

day our veterans retire that uniform to the day that they are put to rest—and that continues on for their families.

Without this commitment, I might not be here today. After all, my grandfather enlisted after Pearl Harbor and went on to march in Patton's Army. My grandmother worked on a bomber assembly line while he was gone. My mother was born at Fort Leavenworth while he was away. When my grandfather returned, he went to college on the GI Bill; bought his first home with a loan from the FHA; moved his family west, all the way to Hawaii, where he and my grandmother helped to raise me.

And I think about my grandfather whenever I have the privilege of meeting the young men and women who serve in our military today. They are our best and brightest, and they're our bravest—enlisting in a time of war; enduring tour after tour of duty; serving with honor under the most difficult circumstances; and making sacrifices that many of us cannot begin to imagine. The same can be said of their families. As my wife, Michelle, has seen firsthand during visits to military bases across this country, we don't just deploy our troops in a time of war—we deploy their families, too.

So while the mission of this department is always vital, it is even more so during long and difficult conflicts like those that we're engaged in today. Because when the guns finally fall silent and the cameras are turned off and our troops return home, they deserve the same commitment from their government as my grandparents received.

Last month, I announced my strategy for ending the war in Iraq. And I made it very clear that this strategy would not end with military plans and diplomatic agendas, but would endure through my commitment to upholding our sacred trust with every man and woman who has served this country. And the same holds true for our troops serving in Afghanistan.

The homecoming we face over the next year and a half will be the true test of this commitment: whether we will stand with our veterans as they face new challenges—physical, psychological and economic—here at home.

I intend to start that work by making good on my pledge to transform the Department of Veterans Affairs for the 21st century. That's an effort that, under Secretary Shinseki's leadership, all of you have already begun—conducting a thorough review of your operations all across this agency. And I intend to support this effort not just with words of encouragement, but with resources. That's why the budget I sent to Congress increases funding for this department by \$25 billion over the next five years.

With this budget, we don't just fully fund our VA health care program—we expand it to serve an additional 500,000 veterans by 2013; to provide better health care in more places; and to dramatically improve services related to mental health and injuries like Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Traumatic Brain Injury. We also invest in the technology to cut red tape and ease the transition from active duty. And we provide new help for homeless veterans, because those heroes have a home—it's the country they served, the United States of America. And until we reach a day when not a single veteran sleeps on our nation's streets, our work remains unfinished. (Applause.)

Finally, in this new century, it's time to heed the lesson of history, that our returning veterans can form the backbone of our middle class—by implementing a GI Bill for the 21st century. I know you're working hard under a tough deadline, but I am confident that we will be ready for August 1st. And that's how we'll show our servicemen and

women that when you come home to America, America will be here for you. That's how we will ensure that those who have "borne the battle"—and their families—will have every chance to live out their dreams.

I've had the privilege of meeting so many of these heroes. Some of the most inspiring are those that I've met in places like Walter Reed—young men and women who've lost a limb or even their ability to take care of themselves, but who never lose the pride they feel for their country. And that is, after all, what led them to wear the uniform in the first place—their unwavering belief in the idea of America; that no matter where you come from, what you look like, who your parents are, this is a place where anything is possible, where anyone can make it, where we take care of each other and look out for each other—especially for those who've sacrificed so much for this country.

These are the ideals that generations of Americans have fought for and bled for and died for. These are the ideals at the core of your mission—a mission that dates back before our founding—one taken up by our first President years before he took office, back when he served as Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army. Then-General Washington fought tirelessly to support the veterans of America's Revolutionary War. Such support, he argued, should "never be considered as a pension or gratuity . . ." Rather, ". . . it was the price of their blood," and of our independence; ". . . it is, therefore," he said, "more than a common debt, it is a debt of honor . . ." A debt of honor.

Washington understood that caring for our veterans was more than just a way of thanking them for their service. He recognized the obligation is deeper than that—that when our fellow citizens commit themselves to shed blood for us, that binds our fates with theirs in a way that nothing else can. And in the end, caring for those who have given their fullest measure of devotion to us—and for their families—is a matter of honor—as a nation and as a people.

That's a responsibility you hold, that's the work that you do—repaying that debt of honor, a debt we can never fully discharge. And I know it's not always easy. I know there's much work ahead to transform this agency for the 21st century. But I have the fullest confidence that with Secretary Shinseki's leadership, and with the hard work of the men and women of this department, we will fulfill our sacred trust and serve our returning heroes as well as they've served us.

Thank you. God bless you, and may God bless the United States of America. Thank you, everybody.

HONORING THE MEMORY OF MILDRED JUANITA NETTLES COOK

HON. JO BONNER

OF ALABAMA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 19, 2009

Mr. BONNER. Madam Speaker, Wilcox County recently lost a dear friend, and I rise today to honor Mildred Juanita Nettles Cook and pay tribute to her memory.

