

2001 and within one year achieved the number two market share in low-calorie sweeteners in the world. As a result, Splenda saw more than 100 percent profit growth from 2001 to 2002. Also in that year, McNeil Nutritionals had a 110 percent sales growth from its base year and implemented "Six Sigma" quality projects that resulted in cost savings of \$15 million.

Mr. Speaker, I proudly ask you and my colleagues to join me, the Alabama Technology Network and the Business Council of Alabama in honoring McNeil Nutritionals, Splenda Plant, for its outstanding accomplishments. I also want to recognize and thank McNeil Nutritionals for its contributions to the local economy and to the quality of life enjoyed in the State of Alabama.

PRESIDENTIAL GIFTS
ACCOUNTABILITY ACT

HON. DOUG OSE

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 3, 2003

Mr. OSE. Mr. Speaker, today, I rise to introduce a revised version of my "Presidential Gifts Accountability Act." During the 107th Congress, I introduced an initial bill, H.R. 1081. Both versions of this good government bill establish responsibility in one agency for the receipt, valuation and disposition of Presidential gifts.

In January 2001, there were press accounts of President Clinton's last financial disclosure report, which covered calendar year 2000 and January 1–20, 2001. This report revealed that the Clintons chose to retain \$190,027 in gifts, each over \$260, during this period. In February 2001, there were press accounts of numerous furniture gifts to the White House residence, which the Clintons returned to the U.S. Government. These press stories led me to question how the current Presidential gifts system works and what legislative changes, if any, are needed to prevent future abuses.

I believe that the American people have the right to know what gifts were received and retained by their President. Additionally, I believe that donors should not receive an unfair advantage in the policymaking process or other governmental benefits.

To prevent future abuses, in March 2001, I introduced H.R. 1081, the "Accountability for Presidential Gifts Act," which had bi-partisan support during the 107th Congress. The Government Reform Subcommittee on Energy Policy, Natural Resources and Regulatory Affairs, which I chair, spent nearly a year gathering the empirical data to support and improve such a legislative effort.

The Subcommittee found that several laws, involving six Federal offices and agencies, govern the current system. In February 2002, the Subcommittee released a 55-page document summarizing the Subcommittee's findings. The Subcommittee identified a host of problems with the Presidential gifts system, such as consistently undervalued gifts and questionable White House Counsel rulings. Since the current system is subject to abuse and political interference, I believe that there is a need for centralized accountability in one agency staffed by career employees. My bill establishes responsibility in one agency—

staffed by career employees—for the receipt, valuation and disposition of Presidential gifts.

On October 28, 2002, my Subcommittee's analysis was presented in House Report 107–768, "Problems with the Presidential Gifts System." The Report summarized how the current system works, my Subcommittee's investigation and findings, and recommendations made in my Subcommittee's hearing and a second hearing by the Government Reform Subcommittee on Government Efficiency, Financial Management and Intergovernmental Relations. The Report's findings included: Non-Competitive Hiring of Political Appointee for Career Job, Some Gifts Over the Reporting Threshold Were Not Disclosed, Some Gifts Were Solicited, Many Gifts Were Undervalued, Some Gifts Were Not Included in the White House Database, Some Gifts Were Lost, Questionable White House Counsel Rulings, Some U.S. Property Was Taken, Most Furniture Gifts Were Coordinated, Some Gift Certificates Were Accepted, and Huge Gifts to the Presidential Library

The total value of gifts retained by the former First Family over an 8-year period creates at least an appearance problem. The fact that so many gifts were undervalued raises many questions. The fact that gifts were misplaced or lost show sloppy management and maybe more. The fact that U.S. government property was improperly taken is troubling. And, the fact that, after the former First Lady's election to the U.S. Senate and before she was subject to the Congress' very strict gift acceptance rules, the former First Family accepted nearly \$40,000 in furniture gifts and the First Lady solicited nearly \$40,000 in fine china and silver is disturbing at best. Public servants, including the President, should not be able to enrich themselves with lavish gifts.

The revised version of my bill, which I am introducing today, reflects several recommendations made by public witnesses at both hearings on the earlier version. These include the President of Common Cause and the Director for Public Service of The Brookings Institution, both of which expressed support for the bill. I believe that, if enacted, this bill will provide transparency for the public, establish discipline in the multi-agency system, and ensure accountability. A section-by-section analysis of the bill's provisions is attached to this introductory statement.

