

to raise the profile of Y2K issues. Senator BENNETT now chairs the joint task force on Y2K, and he will be a forceful advocate for the necessity of addressing this issue.

Government, businesses, farms and homes rely on computers for nearly every aspect of their operations—from paying Social Security, to operating vehicles and equipment, to calculating interest, to conducting elections, to launching missiles. A failure in one computer system could not only be devastating to that particular operation, but could also have a domino effect.

For these reasons, it is vitally important that government and the private sector work together to avoid a potential disaster. According to a recent General Accounting Office (GAO) study, the federal government is extremely vulnerable to year 2000 problems because of its widespread dependence on computer systems.

The GAO study found uneven progress and made a number of recommendations for federal agencies to implement. Among them are the need to establish priorities, solidify data exchange agreements, and develop contingency plans.

GAO testimony before the Senate Agriculture Committee, on which I also serve, focused on the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) computer systems. The GAO concluded that if not properly fixed, severe consequences could result such as:

Payments to schools, farmers and others in rural communities could be delayed or incorrectly computed.

The economy could be adversely affected if information critical to crop and livestock providers and investors is unreliable, late or unavailable.

The import and export of foodstuffs could be delayed, thus increasing the likelihood that they will not reach their intended destinations before their spoilage dates.

Food distribution to schools and others could be stopped or delayed.

Public health and safety could be at risk if equipment used in USDA's many laboratories to detect bacteria, diseases, and unwholesome foods is not compliant.

These are a few of the potential year 2000 computer problems in just one agency of the federal government. Many federal agencies have made tremendous progress in solving their computer problems, but many more have been remiss. Therefore, the role of the Administration through the President's Council on Year 2000 Conversion becomes even more important in ensuring the federal government's readiness for year 2000.

I am encouraged by President Clinton's recent initiatives to increase national and global awareness of the Y2K problem and to facilitate private sector attempts to address it. The President's "Year 2000 Good Samaritan" legislation is designed to promote private sector exchange of year 2000-related infor-

mation and would help our national preparedness for 2000.

Y2K will not just impact the United States. In today's global economy, no area can remain isolated from any other. The United States also will contribute \$12 million to assist the World Bank's plan to raise awareness of the problem in developing countries.

I am also encouraged by the recent testing of Y2K compliance by Wall Street firms which are conducting a series of tests to see whether U.S. markets will face Y2K difficulties. These firms represent the type of foresight which will limit any dislocation caused by the Y2K glitch. This is the first known comprehensive effort to check the compliance of corporate America for the Y2K bug, and I hope more sectors of the economy quickly follow suit.

The potential difficulties are almost incalculable, when we consider the tremendous role computers play in our everyday lives. From food distribution to air traffic control. From our monetary infrastructure to electric power grids. Telecommunications systems and traffic lights. All of these necessities we take for granted could be impacted on January 1, 2000.

Congress must continue its oversight to make certain that the necessary resources are brought to bear on this critical issue. We have made progress, but there is still a tremendous amount of work to be done. The clock is running, and we cannot afford to fail to meet the year 2000 deadline.●

GRAND RAPIDS' COMMUNITY SUCCESS

● Mr. ABRAHAM. Mr. President, I rise to bring to my colleagues' attention an important article from *The American Enterprise* magazine. In it Michael Barone of *Reader's Digest* lauds the great success of Grand Rapids, Michigan in rebuilding its economy and community. Mr. Barone reports that a vital combination of entrepreneurship, public spirit, and responsible philanthropy have brought the people of Grand Rapids together to build a vibrant economy and public life.

Business and community leaders in Grand Rapids have joined together to rehabilitate the downtown area. They have encouraged one another to sponsor important projects like the Van Andel Institute for nutrition research and Faith Inc., which trains people from close-in neighborhoods and places them in full-time jobs. A pro-business environment has facilitated the growth of diverse businesses, from furniture manufacturers to merchandisers. And Grand Rapids' respect for free markets and entrepreneurship has maintained an economy in which unemployment is low and small business thrives, with 80 percent of local businesses employing fewer than 30 people.

