First Lady Hillary Clinton's public statement this May that ''it will be in the long-term interests of the Middle East for Palestine to be a state . . . and seen on the same footing as any other state'' put U.S. policy on this issue in severe and grave doubt.

Despite official denials by the U.S. State Department and numerous other officials in the administration, the First Lady's remarks were interpreted by many around the world including Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat, as ''a very important and clear signal'' regarding the administration's position. He subsequently threatened to unilaterally declare an independent Palestinian state in May of 1999—after the expiration of the scheduled date for completing the final status talks between Israel and the Palestinians.

The United Nations then voted this past July 7th to elevate the Palestinian observer mission at the United Nations to the status of a full observer mission, a status just short of that accorded an independent state. Media reports in the Middle East indicate that the government of French Premier Lionel Jospin may be prepared to recognize an independent Palestinian state immediately after the end of the interim Oslo accords in May 1999. Just last week in speaking to the United Nations, Yasser Arafat called on world leaders to support an independent Palestinian state—though the State Department had to scramble mightily to prevent him from repeating his threat to declare such a state unilaterally.

Mr. Speaker, what has been missing from this debate over the last several months has been a public—and unequivocal—statement from President Clinton himself that the United States will never recognize the unilateral declaration of an independent Palestinian state. No amount of denials, statements, or clarifications by Secretary of State Madeline Albright and other functionaries down at the State Department can dispel the confusion and uncertainty about U.S. policy occasioned by the First Lady's remarks. Rightly or wrongly, the reception of many around the world and even in this country is that only President Clinton has the clout to override the influence of the First Lady within his Administration.

For the President to pretend otherwise is to hide his head, and America's in the sand. The need for the President to personally act to clarify the U.S. position was brought home when Yasser Arafat stated on July 15, 1998 that ''[t]here is a transition period of five years and after five years we have the right to declare an independent Palestine state. We are asking for an accurate implementation, an honest implementation of what has been signed in the White House under the supervision of President Clinton.''

We must remember that Yasser Arafat demands the whole West Bank and has declared that there can be no permanent peace as long as the problem of Jerusalem remains ''unresolved.'' The Palestinian Cabinet, on Thursday, September 24, stated that ''at the end of the interim period, it (the Palestinian government) shall declare the establishment of a Palestinian state on all Palestinian land occupied since 1967, with Jerusalem as the eternal capital of the Palestinian state.''

It is way past time for the President to declare that the United States will never recognize a unilateral declaration of an independent Palestinian state; and that Israel, and Israel alone, can determine its security needs. This was made clear back in June, a month after the First Lady's remarks, when Palestinian National Council Speaker Salim al-Za'nun announced that, ''If following our declaration of state, Israel renews its occupation of East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and the Gaza strip, the Palestinian people will struggle and resist the occupier with all means possible, including armed struggle.''

I urge my colleagues to support this resolution and to expedite its consideration.

RECOGNITION OF TAMMY LYONS, TEACHER OF THE YEAR FINALIST

HON. ROBERT A. WEYGAND

OF RHODE ISLAND

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, October 8, 1998

Mr. WEYGAND. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Tammy Lyons, a constituent from my district, who was recently selected as a finalist for the Department of Education's ''Teacher of the Year.''

Tammy, a resident of Charlestown, Rhode Island, has earned a great deal of respect and honor from her work as a fourth grade teacher at the Ashaway Elementary School. Her status as a Teacher of the Year finalist is a testament to her dedication to the education and development of her students as well as to the improvement of her school and community.

We have spoken a great deal lately of the importance of preparing our nation's students for the coming years and for the new challenges they will face. This goal will be reached through the dedication of our teachers, and Tammy stands out among their number. Not only does she shine as a teacher of the basic skills that students need, she has also brought new ideas to her community. Her day does not end with the afternoon bell; she helps coordinate an after-school program to help students deal with conflict. Such programs are clearly beneficial to our students, for they instruct the skills of understanding and tolerance, key character traits that are essential in a world that contains many ideas and beliefs.

For the last nine years, Tammy has been an asset to her school and her community by bridging the traditional role of teacher with the new expectations asked of modern educators. I thank Tammy for her dedication and commitment and ask colleagues to join me in congratulating her on this notable accomplishment.

IN HONOR OF THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF SAINT LEO THE GREAT PARISH

HON. DENNIS J. KUCINICH

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, October 8, 1998

Mr. KUCINICH. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Saint Leo the Great Parish, a parish that builds on tradition, innovation and education.

In October 1948, St. Leo opened its doors. Father Sylvester Lux was appointed as the first pastor. Constructed to serve the growing communities of the South Hills area of Cleveland, Brooklyn Heights, and the northeast area of Parma, St. Leo drew its original families from Our Lady of Good Counsel and St. Francis DeSales parishes in Cleveland and Parma respectively.

