

As the veterans population of Florida and the Tampa Bay area continues to grow, the staff at Bay Pines seeks to respond quickly to meet the increased demand for veterans medical care.

Madam Speaker, representing Bay Pines and the veterans its serves is a great honor but also a great responsibility. It is reassuring to know that with receipt of the Carey Award for Excellence that Bay Pines continues to provide the highest level of care and that they never rest on their laurels as the staff and volunteers continue to search for new ways to improve the services they provide to our nation's heroes and their families. It is my hope that my colleagues will join me today in expressing to the staff and volunteers at Bay Pines our thanks and appreciation for a job well done.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. JOHN CONYERS, JR.

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, January 13, 2009

Mr. CONYERS. Madam Speaker, on January 9, 2009, I inadvertently cast a "yea" vote for H. Res. 34. I intended to vote "present."

PAYCHECK FAIRNESS ACT

SPEECH OF

HON. CHET EDWARDS

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, January 9, 2009

Mr. EDWARDS of Texas. Mr. Speaker, the Paycheck Fairness Act is about far more than the size of a paycheck. It is about our commitment to the American values of hard work and equality of opportunity.

The story of America is our never-ending march toward the highest ideals of equal opportunity for all our citizens.

Today, we write a new chapter in that great American story. Today, we say to women and young girls all across our land, that if you work hard and play by the rules, you will be rewarded fairly. You will reap what you sow.

From our founding days, that promise has motivated parents to work hard to improve the lives of their families and the future for their children. It has inspired generations of immigrants to leave their homelands to make America their home.

Fulfilling the promise of equal opportunity for American women will lift millions of our families and children out of poverty. That's not just progress for their families; it is real progress for the American family. And, by fairly rewarding the hard work of America's women, we make our Nation more competitive in the world economy.

Some will say this step forward will be inconvenient. I say that knocking down barriers to equality of opportunity has never been the convenient thing to do, but it has always been the right thing to do.

My wife and I try to teach our two young sons every day that if they will work hard, they will do well in life—that their work will be rewarded fairly.

I am supporting this bill, because I want the parents of every little girl in America to be able

to teach that value, to make that promise to their daughters. It is the promise of America.

INTRODUCTION OF WORKER RELIEF LEGISLATION

HON. JOHN M. McHUGH

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, January 13, 2009

Mr. McHUGH. Madam Speaker, on January 6, 2009, I introduced three measures that are designed to provide relief to millions of unemployed American workers. These proposals are H.R. 155, the Suspension of Federal Income Tax on Unemployment Benefits Act of 2009; H.R. 154, the Workers Severance Tax Reduction Act of 2009; and H.R. 153, the Worker Savings Account Act of 2009.

From December 2007 to December 2008, the national unemployment rate has risen from 4.9 percent to 7.2 percent and 2.6 million jobs have been lost. In fact, from November 2007 to November 2008, the number of those seeking work has risen in 49 States and the District of Columbia, including New York, which has seen its rate increase from 4.6 percent to 6.1 percent during that time. As of November 2008, in New York's 23rd Congressional District, which I have the privilege of representing, 9 of my 11 constituent counties had unemployment rates that significantly exceed the national rate. With my support, the 110th Congress enacted legislation (P.L. 110-252 and P.L. 110-449) to provide up to an additional 20 weeks of unemployment benefits to workers who have exhausted their 26 weeks of regular benefits. However, there is more we can and should do to help those without a job.

In the first instance, we should enact H.R. 155, the Suspension of Federal Income Tax on Unemployment Benefits Act of 2009. Many Americans are unaware that they must pay Federal income taxes on any unemployment compensation benefits they might receive. This has not always been the case; between 1979 and 1986, those payments were excluded from Federal income taxes. It is time to once more provide this relief to unemployed Americans, which could provide up to \$117 in additional income to the average beneficiary. In this manner, Congress can both help those individuals who are most in need and inject billions of dollars into the economy through paid rents, mortgages, utilities, groceries, and other necessities.

We should also enact H.R. 154, the Workers Severance Tax Reduction Act of 2009, which would allow laid-off workers to exclude up to \$40,000 from any severance pay, provided that it is less than \$150,000 and is received between December 31, 2007, and December 31, 2010. Studies have indicated that roughly 60 percent of businesses offer their employees some kind of severance pay. While these totals can vary from business to business, in many cases it is remitted as a lump sum. Unfortunately for many workers, the IRS takes a substantial bite out of these benefits. Specifically, under current law, severance pay is treated as regular income, thus often driving people into higher tax brackets at the very time they are losing their jobs.