Mr. President, as we in the Senate continue our debate over how best to encourage the revitalization of dis-

tressed urban areas, I hope we will learn from cities like Grand Rapids. As a member of the Renewal Alliance and a strong supporter of its efforts to help distressed urban areas, I feel that Grand Rapids can provide us with an extremely helpful model of what works. This great city shows the importance of local involvement, free markets, and faith in rebuilding strong communities.

I heartily recommend this article to my colleagues and ask that its text be printed in the RECORD.

The article follows:

[From the *American Enterprise*, Sept./Oct. 1998]

A CITY WHERE BUSINESS AND PHILANTHROPY FLOURISH

(By Michael Barone)

Looking for a city with a tradition of community involvement, creative local philanthropy, vibrant cultural institutions old and new? Try Grand Rapids. The home town of President Gerald Ford, the city proposed by Chicago Tribune publisher Colonel Robert McCormick as a new national capital, Grand Rapids remains largely unknown nationally and even in Michigan is often overshadowed by Detroit. But greater Grand Rapids is now approaching a million people, its strong local economy has led Michigan's economic recovery, and its successful entrepreneurs have built civic institutions the envy of many metro areas two or three times the size. Civil society is alive and well here.

What are Grand Rapids' secret? One is a vigorous free market economy, built steadily over decades. Grand Rapids was first settled by New England Yankees and immigrants from Germany and the Netherlands at the falls of the Grand River, in the heart of Michigan's immense forests. Its first industries were lumber and a natural offshoot, furniture. In the first decades of this century Grand Rapids was the nation's leading producer of household furniture. But the forests were overharvested, the furniture market collapsed in the Depression, and after World War II manufacturers relocated to North Carolina.

Some furniture manufacturers who survived turned to office furniture. Today three of the nation's four largest office furniture manufacturers are located in Grand Rapids or nearby Holland. But there is plenty of diversity as well. The city is a leader in injected plastic moldings and a major center for tool and die shops, with lots of small successful firms. It is the headquarters of Meijer, whose 100-plus Thrifty Acres stores combine supermarkets with general merchandise stores—a formula Wal-Mart has copied but has not been able to make pay as well as Meijer. Grand Rapids is the headquarters of Universal Wood Products, the nation's largest fence producer. It is the home of Gordon Foods and Bissell carpet sweepers. It has one large General Motors plant and dozens of auto suppliers. Ada, a village six miles east, is the home of Amway, privately owned by the Van Andel and DeVos families, founded in a garage in 1959, now selling over \$7 billion of home care housewares, and cosmetic products in 52 countries, most of them manufactured in Grand Rapids' Kent County.

Most of Grand Rapids' successful companies are small: 80 percent of businesses employ fewer than 30 people, according to John Canepa, former chairman of Grand Rapids' Old Kent Bank. Firms that have grown bigger have done so through creative innovation and good employee relations. Local office furniture manufacturers pioneered modular units and electronic connectors. Amway

took an old idea—direct sales—and made it work on a scale never seen before. Fred Meijer, to make shopping more pleasant for parents with kids, installed mechanical ponies in his stores which cost one cent per ride and personally hands out "Purple Cow" cards for free ice cream cones.

Employee relations are also an important part of Grand Rapids' success. "We have 60,000 people working with us," Fred Meijer says. "We need them; so let's treat them like we need them." If any of us makes a mistake, he adds, "we don't need to be bawled out, we need to be helped to succeed." That way, the "job will be better, and everybody will be more productive."