In the spring of 1949, realizing that members of the parish didn't enjoy attending Mass at a public school, a temporary building was erected in three days. In January 1950, construction began on both a new school and a new church. The school opened in September 1950, and inaugural Mass was celebrated in the church on December 24, 1950.

Throughout the last fifty years, pastors have benevolently dedicated themselves to spreading the word of God and developing a parish that contributes to the well-being of its community. Both pastors and parishioners have devoted much of their time to sheltering the homeless, feeding the hungry, healing the sick, fostering the elderly and educating the youth. These same principles are still emulated today under the direction of Fr. Bob Bielek.

As the 50th anniversary approaches, St. Leo and parishioners are seizing the opportunity to make the world a finer place. Among the events marking the anniversary year is the Habitat for Humanity Adopt a House Project. The parish would become the first Catholic Parish within the city of Cleveland to complete such a project. The project is directly linked to St. Leo's 50th anniversary theme; to ''Build a House Where Love Can Dwell.''

My fellow colleagues, please join me in celebrating St. Leo's 50th anniversary, a celebration of service and enhancement that began in 1948 and continues today.

CRIME IDENTIFICATION TECHNOLOGY ACT OF 1998

SPEECH OF

HON. PETE SESSIONS

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, October 7, 1998

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. Speaker, I want to commend my friends from Florida, Mr. MCCOLLUM and Mr. FOLEY, for working together to bring this legislation to the floor today. Their hard work is sure to provide greater safety to millions of Americans. I want to thank Mr. MCCOLLUM, especially, who, as Chairman of the House Subcommittee on Crime of the Committee on the Judiciary, has given me his assurances that the provisions in the bill which allow for criminal background checks do not open volunteer organizations to greater liability. As the bill allows qualified entities—certain volunteer organizations—to obtain national criminal fingerprint background checks, it avails organizations that make use of the services generously donated by millions of Americans of a privilege heretofore unavailable to them. I am grateful for Chairman MCCOLLUM's recognition that obtaining criminal fingerprint background checks is a costly process from which, at least at present, results may not be available on a timely basis. Charities must balance the cost, burden, and timeliness of the process against the risk that otherwise qualified individuals may be discouraged from volunteering, and that needed programs may have to be reduced or eliminated to pay for such background checks. The committee included section 222 in the bill to provide an

option to voluntary nonprofit organizations, not to require them, either directly or indirectly, to undertake criminal fingerprint background checks for employees and volunteers. Chairman MCCOLLUM has assured me, both personally and in his statement, that failure to seek or obtain a criminal fingerprint background check should not be construed as a basis for, or offered as evidence of, liability in civil litigation against a nonprofit voluntary organization where the lawsuit is based on the conduct or actions of an employee or volunteer.

Once again, I would like to congratulate the gentlemen from Florida for their herculean efforts to pass this important legislation, and I thank them for the privilege of making a statement on the bill. I urge my colleagues to vote in favor of the measure.

IN HONOR OF THE PEARL BUCK CENTER'S 45TH ANNIVERSARY

HON. PETER A. DeFAZIO

OF OREGON

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, October 8, 1998

Mr. DEFAZIO. Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege and honor to congratulate Pearl Buck Center on 45 years of dedicated service to individuals with developmental disabilities.

When Pearl Buck opened in 1953, it was one of the only educational programs in Oregon providing educational services to children with mental retardation and other developmental disabilities. Pearl Buck Center has continued this tradition of leadership in the community, the state, and the nation, providing vocational training, employment, education, and case management services to people with developmental disabilities.

Annually, Pearl Buck Center provides services to about 400 individuals with developmental disabilities and their children. Since it was founded, Pearl Buck Center has helped thousands of adults and children meet the challenges of their disabilities and find opportunities to succeed in school and on the job; to succeed as parents and as self-sufficient individuals; and to contribute to the community and society.

I would like to acknowledge the hard work and spirit of service that characterizes this organization. I hope that all Americans will reflect on the dedication of the staff and volunteers of Pearl Buck Center and on the struggles and successes of the individuals they serve.

I extend my deepest appreciation and thanks to Pearl Buck Center for their efforts, past and present, to help individuals with disabilities more fully realize their abilities, potential, and independence. We are all richer for your 45 years of service.

SPECIAL RECOGNITION OF SENATOR BEN GAETH (DEFIANCE–OH) UPON HIS RETIREMENT FROM PUBLIC SERVICE

HON. MICHAEL G. OXLEY

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, October 8, 1998

Mr. OXLEY. Mr. Speaker, I rise to honor a true public servant and long time friend, Senator Ben Gaeth of Defiance, Ohio. Senator Gaeth served with distinction from 1975 to the present in the Ohio Senate, and during that time I had the privilege of working with him on many issues of the day. Ben has also represented my home county of Hancock for 23 years during his tenure in the Senate and has always been a responsive and responsible legislator who has represented the best interest of his constituents during his illustrious career.

