

party send up a raucous cheer when the chief executive enters the chamber. Even people who despise the president jostle to be captured on camera smiling, clapping and cheering for him.

Throughout the address, the president's supporters bounce up and down giving standing ovations in response to choreographed rhetorical flourishes. His opponents, also playing to the cameras, signify displeasure with stony silence. Or they disproportionately applaud such presidential lines as "We must do better," when "better" refers to a policy that the opponents support.

The president tosses rhetorical bouquets to people seated in the House gallery—his family, disabled veterans, civilian heroes.

The State of the Union address has become a long, shallow and predictable bit of political theater. A reversion to Jeffersonian discretion, considering the current circumstances, wouldn't be a bad thing.

COMMENTS ON 1ST SWEARING IN—
THE 106TH CONGRESS

HON. JOHN E. SWEENEY

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, January 6, 1999

Mr. SWEENEY. Mr. Speaker, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, my newly confirmed colleagues of the 106th Congress. I am truly honored to be here today joining this distinguished group of Americans from across our great nation. Standing shoulder-to-shoulder in the U.S. Capitol today with these Members of the 106th Congress is an honor exceeded only by that of representing the wonderful people of the 22nd District of New York.

Mr. Speaker, I am truly humbled by the awesome responsibility and I am invigorated by the challenge before me—to carry on the tradition of my esteemed predecessor, Jerry Solomon, and to advance policies beneficial to the 600,000 people I now represent.

Today is a day dominated by idealistic visions and profound rhetoric. While I bring with me today the ideals of freedom and opportunity, I am riveted in the reality that these notions must be translated into concrete results in people's everyday life. Bringing tax relief to hard working families, promoting economic development to create new job opportunities, taking significant steps to ensure a safe and drug-free environment in our schools—All these examples make a difference in the homes of the people of the Hudson Valley and Adirondack Mountains of New York and all will be my priorities as I take the oath of office today.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my family, those that are here today and those that could not make the trip, for all their love and support as we begin this new endeavor. I would like to thank Congressman Solomon a truly great American, for his two decades of dedicated and tireless service to the citizens of the 22nd District of New York. And thank you to those same citizens that have entrusted me to advance their views here in the U.S. Capitol.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PRESCRIBED BURNS IN AREA NATIONAL FORESTS

HON. JAMES E. ROGAN

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, January 6, 1999

Mr. ROGAN. Mr. Speaker, recent figures from the Department of the Interior indicate that the cost of fighting severe wildfires has risen from \$100 million per year just two decades ago, to well over \$1 billion today. In addition, wildfires every year destroy hundreds of acres of forest lands, threatening lives, home and air quality.

In many remote regions of the country, forestry officials use small, controlled fires known as "prescribed burns" to remove excess underbrush that fuels severe wildfires. In so doing, they eliminate a major source of fuel of wildfires, while also promoting healthier forest growth.

In metropolitan areas like Los Angeles, however, officials are prevented from expanding this procedure due to air quality regulations that limit emissions from all sources—wildfires, burns, smog, and the like. Last year alone, these officials wanted to burn more than 20,000 acres to protect local residents from out-of-control wildfires. Bureaucratic regulations, however, permitted the burning of only 2,000 acres—well below safety experts' recommendations.

Working with Representatives DREIER, McKEON and local forestry and air quality officials, I have introduced the Forest Protection Act. This measure will ease current restrictions for ten years to allow officials to conduct an expanded prescribed burn program. Over the time-year period, local officials will monitor forest health and air quality to ensure that both improve over time.

Local forestry officials are not the only experts to recognize the importance of this procedure. Both Interior Secretary Babbitt and Environmental Protection Agency chief Carol Browner have publicly supported prescribed burns as a means to promote forest health and prevent severe wildfires.

The Forest Health and Wildfire Prevention Act will give forestry officials the ability to use this time-tested technique to protect area residents and air quality while supporting the delicate ecological balance in our forests.

NOTCH BABY ACT OF 1999

HON. JO ANN EMERSON

OF MISSOURI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, January 6, 1999

Mrs. EMERSON. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce the Notch Baby Act of 1999 which would create a new alternative transition computation formula for Social Security benefits for those seniors born between 1917 and 1921. These seniors, who are generally referred to as "Notch Babies," have been receiving lower monthly Social Security benefits than seniors born in the years just prior to or after this five year period.

There are those who dispute the existence of a Notch problem. However, take into consideration the following example presented in

a 1994 report by the Commission on Social Security Notch Issue. There are two workers who retired at the same age with the same average career earnings. One was born on December 31, 1916 and the other was born on January 2, 1917. Both retired in 1982 at the age of 65. The retiree born in 1917 receives \$110 a month less in Social Security benefits than did the retiree born just two days before in 1996. Also take into consideration that there are currently more than 6 million seniors in our Nation who are faced with this painfully obvious inequity in the Social Security benefit computation formula.