Nor is there an adversarial relationship between business and government. "The best thing government can do is to get out of the way," says Grand Rapids City Manager Kurt Kimball. "To try to create an environment that enables the private sector to achieve its ends. Prosperity for business means prosperity for residents. Then we'll have the resources for quality of life." Says GR magazine editor Carol Valade, "There is a very low tolerance for government here—the attitude is, I will do it myself. And a tremendous respect for the arts of the entrepreneur. It spills over into government. The city removed 98 percent of its effluents from its sewers, without federal funds—the only city in Michigan to do so."

Successful small businesses and small businesses that have grown large but have stayed headquartered here, have helped build Grand Rapids' cultural institutions. Even the banks have remained local. Old Kent is still based in Grand Rapids, though it has spread outward; First Union sold out to Detroit-based NBD, but David Frey, whose grandfather founded the bank, has kept the Frey Foundation here, and 85 percent of its grants are in western Michigan. "Giving money intelligently is hard work," Frey says. "A lot of due diligence is required. But there's the prospect of great satisfaction."

Anyone walking through downtown Grand Rapids can see some of the reasons for that satisfaction. Twenty-five years ago, downtown Grand Rapids looked dumpy, with aging and often empty commercial buildings, and a grubby convention center. Then Grand Rapids' business leaders decided to make it something special. "Always the private sector has taken the lead," says Frey. "And people are willing to put corporate money into projects. Then they would get the city, county, or state governments to forge a coalition." Phase one, in the mid-1970s, included a new Old Kent building and Vandenberg Center, which replaced abandoned warehouses. Phase two included the Amway Plaza Hotel and the Gerald Ford Museum. Phase three includes the recently opened Van Andel Arena for Grand Rapids' minor league hockey and basketball, a new convention center, and a downtown campus for Grand Valley State College.

The secret is leadership and commitment. "We have people who give time and effort and support. They sit at the same table," says Pete Secchia, head of Universal Products, and also a leader of Michigan's Republican Party who served as Ambassador to Italy under Bush. "When we promise something," says Fred Meijer, sitting around a table with other Grand Rapids business leaders, "we don't do it lightly. Not one of us has ever renege on a promise." If there are problems, someone jumps in and solves them. "The Amway Plaza would be torn down or destitute if Amway hadn't picked it up," Meijer adds.

With no major university or medical school, Grand Rapids has missed out on the boom in biomedicine. But that's likely to change with the building of a Van Andel In-

stitute for nutrition research at Grand Rapids' Butterworth Hospital. Steve Van Andel, who has succeeded his father Jay as co-head of Amway, describes the process. "We watched our fathers build the firm. The second generation got even more involved with the community. The building decision was also made by the second generation of the Van Andel and DeVos families. My dad and family have been discussing it for years. We decided to do something. Dad was always interested in nutrition, so we decided to build an institute that would work on nutrition research and education." He is thinking big. Peter Cook, who owns several big car dealerships and is on the board, says that it has five Nobel Prize winners as advisers and will have 200 to 300 doctors and scientists in a \$30 million building.

Grand Rapids' philanthropists are buttressed not by the liberalism of so many national foundations but by traditional virtues. It's an early-to-bed-early-to-rise town, where people eat at home with their families. "Everyone is doing well but restaurants," says Secchia, "but the breakfast joints are filled at 6:30 in the morning." The churches are busy on Sundays, filled with people from all economic levels; the billionaire Van Anders and DeVoses pray at a modest Reform church not far from downtown. Or as Peter Cook puts it, "A lot of our people have done more than their share in giving. We grew up in a Christian home and tithed, and after that you gave more. We give 30 to 40 percent of our income. . . . That type of thing is very influential. This is a good place to work and live."

Entrepreneurial and religious impulses also inform Grand Rapids' programs to help the poor. Gene Pratt, now retired, tells of raising \$1 million in less than two hours to renovate his community center, and how a kids' gardening project produced City Kids Barbecue sauce, got it stocked in Meijer's and other local supermarkets, and got 5 percent of the market. Verne Barry, head of the Downtown Development Agency, came to Grand Rapids in 1985 after living homeless in New York. With ministries and social service agencies he founded Faith Inc., which won competitive contracts with 25 local manufacturers. Hiring people from close-in neighborhoods, his group got commitments for 10 percent of the jobs on projects like the Van Andell Arena. He claims that more than 50 percent of those with little work experience are now in permanent employment.