The current system is clearly broken and needs to be fixed.

To expedite progress, I am also sending a letter to the President today to recommend some changes in the current system, which he can make administratively to provide transparency, discipline, and accountability. These include interagency coordination, establishment of a unified database with a single numbering system, and annual public disclosure of all Presidential gifts over \$100 (except a gift from a foreign government or a relative). A copy of this letter is also attached to this introductory statement.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
Washington, DC, April 3, 2003.

Hon. GEORGE W. BUSH,
The White House,
Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. PRESIDENT: Today, after a lengthy investigation and two hearings of Government Reform Subcommittees, I introduced an improved version of my "Presidential Gifts Accountability Act." This good government bill establishes responsibility in

one agency for the receipt, valuation, and disposition of Presidential gifts. In the meantime, I am writing you to recommend some changes in the current system, which can be made administratively.

Several laws, involving six Federal offices and agencies, govern the current system. The Subcommittee on Energy Policy, Natural Resources and Regulatory Affairs, which I chair, identified a host of problems with the system in use during the prior Administration, such as consistently undervalued gifts and questionable White House Counsel rulings. These are presented in House Report 107–768, "Problems with the Presidential Gifts System." Since the system is subject to abuse and political interference, I believe that there is a need for centralized accountability in one agency staffed by career employees. My bill establishes responsibility in one agency for the receipt, valuation and disposition of Presidential gifts.

At the second hearing in June 2002, it was revealed that only minor changes were made by your Administration to address the problems revealed in the first hearing in February 22. In July 2002, my Subcommittee invited your staff and the six affected agencies to a meeting to identify changes, which could be made administratively. The attendees confirmed that, since the Subcommittee's investigation began: there has been no inter-agency meeting or other coordination between the six agencies; there is no unified database system in use by the six agencies for the receipt, valuation and disposition of Presidential gifts; and, there is no single numbering system for Presidential gifts. Please consider such coordination and establishment of a unified database with a single numbering system. In addition, I recommend annual public disclosure of all Presidential gifts over \$100 (except a gift from a foreign government or a relative).

As the Director for Public Service at the Brookings Institution stated, "In this moment of heightened public confidence in government, the presidential gift process offers the potential for staggering embarrassment and diminished accountability. The current fragmented process for logging, valuing, and manging gifts to the president defies bureaucratic logic, and appears designed more to frustrate accountability than enhance it. One could design a more unwieldy system if one started out do so." I agree with his assessment.

Sincerely,

DOUG OSE,
Member of Congress.

CHILD ABDUCTION PREVENTION
ACT

SPEECH OF

HON. BETTY McCOLLUM

OF MINNESOTA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 27, 2003

The House in Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union had under consideration the bill (H.R. 1104) to prevent child abduction, and for other purposes:

Ms. McCOLLUM. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 1104 the Child Abduction Prevention Act. This legislation takes a significant step toward bringing child abductors to justice by aiding law enforcement agencies to effectively prevent, investigate and prosecute crimes against children. H.R. 1104 also provides families and communities with immediate and effective assistance to recover a

missing child through the AMBER Alert Network Plan. I believe it is important that the federal government send a clear message to child abductors that their actions will not go unpunished, and that we will take the appropriate measures to ensure the protection of our children.

I am disappointed, however, that the Republican majority chose to add a number of provisions to this legislation that I oppose, including an expansion of the death penalty, making it easier to authorize wiretaps against criminal suspects, and establishing mandatory life sentences for certain crimes. It is unfortunate that these failed, controversial provisions were added to such an important piece of legislation.

I will continue to support measures designed to keep child abductors off the street, and increase security for the children in our neighborhoods and communities. Furthermore, I remain opposed to the death penalty, expanded surveillance measures that violate our civil liberties, and mandatory sentencing guidelines that take away the discretion of a judge to decide a case fairly and justly. It's regrettable we could not pass a clean bill that reflects all of these ideas.

DENYING DEMOCRATS THE OPPORTUNITY TO OFFER AMENDMENTS ON H.R. 1559

HON. SHEILA JACKSON-LEE

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 3, 2003

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I rise in opposition to this rule. The rule waives all points of order against the Majority's bill, while denying Democrats the opportunity to offer amendments.