By phasing in an improved benefit formula over five years, the Notch Baby Act of 1999 will restore fairness and equality in the Social Security benefit computation formula for the Notch Babies. For once and for all this legislation would put to rest the Notch issue, and it would put an end to the constant barrage of mailings and fundraising attempts which target our Nation's seniors in the name of Notch reform. Our seniors deserve fairness and equality in the Social Security system. They deserve an end to the repeated congressional stalling on this issue. I urge my colleagues in the House to discuss this issue with the seniors in their districts, and to join me in ensuring that the Notch issue is addressed in the 106th Congress.

INTRODUCING H.R. 218, THE
COMMUNITY PROTECTION ACT

HON. RANDY "DUKE" CUNNINGHAM

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, January 6, 1999

Mr. CUNNINGHAM. Mr. Speaker, today I am reintroducing my legislation to permit qualified current and former law enforcement officers to carry a concealed firearm in any jurisdiction. This measure is called the Community Protection Act, and I have requested that it be assigned the same bill number as in previous Congresses—H.R. 218.

The Community Protection Act provides three benefits to our police and to our country.

First, it effectively provides thousands more trained cops on the beat—at zero taxpayer cost.

Second, it enables current and former law enforcement officers to protect themselves and their families from criminals. When a criminal completes his or her sentence, that criminal can find where their arresting officer lives, where their corrections officer travels, and other information about our brave law enforcement personnel and their families.

And, third, it helps keep our communities safer from criminals.

This measure is very similar to the H.R. 218 reported by the Judiciary Committee in the 105th Congress, with one exception: this version for the 106th Congress does not address the matter of interstate reciprocity for holders of civilian concealed carry licenses. This measure affects police only.

In the interest of providing Members and the public additional background information on the Community Protection Act, I have attached below some excerpts from the Committee report accompanying H.R. 218 from the 105th Congress (H. Rept. 105-819), and my testimony before the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime, the details of which remain applicable to the legislation I introduce today:

THE COMMUNITY PROTECTION ACT SELECTED

EXCERPTS FROM H. REPT. 105-819

PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

H.R. 218, the "Community Protection Act of 1998," establishes federal regulations and procedures which may allow active-duty and retired law enforcement officers *** to travel interstate with a firearm ***.

For law enforcement officers, H.R. 218 creates strict guidelines which must be met before any law enforcement officer, active-duty or retired, may carry a firearm into another state ***.

H.R. 218 establishes a mechanism by which law enforcement officers *** may travel interstate with a firearm. Qualified active-duty law enforcement officers will be permitted to travel interstate with a firearm, subject to certain limitations and provided that the officer is carrying his or her official badge and photographic identification.

Generally, an active-duty officer is a qualified officer under H.R. 218 if the officer is authorized to engage in or supervise any violation of law, is authorized to carry a firearm at all times, is not subject to any disciplinary action by the agency, and meets any agency standards with respect to qualification with a firearm. A qualified active-duty officer may not carry a concealed firearm on any privately owned lands, if the owner prohibits or restricts such possession. A qualified officer may also not carry a firearm on any state or local government property, installation, building, base, or park. However, in their official capacity, law enforcement officers are permitted to carry weapons whenever federal, state, or local law allows. This legislation is not intended to interfere with any law enforcement officer's right to carry a concealed firearm, on private or government property, while on duty or in the course of official business.

A qualified retired officer may carry a concealed firearm, subject to the same restrictions as active-duty officers, with a few additional requirements. A retired officer must have retired in good standing, have a non-forfeitable right to collect benefits under a retirement plan, and have been employed before retirement for an aggregate of five years or more, unless forced to retire due to a service-related injury. In addition, a qualified retired officer must complete a state-approved firearms training or qualification course at his or her own expense ***.

As you know, I am the sponsor of one of these measures, the Community Protection Act (HR 218). The Community Protection Act permits qualified current and retired sworn law enforcement officers in good standing to carry a concealed weapon into any jurisdiction. In effect, it means three things: More cops on the street, more protection for the public, at zero taxpayer cost.

Too often, State laws prevent highly qualified officers from assisting in crime prevention and protecting themselves while not on duty. An officer who has spent his life fighting crime can be barred from helping a colleague or a citizen in distress because he cannot use his service revolver—a handgun that he is required to train with on a regular basis. That same officer, active or retired, isn't allowed to defend himself from the criminals that he put in jail.

I would like to give you an example of how the Community Protection Act would work, based upon an incident in my own home town of San Diego. Following is a story from the April 29, 1997, San Diego Union-Tribune:

OFFICER FINDS WORK ON HER DAY OFF

(By Joe Hughes)

HILLCREST.—For San Diego police Officer Sandra Oplinger, it was anything but an off day.