Senator Gaeth was first elected to the Senate in 1975 serving the people of the 1st Ohio Senate District. Before this he was Safety Director for the City of Defiance from 1962 until 1965. After this, he went on to serve a long career as the Mayor of Definance until 1974. He has served as President in the Mayor's Association of Ohio as well as the Ohio Municipal League.

He has fought to preserve our nation's heritage and our children's freedom. He was wounded while in the Navy in the Pacific and Atlantic War Theaters. Mr. Speaker, Senator Gaeth is a true American Hero.

His many civic duties and charities include the Defiance Area Chamber of Commerce, Rotary Club, Masonic Lodge, Order of the Purple Heart, Veterans of Foreign War, Amvets, American Legion, Loyal Order of Moose, Eagles, and BPO Elks. As you can readily see, it is a wonder that he has had any time to raise a wonderful family.

He has three children, seven grandchildren and one great-grandchild.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, we extend our best wishes to Ben and his lovely wife, Thelma, on this well earned retirement. Ben and Thelma have truly been inspirations to all of us in public service and have exemplified all that is best about politics and government.

IN HONOR OF THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE GERMAN SCHOOL COMMITTEE

HON. LOIS CAPPS

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, October 8, 1998

Mrs. CAPPS. Mr. Speaker, I rise to bring to the attention of my colleagues the 50th Anniversary of the German School Committee in San Luis Obispo, California on October 24, 1998.

The year 1998 marks the 50th Anniversary of the German School Committee exchange student program between San Luis Obispo High School in San Luis Obispo, California and Eberhard Ludwigs Gymnasium in Stuttgart, Germany, as the second oldest international student exchange of its kind.

The German School Committee began in 1948 at San Luis Obispo High School as a postwar goodwill project affiliated with the American Friends Service Committee, which sent goods to Eberhard Ludwigs Gymnasium students.

Ethel Cooley, former Dean of Women at San Luis Obispo High School, directed the program from 1948–1991, and Chris Hovis and Deborah Nelson have directed the program from 1992 to the present. A true student exchange program and a strong bond between the two high schools has developed during the past 50 years, enriching the students' and families' lives by building cultural bridges in their respective communities.

Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the German School Committee student exchange program on their 50th Anniversary, and for fostering friendships between students from culturally diverse backgrounds.

CLOSING THE HUGE HOLE IN MEDICARE'S BENEFITS PACKAGE: STARK INTRODUCES MEDICARE PRESCRIPTION DRUG BENEFIT

HON. FORTNEY PETE STARK

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, October 8, 1998

Mr. STARK. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce the Medicare Prescription Drug Coverage Act of 1998 to remedy a huge hole in the program's benefits package—outpatient prescription drug coverage. Twice in the past 10 years, Congress has almost provided this benefit, and twice we have failed. We established a drug benefit in the Medicare Catastrophic legislation of 1988, but it was repealed the next year before the benefit could start. A drug benefit was a key component of H.R. 3600, the Health Security Act of 1994, reported by the Ways and Means Committee, but failed to pass that year.

It is time to debate this issue again and try some new approaches.

While Congress has done nothing, drug costs have been soaring out of the reach of millions of seniors enrolled in traditional Medicare.

In 1995, 46% of seniors enrolled in fee-for-service Medicare were without drug coverage. Almost one-quarter of beneficiaries enrolled in Medicare HMOs (about 4% of all beneficiaries) do not have a drug benefit.

And in the face of projections that prescription drug prices are about to spike again, following a brief slowdown during the 1993–94 health care reform debate, the number of seniors with no drug benefits could accelerate.

By 2007, the Health Care Financing Administration projects drug costs will account for over 8% of total health care costs, up from 6% in 1996. Viewed another way, that could mean double-digit price increases. For many beneficiaries with modest incomes, no retiree health coverage, and too many assets to qualify for Medicaid, these economic trends mean they will be forced to rely on traditional Medicare—with no drug coverage.

In effect, we are rapidly creating a large underinsured class of Medicare beneficiaries.

So as we approach the millennium, I will pose the question again: Why doesn't Medicare have a drug benefit? Why do nearly all Americans who have private insurance, which includes every member of Congress, enjoy drug coverage, while millions of seniors do not?

Most Americans have heard stories about seniors who must make repeated, difficult choices to buy either prescription drugs or other necessities—like food. The health toll this produces is not easy to quantify. Researchers report that seniors without drug coverage frequently decide to go without medications for conditions such as headaches and muscle aches. What is less well known is that