A lifelong resident of Arlington, Mrs. Cook graduated from Wilcox County High School and, in 1940, she graduated with honors from Alabama State College for Women in Montevallo.

Mrs. Cook was also a lifelong member of the Arlington United Methodist Church, where she served as treasurer and Sunday school

superintendent for many years. She was also a member of the United Methodist Women and the Friday Afternoon Club. She was a member of Alabama Charter Chapter #36 United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Lt. Joseph M. Wilcox Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution. She served as president of both the Alabama Division and the General Division of the UDC and was known and respected throughout the nation for her leadership in both the Daughters of the Confederacy and the Daughters of the American Revolution.

Mrs. Cook was a charter director of the Town-Country National Bank in Camden. She also served as treasurer of the Arlington Methodist Community and Cemetery Foundation.

Madam Speaker, I ask my colleagues to join me in remembering a dedicated community leader and friend to many throughout south Alabama. "Miss Mildred" will be dearly missed by her family—her sons, Daniel Bragg Cook Jr. and his wife Angela, Samuel McPherson Cook and his wife Claudia, and Abe Crum Cook III and his wife Helen; her grandchildren, Jennifer Mildred Cook Nice, Richard Daniel Cook, Samuel McPherson Cook Jr., John Roan Cook, Claudina Pereira, Marian Denisse Cook, Abe Crum Cook IV, Braxton Dauphin Cook, and Kathryn Elizabeth Cook; her great-grandchildren, Leina Tsou Cook, Anara Tsou Cook, and Samuel Rikard Cook; and many nieces, nephews, and cousins—as well as the countless friends she leaves behind.

Our thoughts and prayers are with them all during this difficult time.

A TRIBUTE TO JOYLENE WAGNER

HON. ADAM B. SCHIFF

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 19, 2009

Mr. SCHIFF. Madam Speaker, I rise today to honor Mrs. Joylene Wagner of Glendale, California. Every March we celebrate Women's History Month in recognition of the contributions and the sacrifices made by our nation's women. Accordingly it is my privilege to highlight Mrs. Wagner as a woman whose extraordinary efforts are vital to my district.

Born and raised in Monrovia, California, Joylene graduated in 1976 from University of California, Santa Cruz with a degree in Western Civilization and continued on to the University of San Diego's Legal Assistant program. During her five years working as a litigation paralegal in San Diego and later in Los Angeles, she served on the founding board of the San Diego Association of Legal Assistants and in the La Jolla University/Community Chorus and Orchestra Association.

Joylene and her husband Robert moved to Glendale in 1981, where they both became active in the Adams Hill Homeowners Association. They are very proud of their 3 children, who all attended Glendale schools. Their daughter Meg now teaches children with autism in Fairfax County, Virginia, son Will serves on the staff of Senator ARLEN SPECTER, and son Nick will graduate from Glendale High School this year.

Since 1985, in addition to singing in the First United Methodist Church choir, Joylene has split her time between volunteering in the schools and community and working part-time

teaching children's choral music either at church, in Glendale elementary schools, or at the Los Angeles Children's Chorus. Her community involvement has included serving on the boards of Glendale Healthy Kids, Verdugo Workforce Investment, Los Angeles County School Trustees Association, and the League of Women Voters, as well as on the Glendale Arts and Culture Commission.

Before her election to the Glendale Unified School District Board of Education in 2005, Joylene worked locally as a substitute teacher and completed graduate work in education. She has since served as the Board's President, working to find ways to enrich and increase student learning through arts instruction and career-technical education opportunities. In the face of drastic state funding cuts and in an effort to ensure budgetary support for educational priorities, Joylene has facilitated creative, courageous, and cooperative community conversations about what is most essential for student success.

Joylene's steadfast dedication and selfless service are an invaluable addition to the legacy of Women's History Month. With gratitude and admiration, I ask all Members of Congress to join me in honoring an extraordinary woman of California's 29th Congressional District, Mrs. Joylene Wagner.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. NEIL ABERCROMBIE

OF HAWAII

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 19, 2009

Mr. ABERCROMBIE. Madam Speaker, I regret that I missed rollcall vote No. 107 through 115. Had I been present, I would have voted "aye" on rollcall votes 107 and 109 through 115. I would have voted "no" on rollcall vote 108.

INTRODUCTION OF THE UNIVERSAL RIGHT TO VOTE BY MAIL ACT

HON. SUSAN A. DAVIS

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 19, 2009

Mrs. DAVIS of California. Madam Speaker, I rise today to introduce the Universal Right to Vote by Mail Act of 2009—a bill to allow any eligible voter to vote by mail in a federal election if he or she chooses to do so.

In my home state of California, voters already have this right. California is one of the twenty-eight states that already provide this convenient alternative to voters.

While I love the ritual of going to the polls to vote, I know that getting to the polls on Election Day is often difficult. For some, it's impossible.

