Philippines and using that as a base to regain the Pacific.

What will be clear from this testimony next week at the House Committee on Veterans Affairs will be the bravery, the courage, the honor, the dignity and the loyalty of these veterans of World War II, and what will also be clear is the injustice that was perpetrated more than 50 years ago and the dishonor that was brought really to us as Americans by allowing this action. We took away the rights that they had earned as veterans of the American Armed Forces. To this day, they are still wanting a return of this honor and dignity. Of more than almost a quarter of a million who were alive during World War II, less than 75,000 are alive today.

I plead with this Congress and with the Committee on Veterans' Affairs to restore the honor and dignity to these brave veterans in the last years of their lives. Let us pass H.R. 836, the Filipino Veterans Equity Act. Let us restore the honor and dignity of these brave fighters of World War II. Let us grant equity to them now.

We have apologized as a Nation for the internment of the Japanese in World War II. We have apologized to those soldiers at Tuskegee who were involuntarily subject to medical experiments which led to their death. It is time as a Nation that we apologize to the brave veterans of World War II who are from the Philippines. Let us pass H.R. 836. Let us give these soldiers their honor and dignity.

#### RUSSIAN MATTERS RELEVANT TO THE UNITED STATES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 21, 1997, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. WELDON) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. WELDON of Pennsylvania. Madam Speaker, last evening I gave a keynote speech at the John F. Kennedy School of Harvard University to a group of 25 Duma members from Russia, parliamentarians who were here for 2 weeks of orientation in the ways of our operation of the American democracy, our Congress and our system of government. It was an eye-opening experience, and I wish them well as they spend the next 2 weeks learning more about America and our democracy.

Working in Russian issues as I do, I have two other facts I would like to bring to the attention of my colleagues. One is a very positive development in Russia, and we have all watched with a great degree of concern as this emerging democracy over the past several years has evolved in giving people additional rights and freedoms.

One of my good friends, Aleksei Yablokov, who has testified twice before Members of this Congress and our subcommittees on issues involving the environment, nuclear contamination and small nuclear bombs, unfortunately had an incident where one of the Russian publications, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, wrote an article about Mr. Yablokov calling him a traitor because he came before the U.S. Congress and told in a very open setting about his concerns that Russia had, in fact, built small nuclear suitcase bombs, that these bombs might not be accounted for.

Mr. Yablokov sued this publication and just recently, in fact last week, the Moscow Municipal Court ruled in favor of Aleksei Yablokov, ordered the newspaper, the *Gazeta*, to print a public retraction by the 9th of September, 1998, and to pay Yablokov 30,000 rubles because of this libel case. It is a credit to the Russian system that an individual with the integrity of Aleksei Yablokov can sue and successfully win compensation for wrongs committed by the Russian media, and for that I applaud Russia.

The second issue concerns me, Madam Speaker, because during the recent break one of my good friends, a member of the State Duma from the

our home is Russia party, Lev Rokhlin was assassinated. He was the Chairman of the Duma Committee on National Security. I had met with him on numerous occasions, and while I in many cases did not agree with his political positions, I respected him. He was a retired Russian general, someone who was known for committing himself and his political leadership to support for the troops, for their quality of life.

□ 1300

Lev was also one of the most outspoken critics of Boris Yeltsin. In fact, last year he called publicly for Yeltsin to be impeached. For these calls, Lev was removed from his position as chairman of the Duma Defense Committee. He was involved more recently in investigating whether or not Russian oil companies took money for use in the Caucasus, to be used to buy weapons, instead of being used for the people and for the Russian government.

There are suspicions that Lev Rokhlin was assassinated because of his outspoken comments. The official line out of Moscow is that Lev was killed by his wife, a wife who shot him in a fit of anger. But Lev's children have publicly come out and said that is not the case, that Lev was assassinated, and that his wife had to say what she did because she also was told she would be assassinated.

In addition, Yuri Markin, a lawyer that worked with Rokhlin, said that he believed that there was an assassination attempt on his life the same night Lev Rokhlin was killed. Mr. Markin claims Lev was assassinated because he in fact was revealing things that were going on inside of Russia that were not legal and that in fact involved organized crime.

I encourage, Madam Speaker, the Russian government to fully investigate, as Boris Yeltsin has promised, the unfortunate and untimely death of Lev Rokhlin, so we can, as we have in the case of the environmentalists winning the money from the slanderous article by the Russian newspaper, so that we can have peace of mind that Lev Rokhlin was not killed by some organized criminal element in Russia because of what he was saying and because of the job that he was performing as a member of the State Duma.

The Russian people understand this issue. In fact, at Lev's funeral last week over 10,000 Russian citizens came out in force. Most of them have a suspicion that Lev was in fact assassinated by forces other than his wife.

I would ask our administration to lend its support to my call for the Russian government to have a full accounting as to the circumstances and facts surrounding the death of Duma Deputy Lev Rokhlin.

#### THE TRANSPORTATION NEEDS OF THE RESIDENTS OF THE 46TH CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mrs. JOHNSON of Connecticut). Under the