Yesterday, during the meeting of the Rules Committee, my Democratic colleagues offered thoughtful amendments ranging from increasing funds for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to adding \$1.7 billion for health care, education, and infrastructure in the United States; yet none of my Democratic colleagues were granted waivers. I offered five amendments addressing our homeland security needs and mental health services. None of these amendments were granted waivers.

I believe that our domestic priorities and our first responders must not be overlooked as we consider this supplemental appropriations bill. The Ranking Member of the Appropriations Committee offered an amendment to increase funding by \$2.5 billion to Homeland Security programs. This was not accepted for a waiver.

These increases would have provided an additional \$197 million to protect military facilities; \$241 million for nuclear security (nuclear cargo detection, nuclear detection equipment,

securing nuclear materials abroad and in the U.S.); \$722 million for port and infrastructure security (Coast Guard personnel, port security grants, dam and bridge security, water and chemical plant security, rail tunnel security); and \$1.2 billion for state and local first responders (state and local civil defense teams, first responder equipment, firefighter grants, state and local biotechnical response, military guard and reserves).

The Obey amendment, which I support, provides critical funding to Homeland Security programs. Under Article I, section 7, of the U.S. Constitution, Congress has the power of the purse. We have an obligation to have an open and democratic debate on this supplemental.

With the United States now at war to disarm Saddam Hussein, some Republicans continue to question the patriotism of anyone who has the audacity to challenge the Bush administration's foreign policy. All of us pray for a quick, successful conclusion to this war and for our troops' safe return.

However, it is our duty as members of this august body of Congress to consider fully any funding that involves our military forces and funding that could help our domestic priorities.

With the Republicans denying essential debate on this bill, we will not have full consideration of the supplemental, and this is an abomination on what should be a fair and open process.

This is a process far from what our Founding Fathers envisioned when granting Congress spending authority. I regret that we cannot have a serious Open Rule process and waivers for amendments that address this nation's needs.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. ERNIE FLETCHER

OF KENTUCKY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 3, 2003

Mr. FLETCHER. Mr. Speaker, on Monday, March 31, 2003, despite all my efforts, I was unavoidably detained. Had I been present for Roll Call Vote Nos. 93 and 94 I would have voted the following way:

Roll Call Vote No. 93,—“Aye”.
Roll Call Vote No. 94,—“Aye”.

OUR MILITARY SURVIVORS
DESERVE FAIRNESS AND EQUITY!

HON. BOB FILNER

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 3, 2003

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker and colleagues, I rise today to speak about a bill to restore eq-

uity to the survivors of our nation's veterans, the Military Survivors' Equity Act (H.R. 1592).

It is hard to believe that we continue to condone a system that penalizes the aging survivors, mostly widows, of the veterans of our country, but that is exactly what the Military Survivors' Benefit Plan does! When a member of the military retires, he or she may join the Survivors' Benefits Plan, known as the SBP. After paying a premium for many, many years, the retiree expects that his or her spouse will receive 55 percent of the retired military pay if the veteran dies. But this is not the case!

As I said, most of the survivors who receive SBP benefits are military widows. You may not realize that when these widows who are receiving SBP benefits turn 62, a Social Security offset causes their benefits to be reduced from 55 percent to 35 percent of their husband's military retired pay. This occurs even when the Social Security comes from the wife's employment!

What does this reduction mean to our nation's military widows? I have received many, many letters on this topic. Let me read from two:

My husband, who served in the Army for 20 years, was on Social Security disability because of heart problems and could no longer work. He died when I was 61 years old. I was doing okay, paying my monthly bills and having enough left for groceries, but when I turned 62, I was notified that my SBP was reduced from \$476 to \$302. What a shock! This was my grocery money that they took away from me.

And a second—

While my husband was alive, we worked out a budget for me in case he died. I felt secure in the knowledge that he had provided for me by joining the Survivors Benefits Plan. I could not believe it when I learned that I was not going to get the amount we were promised. I cannot believe that our government would do this to the widow of a veteran.

It is past time to change this misleading and unfair law. We must provide equity to the surviving spouses of our military retirees. My bill would fix this problem by eliminating the callous and absurd reduction in benefits and give what is expected and what is deserved: 55 percent of the military retired pay. To put it simply, no offset. A simple solution to a difficult problem, as equitable solution to a mean-spirited practice.

Colleagues, please join me in co-sponsoring H.R. 1592, the Military Survivors' Equity Act. Let us do this for our veterans and for their surviving spouses. Let us stop the pain and anguish that we are causing them.