Grand Rapids has low crime, low unemployment, and scandal-free local government. But statistics tell only part of the story. For Grand Rapids' leaders have put the imprint of their own personalities on the civic institutions they've built. The Grand Rapids Museum hosted an exhibit of the artist Perugino in 1997-98; Secchia helped set it up using his Italian contacts and the fact that Perugia is a sister city. Fred Meijer took over a 20-acre parcel of industrial property and built the Frederik Meijer Gardens, one of the nation's largest conservatories. Amid the plants and the gardens outside he placed 70 bronze sculptures he has collected over the years. You can see him there some days, smiling and enjoying himself as he leads kids around, explaining the plants and sculptures, and handing out Purple Cow cards for free ice cream cones—the spirit of Grand Rapids in person.●

WHAT'LL YA' HAVE? A TRIBUTE TO THE VARSITY

● Mr. CLELAND. Mr. President, I would like to take this opportunity to salute Georgia's beloved Varsity Restaurant for 70 years of prospering busi-

ness and never-ending dedication to its customers and employees. People have come from all around the world simply for a sampling of the Varsity's great food and down home hospitality.

The Varsity was founded by Frank Gordy in 1928. As the world's largest drive-in, the Varsity's hot dogs, chili dogs, hamburgers, chili burgers, onion rings, french fries, and fried pies are the best in the world. The Varsity also sells more Coca-Cola than any other single outlet in the world. Whether you get your "dogs" at Atlanta's North Avenue Varsity, the Gwinnett Varsity off Jimmy Carter Blvd., the Varsity Jr. on Lindbergh Drive or the Varsity on Broad Street in Athens you are guaranteed to go back for more.

The menu is extensive and the Varsity's volume is legendary. Two miles of hot dogs, a ton of onions, 2500 pounds of potatoes, and 5,000 fried pies are served every day. Six 50 gallon pots of chili are made from scratch and, like all specialty items, are prepared from original recipes. Varsity orange is piped from the kitchen to faucets at the serving counter and the popular frosted version is also on tap.

Every time I come home to Atlanta from Washington, D.C., stopping by the Varsity is a must on my agenda. In fact, it is often my first stop after leaving the airport. All Georgians can attest that the Varsity's heavy weight, chili steak, frosted orange or fried pies are unlike any other food in the world. I cannot count the number of meals I have eaten at this Atlanta institution, but the memories of dining at the Varsity are endless.

Mr. President, I ask that you join me, our colleagues, and the entire Gordy family in recognizing 70 years of mouth-watering food and fond memories, and in wishing the entire Varsity family many more successes in the future.●

THE VERY BAD DEBT BOXSCORE

● Mr. HELMS. Mr. President, at the close of business yesterday, Monday, August 31, 1998, the federal debt stood at \$5,564,553,479,478.04 (Five trillion, five hundred sixty-four billion, five hundred fifty-three million, four hundred seventy-nine thousand, four hundred seventy-eight dollars and four cents).

Five years ago, August 31, 1993, the federal debt stood at \$4,403,247,000,000 (Four trillion, four hundred three billion, two hundred forty-seven million).

Ten years ago, August 31, 1988, the federal debt stood at \$2,575,800,000,000 (Two trillion, five hundred seventy-five billion, eight hundred million).

Fifteen years ago, August 31, 1983, the federal debt stood at \$1,348,374,000,000 (One trillion, three hundred forty-eight billion, three hundred seventy-four million).

Twenty-five years ago, August 31, 1973, the federal debt stood at \$461,845,000,000 (Four hundred sixty-one billion, eight hundred forty-five million) which reflects a debt increase of