

Light” and to celebrate the growing tide of commitment to service and volunteering that is a hallmark of this great nation. Tomorrow, President George H. W. Bush and President Barack Obama are together to mark this important milestone in the history of the service movement.

Twenty years ago, President Bush spoke of a thousand points of light, individuals and organizations “spread like stars throughout the nation, doing good.” From this idea rose the Points of Light Foundation which has both recognized and organized exemplary acts of giving for the past two decades.

In 2007, it merged with Hands On Network, which started in my district, in the city of Atlanta, and the combined organization is now the Points of Light Institute, the largest volunteer network in the country. Their mission is to mobilize, not just a thousand, but millions to answer the call to solve our most pressing problems—volunteers working together to help those with HIV in San Francisco, building wheelchair ramps in Greenville, and creating award-winning tutoring programs in Atlanta.

In today’s hard times, people are hurting. Americans are having to choose between paying their mortgages and putting food on the table. In these tough times it is more important than ever that we, as American citizens, give back to those in need. National Service becomes ever more important when people are hurting. I am proud of my fellow citizens who have heeded the calls to service, and have dedicated their time to helping others. In 2008, 61.8 million Americans volunteered, dedicating more than 8 billion hours of service worth an estimated \$162 billion.

The Points of Light Institute and its 250 Hands On Action Centers reach 80 percent of our nation’s communities have been at the forefront of this remarkable growth. I am so pleased to be able to recognize this organization’s first 20 years of harnessing the energy and enthusiasm of our people to be a part of a better world and their ongoing contributions as a part of President Obama’s United We Serve initiative.

INTRODUCING THE EVERY CHILD
DESERVES A FAMILY ACT

HON. FORTNEY PETE STARK

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, October 15, 2009

Mr. STARK. Madam Speaker, I rise today to introduce legislation that will open up thousands of good homes to foster children. On any given day, there are approximately 500,000 children in the child welfare system. Over 125,000 of these abused and neglected children are waiting to be adopted. There is an acute shortage, however, of adoptive and foster parents. The result is that many children, particularly minority and special needs children, languish in foster care without permanent homes. The severe developmental, emotional, and educational costs to children raised in foster care are well documented. The 25,000 youth who never find a permanent family and “age out” of the system each year are more likely than nearly any other group to become homeless, incarcerated, or suffer with mental illness or substance abuse.

Despite the shortage of adoptive and foster parents and the terrible consequences of long

stays in the child welfare system, some states have enacted discriminatory bans prohibiting children from being placed with qualified parents due to the parent’s marital status or sexual orientation. Currently, over 65,000 adopted children and 14,000 foster children are living with a gay or lesbian parent. Studies suggest that upward of 2 million gay and lesbian individuals are interested in adopting or fostering a child. Yet, statewide discriminatory bans and the practices of individual adoption agencies have resulted in fewer children being placed in safe and permanent homes.

Congress invests over \$8 billion in the child welfare system each year and we should not accept policies that use Federal funds to enact barriers to adoption and close the door to thousands of potential homes. Multiple studies have found that adopted and foster children raised by gay and lesbian parents fare just as well as their peers being raised by heterosexual parents.

When considering a potential placement for a child, the only criteria should be what is in the child’s best interest and whether the prospective parents can provide a safe and nurturing home. Bigotry should play no part in this decision. That is why I am introducing the “Every Child Deserves a Family Act.” This legislation would simply prohibit any entity that receives Federal child welfare funds from denying or delaying adoption or foster care placements based solely on the prospective parent’s marital status or sexual orientation. States and child welfare agencies that fail to end discriminatory practices would face financial penalties. This is the same approach that put an end to race discrimination in adoption and foster care placements.

Abused and neglected children in our child welfare system are some of the most vulnerable members of our society. We cannot allow divisive politics to further harm these children by shrinking the number of prospective adoptive and foster parents. I urge all of my colleagues to join me in saying yes to children and no to bigotry by cosponsoring the “Every Child Deserves a Family Act” and working with me to make it law.

RECOGNIZING NATIONAL LATINO
AIDS AWARENESS DAY OF 2009

HON. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, October 15, 2009

Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON of Texas. Madam Speaker, I rise today to recognize National Latino AIDS Awareness Day of 2009 which takes place today on Thursday, October 15, 2009. I want to commend the various individuals and groups that have worked hard to make this day a reality including the Hispanic Federation, the Latino Commission on AIDS, the National Alliance of State and Territorial AIDS Directors, and various other local, regional, and national partners.

National Latino AIDS Awareness Day is an incredibly important day that helps bring attention to the problems the Latino community faces in regards to the HIV/AIDS crisis. While the HIV/AIDS problem is an issue that affects every racial and ethnic group in the United States, it unfortunately has a disproportionate impact on the Latino community. In 2006,

there were roughly 80,000 Latinos living with AIDS, representing 18 percent of all those living with the disease, and although Latinos comprise 15.3 percent of the U.S. population, they account for 24.3 percent of new HIV infections. Additionally, stigma within the community, lack of access to health care, and misinformation about the virus make it difficult to combat. Truly, this must be changed, and embracing the goals and ideas of National Latino AIDS Awareness Day is a step towards making that happen.

I am reminded, too, that the Latino community is not alone in this struggle. Other ethnic groups and particularly the African-American community are disproportionately affected by HIV/AIDS. We must all stand together, learn from each other, and work toward ending this virus that hurts so many people in our country and across the world.

Madam Speaker, I urge my fellow colleagues to join me today in recognizing National Latino AIDS Awareness Day for the betterment of our country and the health of the numerous ethnic groups that add so much to our national character.

EAST BAY REGIONAL PARK DISTRICT
AND THE REGIONAL
PARKS FOUNDATION

HON. BARBARA LEE

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, October 15, 2009

Ms. LEE of California. Madam Speaker, I rise today to honor the joint anniversary celebration of East Bay Regional Park District’s 75th Anniversary and the supporting Regional Parks Foundation’s 40th Anniversary. This evening, Park District supporters and friends gather at Temescal Regional Park, overlooking open space created through the founding of the nation’s first and largest Regional Park District.

In 1934, during the catastrophic depths of the Great Depression, members of a grass-roots land preservation movement placed a measure on the ballot that would preserve excess watershed land in the Oakland and Berkeley hills. The project introduced a concept unheard of at the time: creating a natural balance between recreational land use and wilderness preservation. Bay Area residents responded with unprecedented foresight and civic commitment when the measure passed by an astonishing 71 percent.

Today, the East Bay Regional Park District, EBRPD, operating in Alameda and Contra Costa counties, manages more than 98,000 acres of land comprising 65 parks and over 1,000 miles of biking, hiking and horse riding trails. The parks host approximately 14 million visitors per year.

The District, supported by the Regional Parks Foundation’s fundraising efforts, provides recreational opportunities at freshwater swimming areas, fishing docks and piers, day camps, children’s play areas and numerous camping and picnic sites.

Myriad visitor services include education centers, a disabled-access swimming pool and group meeting facilities. The District’s Park Express Bus Program offers subsidized bus service to any District park for groups of senior, disabled or low-income residents and school classes with funded lunch programs.