Mr. Speaker, I ask that you and the rest of the House of Representatives join me in offering our sincere congratulations to the residents of the Mighty Naugatuck Valley of Connecticut for a job well done, and for setting an example for communities around our nation to follow.

Mr. Maloney of Connecticut. Mr. Speaker, I wish to bring to the attention of the U.S. House of Representatives the noteworthy accomplishments of the lower Naugatuck Valley towns located in my congressional district in Connecticut. After being chosen as a finalist in the National Civic League’s All-American City competition in 1999, the Naugatuck Valley’s 2000 delegation sharpened its presentation and on June 3, 2000, was awarded the League’s highest honor, that of an All-American City.

The Naugatuck Valley is comprised of seven municipalities: Ansonia, Beacon Falls, Derby, Naugatuck, Oxford, Seymour and Shelton. Delegates from each community traveled together to Louisville, Kentucky to compete for recognition as an All-American City. Started in 1894 by President Theodore Roosevelt and U.S. Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis, this award recognizes municipalities and regions where governments, citizens, businesses and volunteer organizations work together to address important local problems.

Moving beyond its background as an old industrial area, the Valley’s entry in the competition highlighted the region’s recent initiatives to address its needs. The delegation presented a 10-minute skit touting the region’s Alliance for Growth, a nonprofit development corporation that has attracted business to the area and has created jobs for its residents. The judges were also told about Project Co-N-N-E-C-T, an organization founded to assess the Valley’s economic health. The skit recounted the achievements of the Valley in an effort to rebuild the local Boys and Girls Club after its destruction by a fire eight years ago. In that effort, the seven communities came together to raise $4.5 million to obtain and renovate an old factory site for the youth organization.

What most set the Naugatuck Valley apart from the other entrants was its sense of community and family. Valley residents have a long history of supporting each other and working together to achieve a common goal—as evidenced by their win in Louisville. As only the second Connecticut locality ever to win the award, the delegation and residents of the Naugatuck Valley have demonstrated to the state of Connecticut and, indeed, the rest of the United States, that a dream of excellence can be achieved through hard work and dedication.

The residents and delegates from the seven towns of the lower Naugatuck Valley should rightly feel immense satisfaction at this most significant accomplishment. As one of only ten regions in the country to win the All-American City award this year, they have become part of an elite group of citizens whose concern for—and pride in—their community has enabled great deeds to be accomplished.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that you and the rest of my colleagues join me in offering our sincere congratulations to the residents of the Mighty Naugatuck Valley of Connecticut for a job well done, and for setting an example for communities around our nation to follow.
2000. The bill clarifies an ambiguity in Federal law which allows the Health Care Financing Administration [HCFA] to cut off Medicare funding to hospice patients after 6 months of treatment. The scope of this problem was detailed in a recent Wall Street Journal report which revealed that in early February 1997, several Hospice patients received letters from HCFA saying they were under investigation for Medicare fraud simply because they had lived longer than current Federal guidelines allow for reimbursement. In other words, HCFA officials were more concerned about being reimbursed than they were about caring for these dying patients.

It seems strange that HCFA would begin cracking down on its 6-month rule given the fact that, for years, Medicare officials have encouraged the hospice industry to grow, primarily because it is less costly to care for the terminally ill at home than it is to treat these patients in a nursing home or hospital.

Unfortunately, it seems the rise in hospice care during the 1990s brought about an increase in fraud and abuse of the Medicare system, which in turn sparked a misguided crackdown on terminally ill patients.

HCFA officials discovered roughly $83 million in such abuse and began pushing their intermediaries to crack down on the problem. In 1997, the Inspector General of the Department of Health and Human Services warned HCFA officials to do a better job enforcing their 6-month reimbursement guideline. While HCFA’s plans may have been well-intentioned, its intermediaries’ attempt to enforce the rule was disastrous. For example, the Wall Street Journal reported that UGS, a subsidiary of Blue Cross Blue Shield in Wisconsin and a Medicare intermediary, sent letters to five terminally ill patients which declared that they were not eligible for Medicare hospice and, adding insult to injury, requested these patients to pay $450,000 for the care they received.

Outrage from several hospices and Federal legislators has led to a small change in HCFA’s aggressive crackdown on its 6-month rule. Last week, HCFA’s administrator, Nancy Ann Min DeParle, wrote to thousands of hospices to explain that they were not eligible for Medicare hospice and, adding insult to injury, requested these patients to pay $450,000 for the care they received.

Regardless of Administrator DeParle’s change in position, we must clarify the law so that there is no question about HCFA’s responsibility to provide care for the terminally ill. It is the right and moral thing to do. More importantly, it will let hospice patients live out their final days in dignity. I urge my colleagues to cosponsor my bill and I submit the Wall Street Journal article of June 5th to be printed in the RECORD.