

NOTICES OF HEARINGS

COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION, AND FORESTRY

Mr. LUGAR. Mr. President, I would like to announce that the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry will meet on Wednesday, July 22, 1998, at 9 a.m. in SR-328A. The purpose of this meeting will be to examine the Y2K computer problem as it relates to agricultural business and other matters.

COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS

Mr. CAMPBELL. Mr. President, I would like to announce that the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs and the House Committee on Resources will meet during open session on Wednesday, July 22, 1998, at 9 a.m. to conduct a joint hearing on S. 1770, to evaluate the Director of Indian Health Service to Assistant Secretary for Health and Human Services; and H.R. 3782, Indian Trust Fund Accounts. The hearing will be held in room 106 of the Dirksen Senate Office Building.

Those wishing additional information should contact the Committee on Indian Affairs at 202/224-2251.

AUTHORITY FOR COMMITTEE TO MEET

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

Mr. STEVENS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Foreign Relations be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Monday, July 20, 1998, at 4 p.m. to hold a hearing.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

TRIBUTE TO KENJI SUMIDA UPON HIS RETIREMENT AS PRESIDENT OF THE EAST-WEST CENTER

• Mr. INOUE. Mr. President, on behalf of myself and Senator DANIEL K. AKAKA, I would like to say a few words about Mr. Kenji Sumida who is retiring next month from the post of President of the East-West Center in Honolulu, Hawaii. The East-West Center is a national education and research institution established by the United States Congress in 1960 to promote better relations and understanding among the nations of Asia, the Pacific and the United States.

During his tenure as President of the East-West Center, Mr. Sumida effectively led the Center through a particularly difficult period of reduced funding and budget cuts while maintaining and building upon the Center's reputation as the premiere United States institution dealing with major issues in the Asia-Pacific region. He substantially increased the visibility of the Center in Washington, DC and reached out to the Center's many alumni in the United States and throughout the Asia-Pacific region.

In addition to his leadership role at the East-West Center, Mr. Sumida has served his native State of Hawaii in numerous other capacities, including high-ranking administrative posts at the University of Hawaii, the State of Hawaii, and City and County of Honolulu; director of administration of the Pacific International Center for High Technology Research; and chief of staff and commander of the Hawaii Air National Guard, retiring with the grade of Brigadier General. His long-standing involvement and commitment to numerous community service activities is commendable.

In all of his pursuits, Kenji Sumida has worked tirelessly and conscientiously to create bonds of friendship, respect and mutual understanding in his home state and the nation, as well as with our neighbors in Asia and the Pacific.

We would like to acknowledge and pay tribute to Kenji Sumida for an outstanding career of service to our great nation and to extend our best wishes in his retirement. ●

THERE THEY GO AGAIN: WILL TRIAL LAWYERS STIFLE YEAR 2000 SOLUTIONS?

• Mr. FAIRCLOTH. Mr. President, I rise to address the imminent wave of Year 2000 lawsuits that will flood our courts and enrich thousands of trial lawyers at the expense of American consumers. I also rise to commend President Clinton for his announcement that he will propose legislation to shield businesses from lawsuits based on information shared in efforts to solve these so-called Y2K problems.

Based on the information that I have received, I believe that his approach is too narrow, but it is a step in the right direction.

It is a step away from greedy trial lawyers and litigation towards creative computer programmers and solutions.

We face the so-called millennial glitch—the Year 2000 problem—because most software programs cannot recognize dates after December 31, 1999.

Over the past twenty years, to save computer memory that was prohibitively expensive, programmers shortened the date field in software programs to hold only the last two digits of the year.

This glitch will cause computer systems to malfunction and to crash if these programs are not rewritten and fixed. Certainly, this is a major problem, one that has sent computer programmers scrambling for solutions.

This is one of the most important issues before businesses, Mr. President, and the costs of Y2K compliance are estimated to be hundreds of billions of dollars. The junior Senator from Utah, Mr. BENNETT, is to be commended for his fine work on the Year 2000 subcommittee.

We will face computer chaos if these problems are not resolved before the clock strikes midnight on December 31,

1999. We are looking at the possibility of power outages, frozen bank accounts, even the specter of a global recession.

Unfortunately, though, the solutions are not all clear.

The efficient exchange of information among the involved parties—programmers, computer companies, and consumers—is critical. We will never find solutions if all parties are not free to exchange all the relevant information.

There is, however, a major hurdle to this critical exchange of information—the trial lawyers. The trial lawyers are excited by this Year 2000 problem.

The Gartner Group, a consulting firm, estimates that the costs of the Y2K fix will run up to \$600 billion, but that the legal costs—the trial lawyer taxes—may explode to one trillion dollars.

Yes, Mr. President, \$1 trillion for litigation.

The projected trillion dollars in legal fees is yet another “trial lawyer tax” that greedy plaintiffs’ lawyers impose on the American people in the form of increased costs inevitably passed on to consumers.

The only jobs that the trial lawyers will create with their Year 2000 lawsuits are in the Lear jet factory as the orders come rolling in from these millionaire trial lawyers.

The trial lawyers see another problem to exploit for financial gain, another opportunity for personal enrichment at the expense of the nation.

The justifiable fear that businesses have of these trial lawyers is actually slowing down efforts to solve these critical problems.

The Washington Post reported that, “Many companies have resisted exchanging technical advice with one another, delaying the pace of repair work, because they fear costly litigation if the information they provide inadvertently turns out to be inaccurate.”

So, if the Social Security checks are late and the power gets turned off because computer companies cannot share information with the Federal government, you can thank the trial lawyers and their greed.

The headlines may proclaim that the Social Security Administration is well along in its Year 2000 progress, and it is amongst the more responsive agencies, about 90 percent of the way to getting its computers ready.

However, Mr. President, the Treasury Department—not the Social Security Administration—prints Social Security checks. The bad news is that Treasury is amongst the least responsive federal agencies to the Y2K issue.

I hope that trial lawyers’ greed won’t leave older Americans shivering in the cold on New Year’s Day in the year 2000 because everyone was too afraid of being sued to work together on a solution.

As I said, the threat of a tidal wave of expensive litigation is shutting down the exchange of information, which is