From the start of the current economic slump in December 2007 through November 2008, there have been 20,712 mass layoffs in-

volving nearly a quarter of a million Americans. While not all of them received severance pay, those who did needed all those monies to better support their families, go back to school, or otherwise find a new job or career. Congress can and should help these citizens during this difficult time by allowing them to retain more of these much-needed monies.

Finally, to help Americans enhance their personal safety nets, Congress should enact H.R. 153, the Worker Savings Account Act of 2009. This measure would allow people to establish Worker Savings Accounts (WSAs) to supplement the benefits they might otherwise receive while unemployed.

Like traditional Individual Retirement Accounts (IRAs), WSAs would have an annual contribution limit of \$5,000, indexed to inflation. However, employers would be able to provide matching contributions of up to \$5,000 annually. Contributions to WSAs would be permitted until the account owner actually elects to take Social Security retirement benefits. At that time, WSA account holders could choose to rollover their WSA funds into a 401(k) or IRA; alternatively, the WSA funds could be withdrawn without penalty but subject to taxation. Prior to a WSA account owner's decision to take Social Security payments, WSA funds could be withdrawn without penalty and tax-free as long as employment was lost through no fault of the worker or they had become disabled.

To encourage lower-income Americans to take advantage of the opportunity to contribute to this benefit, the Worker Savings Account Act would provide a refundable tax credit of up to \$1,000 for eligible individuals. This tax credit would be indexed to inflation and recipients could receive up to \$5,000 over the course of their career.

Madam Speaker, by enacting the three bills described above, the 111th Congress can help millions of unemployed Americans. Accordingly, I ask my colleagues to work with me to enact these important measures.

HONORING CADET COLONEL ROBERT J. WILSON

HON. FRANK R. WOLF

OF VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, January 13, 2009

Mr. WOLF. Madam Speaker, it is my privilege to honor my constituent, Cadet Colonel Robert Wilson of Chantilly, Virginia, for his remarkable achievements as a member of the Civil Air Patrol. At a Pentagon presentation and award ceremony on January 5, Cadet Wilson was presented with the General Carl A. Spaatz Award. The Spaatz Award is the Civil Air Patrol's highest cadet honor, presented to cadets who demonstrate extraordinary leadership, character, fitness, and aerospace knowledge.

For every 1,000 cadets, only 2 achieve this distinct honor. Robert first joined the Civil Air Patrol in January 2004 where he served with distinction in the Fairfax Composite Squadron of the National Capital Wing. Upon graduation from high school, he chose to attend Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Prescott, Arizona, to obtain his bachelor's degree in aerospace engineering.

Robert joined the Air Force Reserve Officers' Training Corps and is a member of the Arnold Air Society. He plans to continue his education and training to be of service as a U.S. Air Force test pilot. On December 18, 2008, Robert successfully completed the Carl A. Spaatz Exam, the final stage of a long and grueling journey through 16 rigorous skill tests. Having overcome this final obstacle, he now joins the ranks of the Civil Air Patrol's best and brightest as a recipient of the General Carl A. Spaatz Award for outstanding cadets.

HONORING MARK THORNTON

HON. GEORGE RADANOVICH

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, January 13, 2009

Mr. RADANOVICH. Madam Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Mark Thornton upon his retirement as Tuolumne County Supervisor, District IV. Supervisor Thornton was honored by the Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors during a regularly scheduled board of supervisors meeting held on December 16, 2008.

Mark Thornton moved to Tuolumne County in 1976 after earning his bachelor's of arts degree in sociology from California State University, Fullerton. He spent many years as a historian and consultant, working with local, State and Federal agencies on various projects. He was an active participant in the public arena and served in several leadership positions including the Groveland Community Service District Board of Directors from 1979 through November 1983; Tuolumne County Historic Preservation Review Commission from September 1990 through January 1997; Tuolumne County Blue Ribbon Growth Management Committee from 1993 through 1995; Oak Grove Cemetery District from May 1995 through January 1997. In 1996 Mr. Thornton decided to run for a seat on the Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors to represent District IV. His election was a close one; he beat the incumbent by less than 10 votes.

Over the last 12 years as a supervisor, Mr. Thornton has worked tirelessly to protect the rural quality of life in his district while allowing for cautious expansion. His passion has been the protection of the county's historic and cultural resources. Some of his biggest impacts have been in the areas of transportation, health care and airport and land use planning. He has supported economic growth by gaining an improved coach ordinance, providing an open forum for discussing the building permit process and encouraging reasonable changes to the county's long standing agricultural guidelines. In Supervisor Thornton's most recent term he was a strong advocate for the expansion of the telecommunication infrastructure in Tuolumne County.