Oplinger ended up capturing a suspected bank robber at gunpoint on her day off yesterday.

She happened to be in the area of Home Savings Of America on Fifth Avenue near Washington Street about 12:30 p.m. when she saw a man running from the bank, a trail of red smoke coming from an exploded red dye packet that had been inserted into a wad of the loot.

With her gun drawn, she tracked down and caught the man. Citizens helped by gathering up loose bank cash.

The incident began when a man entered the bank and asked a teller if he could open an account. The teller gave him a blank form and he left. He returned 10 minutes later, approached the same teller and declared it was a robbery, showing a weapon and a demand note he had written on the same form the teller had given him.

He then grabbed some money and ran out the door. The dye pack exploded outside, leaving a trail of smoke that attracted Oplinger's attention and led to the suspect's arrest.

The names of the man and a possible accomplice in a nearby car were not immediately released. A gun was recovered.

Mr. Chairman, it is a good thing that Officer Oplinger was in San Diego. If she was in many other states or in Washington, D.C., she could have been charged with a crime. That's wrong. We can fix it—with the Community Protection Act.

My bill seeks to change that by empowering qualified law enforcement officers to be equipped to handle any situation that may arise, wherever they are. . . .

In the tradition of less government, this bill offers protection to police officers and to all of our communities without creating new programs or bureaucracies, and without spending more taxpayer dollars. It helps protect officers and their families from criminals, and allows officers to respond immediately to crime situations.

I encourage my colleagues to support this common-sense legislation, which is supported by several of America's leading law enforcement organizations and by cops on the beat.

INTRODUCTION OF VETERANS' ACCESS TO EMERGENCY CARE ACT OF 1999

HON. LANE EVANS

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, January 6, 1999

Mr. EVANS. Mr. Speaker, today I am introducing legislation to assure that all veterans enrolled in VA health care will receive coverage for emergency care services delivered both in and outside of VA facilities.

Currently, most veterans lack access to reimbursement for such care unless the emergency occurs on VA grounds.

Many VA medical centers don't routinely offer emergency services and those that do lack an emergency room that is open twenty-four hours a day. Compounding the problem is the fact that most VA medical centers are further from their patients' places of residence than other community providers.

If a veteran receives emergency room care from a non-VA provider, he or she is denied reimbursement even if a trip to the nearest VA hospital would be life threatening.

Last year the President asked all federal agencies to identify where they were deficient

in complying with the Patient Bill of Rights. The VA determined it needed legislation to reimburse veterans for emergency care it didn't provide. While being encouraged to view VA as their managed care provider, veterans could risk financial ruin if VA failed to comply with the same emergency care reimbursement standards applied to private-sector managed health care providers.

Even before veterans began enrolling last year for VA care, VA's responsibility for reimbursing veterans for the cost of emergency health care services was confusing. VA would provide emergency care to only those veterans who were either already at VA when the emergency occurred or to those veterans who were able to physically present themselves at a VA facility before receiving required emergency care from a non-VA provider.

VA's physical "tag up" requirement creates confusion for the majority of veterans who are not on grounds during an emergency. Too often in crisis situations, veterans lack the time to resolve who will pay for their care before seeking treatment.

This situation is likely to become even more confusing as VA begins to market itself as a managed care provider featuring enrollment, a basic benefits package and a new primary care focus—characteristics commonly associated with Health Maintenance Organizations (HMOs). Most HMOs reimburse enrollees for pre-authorized emergency care. The pending legislation would give VA the authority to reimburse emergency care delivered by any provider if veterans had no other coverage for such care.

Many veterans are literally "banking on" VA either furnishing or reimbursing their care for any condition in an emergency. Too many veterans and their families have been financially devastated because they assume VA will be there for them in a health crisis. I believe veterans should be able to count on VA in an emergency.

I am encouraged by the recent recommendation by a coalition of veterans service organizations, the Independent Budget group, to add funds to the FY 2000 VA Medical Care budget in order to provide emergency care to veterans. I encourage my colleagues to cosponsor and support this important legislation.

HONORING RABBI IRWIN GOLDENBERG FOR HIS SERVICE TO THE COMMUNITY

HON. WILLIAM F. GOODLING

OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, January 6, 1999

Mr. GOODLING. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor Rabbi Irwin Goldenberg for his generous service to the community. For twenty-five years, Rabbi Goldenberg has served both his congregation at Temple Beth Israel and the community of York, Pennsylvania as a revered leader, teacher, and father.

In times of sorrow and in times of celebration, Rabbi Goldenberg has demonstrated a strong commitment to his congregation. He has always been there to provide loving support and strong leadership to people of his Temple. Rabbi Goldenberg has long served as the official voice for the Jewish community in