

San Bernardino County in California has actively begun surveying specific routes and mapping claims. This process is 80 percent complete and the county has thus far claimed 4,986 miles, 2,567 of which are in the Mojave National Preserve. The county has requested the Department of Interior waive the \$100 filing fee because they have so many RS 2477 claims the cost to the county to file all of these claims would be prohibitive. I am puzzled how they may lack the money to file these claims, but will somehow find the money to build all these roads?

I doubt more than a fraction of these claims will ever give rise to a road, but the claims will prove sufficient to block federal, state and local efforts to protect the land these road claims bisect. Mr. Chairman, what the public would never support through legislation, the administration is doing by stealth. And, while these actions may succeed at removing these lands from federal protection, they will create a host of new liabilities and unfunded costs.

In some states, including California and New Mexico, state law makes the local jurisdictions liable for failure to maintain a roadway. I wonder what future lawsuits we may be inviting when these localities will be sued for injuries caused by hazardous conditions on roads that were never built?

Given the tens of thousands of claims that have been received, I fail to see corresponding increases in the Bureau of Land Management's budget to process them. Will the granting of rights-of-way, create any new financial obligations for the federal government? What costs, including environmental assessments and litigation might be involved?

Mr. Chairman, this policy is an abomination. The administration needs to be reigned in and the purse strings are all that we have available. Support the Udall amendment.

IN HONOR OF THE AMERICAN  
MERCHANT MARINE FOR A JOB  
WELL DONE DURING OPERATION  
IRAQI FREEDOM

**HON. LORETTA SANCHEZ**

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Wednesday, July 23, 2003*

Ms. LORETTA SANCHEZ of California. Mr. Speaker, I rise to congratulate the members of the American Merchant Marine for exemplary service to our country during Operation Iraqi Freedom. Our nation owes them a debt of gratitude for delivering goods and keeping our troops supplied during a very trying time. Without the Merchant Marines, our armed forces would have faced insurmountable obstacles during their mission in the Persian Gulf.

Our maritime industry accounted for more than 80 percent of the supplies that were moved into Kuwait and Qatar for use in Operation Iraqi Freedom. Over 5000 mariners, from midshipmen to seasoned licensed marine officers, took part in the massive effort. They braved the seas in unarmed vessels full of explosive cargoes, and even volunteered to take anthrax and smallpox vaccinations to protect against biological attack. They moved nearly 21 million square feet of cargo in four

months—the equivalent, as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Richard Myers stated, of shipping everything in the Pentagon three times.

On May 22, 2003, Secretary of Transportation Norman Mineta said, "There is no more devoted a community of professionals than those who serve our nation's marine transportation system." I wholeheartedly agree with this statement. Since the founding of our great nation, the men and women of our maritime industry have shown great dedication to the ideals on which America was founded.

In peacetime, and in wartime, our maritime industry provides the vital lines of communications that keep our manufacturers producing, our farmers growing, and our consumers buying. Without the Merchant Marines, the American economy would grind to a screeching halt.

I ask my colleagues to join me in recognizing the important contributions made by our Merchant Mariners and their unwavering commitment to America's freedom and prosperity. Participation in the most recent war in Iraq is just another example of our Merchant Marine's dedication to our nation.

RECOGNIZING THE DISTINGUISHED  
CAREER OF GENE VERDU, EXECUTIVE  
DIRECTOR OF THE SOUTHWESTERN  
ILLINOIS COLLEGE PROGRAMS AND  
SERVICES FOR OLDER PERSONS

**HON. JERRY F. COSTELLO**

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Wednesday, July 23, 2003*

Mr. COSTELLO. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to ask my colleagues to join me in recognizing the distinguished career and retirement of Gene Verdu, Executive Director of the Southwestern Illinois College Programs and Services for Older Persons (PSOP).

August 31, 2003, will mark the end of an era of dedicated service as Eugene "Gene" Verdu retires from his position as the Executive Director of PSOP. Gene has dedicated his life to helping others. Throughout his 30-year career, he has touched the lives of thousands of people as he built and developed one of the finest social service agencies in the State of Illinois. From Belleville to Belize, Gene's generosity, passion and spirit have had a positive impact on family, friends, colleagues and constituents. His visionary leadership and tireless efforts to constantly improve the lives of others will be missed.

Throughout his career, Gene has served people, first as a teacher from 1963–1968. Moving from teaching young people to serving the needs of the elderly, Gene became the Director of the local Foster Grandparent Program in 1968 and served in that position until 1973. In 1973, Gene became the Director of the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program and served in that position until he was named the Director of the PSOP in 1975.

While serving our area's senior citizen population, Gene developed one of the first comprehensive "Preparation for Retirement" courses and educational materials. He orga-

nized and administered local Foster Grandparent programs, the Senior Companion Program, Senior Nutrition and Development programs, as well as Senior Transportation programs. Gene also developed, organized and taught several statewide training seminars related to the subject of aging and established one of the first electronic telephone reassurance programs for the homebound elderly.

Gene served as a delegate to the 1971, 1981, and 1995 White House Conferences on Aging and served on national committees for the American Association of Retired Persons, the National Council on Aging and the National Council of Senior Citizens. He assisted the State of Illinois by organizing the Illinois State Council of Senior Citizens and lobbying the state to create the Department on Aging. Gene also helped establish the Illinois Gerontology Consortium.

Gene has been the recipient of many community awards, among them the Medal of Merit by the Belleville Rotary Club, the Studs Terkel Humanitarian Award, the Martin Luther King, Jr. Humanitarian Award and the Outstanding Administrator Award from Belleville Area College. He has also received the Distinguished Community Service Award from St. Clair County and the Liberty Bell Award from the St. Clair County Bar Association.

Through Gene's work as the Director of PSOP, the elderly of the community are treated with respect and dignity. Their needs are met by the services PSOP offers: congregate meals, meals delivered to homebound elderly, transportation, employment, companionship, workshops and activities, travel opportunities, wellness clinic, volunteer opportunities, advocacy, counseling, outreach programs, and more. Recently, I was happy to work with Gene to secure more than \$900,000 to help finance the construction of an addition to the PSOP building at 201 North Church Street.

In addition to his work with the elderly, Gene still has a place in his heart for children. He continues to touch the lives of young handicapped children through the Belize Crippled Children's Program. He spends much of his spare time promoting this program, recruiting host families for the children who receive medical treatment at Shriner's Hospital in St. Louis, arranging travel to and from Belize for the children, and often escorting them himself, and traveling to Belize to assist with the medical clinics which are held to select the children for the program.

As a result of his many years of dedication to the Belize Crippled Children's Program, he was appointed Honorary Consul of Belize for the Greater St. Louis/Southern Illinois Area and serves as Secretary-Treasurer to the St. Louis Consular Corps.

If a person, no matter what age, race, or religion, is in need, Gene will lend a helping hand. If there is a situation that needs correcting to benefit others, he will fight to correct it.

The PSOP program helps approximately 12,000 seniors every year and he has helped hundreds of children through the Belize Crippled Children's Program. His life has made a definite impact on thousands of people, thus making the world a better place. Gene Verdu is a true humanitarian.

Mr. Speaker, I ask my colleagues to join me in recognizing the contributions of Gene Verdu and wish him the best in the future.