That is why I have introduced a bill that builds upon the growing trend of states to bring the polls to the voters. I believe we should try to meet our constituents halfway by increasing access to the electoral process.

What I am proposing is not new or even tested. States ranging from my home state of California, to Wisconsin, to North Carolina, to Maine have already adopted this voter-friendly policy.

With mail voting, citizens can vote from the convenience of their own homes. They will have more time to mull over their choices and make informed decisions, and they will be able to do so on their own terms.

Not surprisingly, studies have shown that some of the biggest supporters of voting by mail are parents, who must schedule time to go to the polls around so many other obligations.

Studies have also indicated that adding the option to vote by mail does not create a partisan advantage for one political party over the other.

Republicans and Democrats both benefit from similar increases in voter turnout when voters are given the choice to mail in their ballots.

In fact, overwhelming support for voting by mail is consistent across nearly every demographic—including age, income level, race, education, employment status and ideology. It is a win-win for all Americans.

After adopting a universal right to vote by mail system in 1978, California saw a thirty percent increase in the use of mail-in ballots.

Other states that have implemented this policy have seen the same degree of support from voters, which is why it is hardly surprising that States offering the option of mail-in ballots often experience greater voter participation.

There is also an extremely low incidence of fraud with voting by mail when compared to other methods of voting.

As the former President of the League of Women Voters of San Diego, I care deeply about the integrity of our electoral system.

Twenty-eight states have already proven this option works, and it is safe. It is time to give voters in the remaining states this convenient, secure and affordable alternative.

While I am proud to be from a state where citizens already have this right, I believe democracy works best when all citizens have an equal opportunity to have their voices heard.

Right now, an uneven playing field exists between states that already offer the option of mail-in ballots and states that do not.

When the same election is more accessible to voters in California than it is to voters in other states, the system is unfair.

States that fail to offer this choice stand to compromise their leverage in federal elections by curbing the greatest level of voter participation.

We should follow the lead of over half of our nation's states and ensure a uniformity of rights for all voters.

I ask my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to join me in supporting this effort to strengthen the democratic process and give American voters the choices they deserve.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. ADAM H. PUTNAM

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 19, 2009

Mr. PUTNAM. Madam Speaker, on Monday, March 16, 2009, and Tuesday, March 17, 2009, I was not present for 6 recorded votes. Had I been present, I would have voted the following way: Roll No. 125, yea; Roll No. 126, yea; Roll No. 127, yea; Roll No. 128, yea; Roll No. 129, yea; Roll No. 130, yea.

HONORING DAVID S. GALLATIN, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER OF EXCELA HEALTH

HON. JOHN P. MURTHA

OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 19, 2009

Mr. MURTHA. Madam Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to David S. Gallatin, Chief Executive Officer of Excelsa Health. I would like at this time to draw attention to some of his accomplishments and contributions to our health system and the community of Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania.

David S. Gallatin has long been associated with Excelsa Health and its predecessors, Westmoreland Health System and Westmoreland Hospital. He served, in a voluntary capacity, on the Board of Trustees from 1982 through 2004. During his time on the Board, he was a member of the Executive Committee (1985 to 2004); served as a member of the Finance Committee (1990 to 2004); filled the role of Vice Chairman (1994 to 1999), was named Chairman from 1999 to 2004.

In January 2003, the Westmoreland Health System Board of Trustees voted unanimously to name David S. Gallatin as its Chief Executive Officer, after having served as Interim Chief Executive Officer, while continuing his role as Board of Trustees Chairman until his term expired June 30, 2004.

David S. Gallatin, cited for his leadership skills and vision, helped devise and implement a turnaround plan for the health system, one that resulted in meaningful growth, capital strength, physician recruitment, and retention of a professional work force. He championed the acquisition of the latest clinical technologies, thereby advancing the quality of care for the residents of Westmoreland County and beyond. Further, he, among others, spearheaded the successful merger of Westmoreland Health System with Latrobe Area Hospital, and later, Mercy Jeannette Hospital, creating and expanding the county's largest and only health care provider, Excelsa Health. His vision of a distributed delivery model assures local access to advanced health care, which is evident in Excelsa Health's Centers for Excellence, state of the art Emergency Departments and nationally recognized Stroke Prevention programs.

Therefore, I join in commending David S. Gallatin for his history of hard work and service to our health system and the communities it serves.

RECOGNIZING NAACP MID-MANHATTAN BRANCH'S SALUTE TO NAACP WOMEN OF EXCELLENCE

HON. CHARLES B. RANGEL

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 19, 2009

Mr. RANGEL. Madam Speaker, today I rise to ask my colleagues to join me in recognizing NAACP Mid-Manhattan Branch of the Metropolitan Council of NAACP Branches as they pay tribute to the everlasting accomplishments and contributions of the NAACP Women of Excellence in celebration of Women's History Month and the Centennial Anniversary of the