

selected as the adjudication officer at the VA Medical and Regional Office Center in Togus, Maine. Mr. Montgomery was named director of the Providence, Rhode Island VA Regional Office in 1980.

In February of 1995, he traveled to North Carolina to begin work in his current position as director of the VA Regional Office in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. In this position, he has been responsible for administering federal benefits to 790,000 veterans and their families living in North Carolina. These services total more than \$1.2 billion in annual benefit payments.

The Winston-Salem Regional Office provides benefits and services in all program areas to veterans, service-members, and reservists residing in North Carolina. These programs include compensation, pension, loan guarantee, and vocational rehabilitation.

From 1995 to 2007, Mr. Montgomery oversaw the growth of the Winston-Salem Office from 240 employees to 530 employees. During this period, the office grew to the second largest disability office in the United States.

In 2005, he was successful in having Winston-Salem selected as one of only two national benefits delivery at discharge sites at regional offices. This achievement created an additional 55 professional full-time positions and helped to ensure that the regional office would be a key player in the VA for many years to come.

As director, Mr. Montgomery has supported the veteran community in hiring practices as well as in claims disability work. Of the 516 employees hired at the regional offices in the last 10 years, 260 were veterans, and of that number, 127 were disabled veterans.

Each year, I visit the Winston-Salem Regional Office to learn about the work being done there and, more importantly, to personally thank the VA employees for all they do on behalf of our Nation's veterans. It was during one of these visits that I was struck by a letter I saw hanging on the wall of Mr. Montgomery's office. His family had received a letter from President Franklin D. Roosevelt after losing a loved one in World War II. And I quote President Roosevelt's letter.

"He stands in the unbroken line of patriots who have dared to die that freedom might live and grow, and increase its blessings. Freedom lives, and through it, he lives, in a way that humbles the undertakings of most men."

I am so grateful that my friendship with Mr. Montgomery led me to this wonderful quote, which I have since shared in my own letters to families who have lost a loved one in Afghanistan or Iraq.

During my visits, Mr. Montgomery has generously acted as my guide and has introduced me to employees and visiting veterans. I have witnessed firsthand all of the great work being done by Mr. Montgomery and his staff to take care of our Nation's veterans.

They have excelled in their efforts to reduce the number of pending claims while still maintaining the accuracy of their case audits.

In closing, Madam Speaker, I wish to congratulate Mr. Montgomery on his retirement and his long and successful career of service with the Department of Veterans Affairs. Through his work on behalf of our Nation's veterans, he has earned the respect of so many people, and I know he will be missed.

John Montgomery, thank you for a job well done. I wish you all the best for a long and happy retirement. May God bless you and your family in the years ahead, and may God bless our men and women in uniform, and may God bless America.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. DEFAZIO) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. DEFAZIO addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

#### THE HOUSING STIMULUS PLAN

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. KAPTUR. Madam Speaker, The Politico, a newspaper that is published and distributed here in the Congress, has an article today about how hard the Democrats are working to address the housing stimulus plan that the American people are waiting for.

In places like Ohio, the mortgage foreclosure rate is at all-time highs, and Washington seems to be frozen. There was a program passed here that I voted for for housing counseling to try to help workouts a few months ago; and then I learned that, in a community as hard struck as northern Ohio is, it yielded \$60,000. \$60,000 in a region where hundreds and hundreds of people are losing their homes.

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Washington doesn't seem to be able to match the reality of what is happening across this country.

A newspaper today reports that Senator CHRIS DODD from the other body stated that "Congress needs cooperation. This is not a partisan issue. Our economy is in trouble. We need people to step up and recognize it is Americans that are at risk, and it is America that is at risk."

The figures state that in another sign of distressed housing markets, home equity dipped below 50 percent, an historic low for our Nation. Home mortgage volume fell by 17.5 percent last quarter, and pending home sales also are reaching new lows. We know what the reality is. And yet today, all the major papers had lead stories about the resignation of the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, Mr. Alphonso Jackson. USA Today reports: "HUD chief departure a blow to President.

"For the first time in President Bush's tenure, one of his Cabinet members is stepping down amid a criminal investigation."

The article continues: "The FBI has been investigating the ties between Mr. Jackson and a friend who was paid \$392,000 by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development as a construction manager in New Orleans, according to the Associated Press." It is quite a long story about that resignation.

And then in the Washington Post, the same sort of story, "Jackson Resigns as HUD Secretary, Longtime Bush Friend is Facing Cronyism Investigation."

Mr. Jackson announced his resignation yesterday, leaving the Bush administration without a top housing official in the midst of this vast mortgage crisis which has shaken not just the American economy but the global economy.

The New York Times lead editorial today: "Put the Housing Back in HUD." Boy, can we underline that.

It talks about what a sad commentary it is on the Bush administration's low regard for HUD's mission that Mr. Jackson was permitted to remain in office for so long. And it points out in 2006, an inspector general's report found Mr. Jackson had urged his staff members to favor Mr. Bush's supporters when it awarded contracts. And more recently, the Philadelphia Housing Authority sued Mr. Jackson, charging he had threatened to take away \$50 million from that authority because its president would not turn over valuable property to a developer with ties to Mr. Jackson. He has refused to answer the Senate's questions about the matter, and the Times ends with this admonition: "Mr. Jackson's resignation clears the way for President Bush to name a top caliber successor, given the seriousness of the mortgage crisis." It should also be an occasion to reflect on the cost of appointing HUD secretaries whose priorities are politics and patronage rather than housing and urban development, which was the mission of HUD from the very beginning.

We are celebrating the 40th anniversary of the Kerner Commission Report; and as we look at the disaster we are facing in housing across this country that demands a national response, to have the major official here in our Nation's capital have to step down under a cloud of wrongdoing, and to have no one in place, a team of people who can really reach out to the American people and help as many of them as possible hold onto their largest form of savings, which is their home, is an absolute national disgrace.

It seems like the organizations that are here in our Nation's capital aren't really serious about helping the American people to hold onto their most prized possession after their family, their home, for heaven's sake.

You really wonder what has been going on inside that administration,