

STUDENT'S ACTIVISM WINS
PRAISE**HON. GEORGE MILLER**

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, May 11, 1999

Mr. GEORGE MILLER of California. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to share with my colleagues the accomplishments of an extraordinary young woman, Sipfou Saechao, a senior at Richmond High School in Richmond, California. Feeling frustrated by the self-imposed racial segregation of her fellow classmates, Sipfou took it upon herself to improve race relations at Richmond High, a school as culturally diverse as any in California. Overcoming the initial pessimism of friends, students and faculty, Sipfou formed ACTION—All Colors Together In One Nation—a student organization which now boasts over 40 active members. ACTION has challenged the students and faculty of Richmond High to confront the often volatile issue of race, and to learn and grow from the experience. As described in the following article, Sipfou's activism has earned her the respect and admiration of her peers, and she serves as a model for young people throughout our country. I know that my fellow Members of the House of Representatives join me in recognizing Sipfou Saechao for her tremendous contribution to the health of her community, and congratulating her on receiving the 1999 Take Action Award.

STUDENT'S ACTIVISM HELPS HEAL RACE RIFTS
(By Tony Mercado)

RICHMOND.—Somewhere between sips of cola and bites of a crumb doughnut, Richmond High's Sipfou Saechao decided to make a difference.

It was lunch time when Saechao, then a sophomore, glanced around at the clusters of students and noticed something terribly wrong. For a school so rich in diversity, Asian, Latino and black teens kept to their own.

"That was so stupid," said Saechao, now an 18-year-old senior. "They were excluding themselves from learning about people who could possibly make them a better person."

Last school year, Saechao formed the student club All Colors Together in One Nation—ACTION—to help improve race relations at the school. Friends said it wouldn't work. But Saechao's drive has helped mend a racially split student body, and it has brought her acclaim as one of the country's top young activists.

React Magazine, a teen news publication, has named the UC-Berkeley-bound student one of five grand-prize winners at the 1999 Take Action Awards in New York City. The honor carries a \$20,000 scholarship—a prize sought by about 600 students across the country.

Saechao, who immigrated from Laos at age 2 with her parents and brother, said the money brings her dream of becoming an English teacher closer to reality.

"I'm relieved," said Saechao. She was a semi-finalist for the same prize as a sophomore, for her work to educate Laotian immigrants about the hazards of washing clothes and growing vegetables in toxic soil and water.

"I was stressed about how I was going to be able to afford college," she said. "This changes everything."

The magazine, which reaches 3 million readers as a newspaper insert and through

schools, also awarded Saechao \$24,000 to give to the charity of her choice. Saechao, the school's Associated Student Body president, chose Richmond High. The school plans to buy supplies and encyclopedias.

Dennie Hughes, React's senior editor, called Saechao a tireless worker who yearns to make things happen.

"She's one of those people who wants to see what else can become her project," said Hughes. "She educated the Laotian community, it worked, and then she turned her attention to her school to see how she could help there."

Richmond High has one of Contra Costa County's most diverse student bodies. Fifty percent of students are Latino and 25 percent are Asian. Blacks account for 20 percent. Whites and other ethnic groups account for 5 percent.

The trick to fostering unity was getting classmates to focus on being proud of their school, Saechao said. Scars remained from the past, when tempers between ethnic groups would flare and fists would all too quickly fly.

Some friends told her it would be a nearly impossible task.

"I thought she was crazy," said San Saephanh, an 18-year-old senior. "Because of the violence we had a long time ago, everyone at the time was usually separated."

Saechao helped create a forum where students for the first time could talk about what was on their minds. She began publishing a newsletter call ACTION, filled with students' concerns about the school. Many classmates wrote about pervasive gangs and violence, teen pregnancy and discrimination against girls by boys.

Teachers also got into the act, writing about the frustration of getting students to do homework or bemoaning the lack of respect and communication between teens and adults. But they also wrote about encouraging students to stay in school and work together.

"I thought teachers would be the hardest to convince we could change," Saechao said. "They see what we're like every day, so they have certain stereotypes."

Club membership grew from six to 40, with students from varied backgrounds. The climate is still far from perfect, she said, but students and teachers said people tend to get along better now. Some even share the same picnic table at lunch.

"She gained a real reputation as someone who speaks up for what she thinks is right," said Nancy Ivey, Saechao's leadership class teacher. "Her name comes up the most when kids are asked who they admire as a leader."

The ACTION club is planning fund-raisers so it can provide a scholarship to a graduating senior next year. So far, it has raised about \$1,000. Saechao said it just proves what can happen when there's unity.

"It was actually easy for us students to change," she said. "Most were open-minded about the idea. Hopefully, I've shown that everyone on campus can work together."

CONGRATULATING TERRY NAGEL
ON HER SERVICE AS PRESIDENT
OF THE NJFRW**HON. MARGE ROUKEMA**

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, May 11, 1999

Mrs. ROUKEMA. Mr. Speaker, I rise to congratulate Terry Nagel on her past four years of service as president of the New Jersey Federation of Republican Women. Terry is a stal-

wart veteran of the political process who has fought for her party's values—and promoted the values of our democratic system—for more than 30 years. Her leadership will be missed, but her many contributions will never be forgotten.

As a secondary-school teacher before coming to Congress, I used to tell my students to become politically active in the party of their choice. Whether you are a Republican, Democrat, Independent or member of a minor party, it is important to find the political party that represents your beliefs and then become an active part of the political process. Terry Nagel is someone who has done just that. She is a loyal Republican, of course, but promotes more than just Republican ideals and values. She extols the values of a democratic society and knows the vital importance of an elected government accountable to the electorate. And she always emphasizes that the vote is not just a right but a responsibility—if you don't vote, you have no one but yourself to blame if you're unhappy with government.

Terry Nagel has worked hard to promote her party's candidates—not just women—and has met with tremendous success. While working for men and women candidates alike, she has realized that all issues are women's issues—whether they involve career opportunities or tax rates. Under her guidance, the New Jersey Federation of Republican Women has championed the issues that count with New Jersey voters—a strong economy, good jobs at good wages, streets safe from crime, and welfare reform that works.

The NJFRW grew significantly under Ms. Nagel's tenure, adding chapters in Hunterdon, Warren and Salem counties. The organization participated in the Get Out the Vote campaign in Washington, D.C., increased financial support for candidates throughout the state and urged the State Republican Committee to give the federation a voting seat on the committee. The Federation also played a major role in helping pass the Women's Health and Cancer Rights Act.

Ms. Nagel's involvement in politics began in 1969 as a member of the Women's Republican Club of Middletown, where she planned programs and worked as a fundraiser. She became a member of the Middletown Republican Committee in 1975 and served as president of the Monmouth County Federation of Republican Women from 1983–1985. She was named president of the New Jersey Federation of Republican Women in 1995 and became a member of the board of the National Federation of Republican Women the same year. She chaired former Governor Thomas Kean's telephone campaign in the 15th Congressional District in 1985, and has chaired and organized many political events over the years. She has been an honorary delegate to each Republican National Convention since 1998.

Ms. Nagel has also served on the Middletown Board of Public Assistance and the Middletown Recreation Advisory Committee.

Professionally, Ms. Nagel is a former director of children's recreation at the Institute of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation at New York University. She also directed the preschool program at Exxon's Bayway Community Center. She has also taught physical education at Mater Dei High School and owned her own dance studio. She is a graduate of Panzer College and holds a master's degree in education from New York University.