Madam Speaker, I rise today to commend and congratulate Supervisor Mark Thornton upon his retirement from the Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors. I invite my colleagues to join me in wishing Supervisor Thornton many years of continued success.

TRIBUTE TO KAREN RICE, ASSISTANT IDAHO FALLS DISTRICT MANAGER, BLM

HON. MICHAEL K. SIMPSON

OF IDAHO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, January 13, 2009

Mr. SIMPSON. Madam Speaker, I rise today to honor an exceptional public land manager in my district, Karen Rice, the Assistant Idaho Falls District Manager of the Bureau of Land Management, who is being recognized this week as the Public Lands Foundation's Outstanding Public Lands Professional Technician for 2008.

Now in its 20th year, the Public Lands Foundation award is an important recognition for special achievement by professional public land technicians and managers. The Public Lands Foundation is the only national membership organization dedicated solely to the protection and perpetuation of the National System of Public Lands under the administration of the BLM. It is a national nonprofit conservation organization whose members are primarily active and retired BLM employees.

As a member of that organization, Ms. Rice has worked hard for over 10 years on projects that protect wildlife habitat and promote responsible recreational activities along the South Fork of the Snake River and in the Henry's Lake Area of Critical Environmental Concern.

I am honored to take part in recognizing Ms. Rice today. I commend her for her tremendous efforts and dedication to such a crucial and worthwhile effort. Her efforts are paving the way for a more beautiful state and a more conservation-minded world.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. KAY GRANGER

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, January 13, 2009

Ms. GRANGER. Madam Speaker, on rollcall Nos. 8 and 9 I was absent from the House on official district business. Had I been present, I would have voted "no."

REPORT ON THE IMPERIAL PRESIDENCY OF GEORGE W. BUSH

HON. JOHN CONYERS, JR.

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, January 13, 2009

Mr. CONYERS. Madam Speaker, today I have received a report prepared by the majority staff of the House Judiciary Committee, Committee, detailing numerous abuses by the Bush administration over the past 8 years, and recommending a number of steps to restore an appropriate Constitutional balance of power between the executive and legislative branches.

The report, based largely on oversight activities of the Judiciary Committee, and other committees, over the course of the 110th Congress, is titled "Reining in the Imperial Presidency: Lessons and Recommendations Relating to the Presidency of George W. Bush."

Issues examined include: The politicization of the Department of Justice; assaults on individual liberty, including extreme interrogation, extraordinary rendition, and warrantless wiretapping of U.S. citizens; the misuse of executive branch regulatory authority and Presidential signing statements; misleading manipulation of pre-Iraq War intelligence; improper retaliation against Administration critics; and excessive secrecy, including non-compliance with congressional oversight.

The report examines how the Bush Administration's legal approach to presidential power has eroded the Constitutional system of checks and balances designed by the Framers to preserve our liberty. It also recommends specific steps that this Congress and the incoming Obama administration should take to restore those checks and balances.

I am having the report posted to the Judiciary Committee Web site, in order to make it available to other members of the committee, to the full House, and to the American public.

I believe this report will be of tremendous benefit helping inform the changes we must make going forward—to repair the damage to our democracy, and to prevent similar abuses from occurring in the future.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. BRIAN BAIRD

OF WASHINGTON

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, January 13, 2009

Mr. BAIRD. Madam Speaker, unfortunately, due to record flooding in my congressional district and across Washington State, I was unable to be present on January 9, 2009 for votes. I take my voting responsibility very seriously. Had I been present, I would have voted "yea" on final passage of H.R. 11, the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act. I would also have voted "aye" on final passage of H.R. 12, the Paycheck Fairness Act. I am an original co-sponsor of both bills, voted for their passage in the 110th Congress, and have been a strong and consistent supporter of legislation to end gender-based wage discrimination. I strongly oppose all forms of discrimination and believe that we must act to restore the right for women to challenge wage discrimination.

I was also not able to cast a vote on H. Res. 34, Recognizing Israel's right to defend itself against attacks from Gaza, reaffirming the United States strong support for Israel, and supporting the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. I have traveled to the region and met the families and individuals who are affected by the cycle of violence that continues to claim lives and wreak havoc on all sides of this conflict. As we continue to witness the humanitarian crisis spiral out of control in Gaza, and while rocket attacks persist against Israel, we are reminded that it is imperative for the United States to play a constructive role in pursuing a legitimate peace process that provides security and stability to the many innocent people trapped in the midst of this untenable status quo. Therefore, I would have voted present on this resolution.