

was virtually wiped out in a single devastating blow. But the Japanese empire did not count on the galvanizing effect that this dastardly attack would have on the American people. In the wake of the events of September 11, 2001, we have once again witnessed how this powerful effect unites our country against evil.

Prior to December 7, 1941, the role of the United States in world affairs was the topic of intense debate. That debate ended as the bombs fell on Pearl Harbor. All Americans became united in the effort for victory with a vigor and determination unknown in any American conflict, before or since, perhaps with the exception of the resolve demonstrated by the American people since September 11th. The ultimate tragedy of Pearl Harbor was the fact that it could have been predicted and prevented. Candidates for graduation at the Japanese military academies had been asked to plan an attack on Pearl Harbor as part of their final examinations each year since 1931. The Japanese secret code had been broken, and the State Department was aware that an attack was imminent. However, the location was not known, and so our commanders were not notified in a timely fashion.

Mr. Speaker, this does not mean, however, that our 3,600 casualties were killed or wounded in vain. The heroism demonstrated that fateful Sunday morning did much to inspire millions of Americans to greater sacrifice and heroism which was necessary for our ultimate victory. This year will mark the 60th Anniversary of Pearl Harbor and our thoughts and prayers will be those survivors and their families as well as the families who have lost sons and daughters in the war that followed.

RETIREMENT OF JOSEPH
THOMPSON

HON. JACK QUINN

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, December 11, 2001

Mr. QUINN. Mr. Speaker, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) in particular, is losing a remarkable leader. Joseph Thompson, former Under Secretary for Benefits, is retiring after 26 years of service to veterans.

I met Joe at the start of my tenure as chairman of the Subcommittee on Benefits of the Veterans' Affairs Committee. I had a lot of detail to learn about the VA's claims process, and Joe's knowledge of the VBA was vast. A Vietnam veteran, Joe began his career with VA as a claims examiner in 1975, and through the years he worked in the Education Service, VA's Regional Office and Insurance Center in Philadelphia as Assistant Director, and spent seven years as the Director of the Regional Office in New York. It was in this position that Joe reengineered the regional office's business processes and former Vice President Gore awarded the first "Hammer Award" for reinventing government to the New York Regional Office. Joe asked his coworkers personally to accept the award from the Vice President, which they did in Joe's presence. It was only natural that Joe Thompson would take the helm of the VBA. While managing almost 13,000 equally dedicated employees, Joe was responsible for administering the service-related disability compensation pro-

grams, needs-based pension programs, home loan guarantees, GI Bill education assistance, vocational rehabilitation and job placement services, and life insurance programs—and he rose to the task.

Joe Thompson is indeed a visionary person. Under his direction, VBA developed the Roadmap to Excellence in an effort to improve service delivery, the Balanced Scorecard, which measured performance by each regional office, and established a system to improve the integrity of performance data in order to greatly reduce false or erroneous reporting of outcome measures. These were seen at the time by some as unorthodox ideas, but veterans and VA's stakeholders are better off today because Joe challenged the status quo. Joe laid the bench mark for future VBA employees, and he set the bar rather high, in my opinion. He is one of the most creative and innovative public servants I have known. And the well-spring of growth and change that Joe inspired is Joe's legacy to his fellow veterans.

I have enjoyed a strong working relationship with Joe Thompson and consider him a friend. He is the epitome of the federal employee who reports to work each day because he wants to make a difference, especially for disabled veterans. And I can say without reservation that Joseph Thompson has met the challenge of leadership in public service. I wish Joe and his family all the best following retirement. I am sure Joe's family is proud of him; I know I am.