

TRIBUTE TO IRENE GERSTLE

HON. HEATHER WILSON

OF NEW MEXICO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 22, 1999

Mrs. WILSON. Mr. Speaker, I wish to bring to your attention the outstanding work of Ms. Irene Gerstle, a teacher at Albuquerque High School in my home of Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Recently, Ms. Gerstle received a 1999 Toyota Investment in Mathematics Excellence grant award. Many children in our community and throughout America are falling behind in mathematics skills. Ms. Gerstle sees this problem and looks for solutions. She helps her students to excel in math by teaching them in creative ways. I applaud her commitment to improve mathematics education through the development and implementation of innovative classroom projects. Her hard work and creativity supports students at Albuquerque High gain valuable skills they will need and use in the twenty-first century.

Irene Gerstle is among the many dedicated teachers we have throughout the First Congressional District of New Mexico and the United States. Please join me in thanking Ms. Gerstle for her contributions to our students and our future.

INTRODUCTION OF H.R. 2586, THE VETERANS BURIAL PLOT ALLOWANCE IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 1999

HON. CORRINE BROWN

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 22, 1999

Ms. BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, today I am introducing H.R. 2586, the Veterans Burial Plot Allowance Improvement Act of 1999. My bill would increase the amount of the veterans' plot allowance burial benefit from \$150 to \$300—the first increase of the plot allowance since that benefit was initially authorized over 25 years ago. The proposed increase to \$300 more accurately reflects the current cost of interment and better provides for the original intention of the benefit.

Additionally, my bill would correct an inequity now imposed on peacetime veterans while providing a further incentive to states and their political subdivisions to expand needed burial space for veterans. Under my bill, all veterans who are eligible for burial in a national cemetery would be eligible for a plot allowance payable to a state or a political subdivision of a state when the veteran is buried (without charge for the cost of a plot or interment) in a cemetery or a section of a cemetery owned by the state or political subdivision and that area is used solely for the interment of persons eligible for burial in a national cemetery.

I am proud of America's long-held, solemn commitment to provide a final resting-place of honor for those who have defended her in uniform. I am disappointed, however, that today nearly one-third of United States veterans do not have the option of being buried in a national or state veterans cemetery located within 75 miles of their home—a distance the De-

partment of Veterans Affairs says makes a veterans cemetery "reasonably available". And, I am chagrinned that ninety percent of the veterans who are eligible to be buried in a national or state veterans cemetery decline to be buried there. A great many simply feel that those cemeteries are too far away to be a reasonable option for their families.

Unless Congress takes corrective action soon, the problem of scarce burial space for veterans will become more severe over the next decade. VA projects a 42 percent increase in veteran burials from 1995 to 2010, with the annual veteran death rate reaching 620,000 by the year 2008. I was extremely disappointed that—although VA needs five-to-seven years to plan and build a national cemetery—its proposed fiscal year 2000 budget failed to request any funding for even the planning of a single new national cemetery.

On June 29th, the House passed H.R. 2280 that would require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish four new national cemeteries and contract for an independent assessment of the number of additional national cemeteries that will be required for the interment of qualified individuals who die after 2005.

Mr. Speaker, as helpful as H.R. 2280 promises to be in fulfilling America's commitment to her veterans, national cemeteries were never intended to be the complete solution. The number of veterans under-served by reasonably available veterans cemeteries is—and will continue to be—far too great and widely distributed to be satisfied entirely by national cemeteries administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs. The answer, Mr. Speaker, is to expand the national cemetery supplemental system comprised of veterans cemeteries operated by states and their political subdivisions.

In 1978, Congress established the State Cemetery Grants Program for VA to assist states in providing gravesites for veterans in areas where the national cemetery system could not satisfy their burial needs. Grants are used by states to establish, expand, or improve veterans cemeteries they own and operate. Legislation enacted last November authorized VA to provide up to 100 percent of the development cost for an approved project. For new cemeteries, VA now also can provide the operating equipment. States must furnish the land and agree to administer, operate, and maintain the cemetery.

To date, half of the states—to include my home state of Florida, as well as the large veterans population states of Texas and New York—still do not have a state veterans cemetery.

On May 20th, the Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, of which I am the Ranking Democrat, conducted a hearing on veterans cemeteries. Veterans organization representatives and State Directors of Veterans Affairs testified that many states do not seek VA grants to establish a veterans cemetery because of their concern for the high perpetual costs of operating them. Witnesses noted that the amount of the plot allowance received by state cemeteries—\$150—has remained unchanged since the benefit was authorized in 1973 and does not come close to covering the state's cost of an interment. Furthermore, states are not able to receive plot allowance payments for veterans unless those veterans had wartime service.

Witnesses estimated that 20 percent of the veterans buried in state veterans cemeteries were peacetime veterans who would have been eligible to be buried in a national cemetery.

To encourage states to apply for a VA state cemetery grant, my legislation would increase the plot allowance to \$300. This amount represents a conservative estimate of the current actual cost to states for the interment of veterans—the original intent of the plot allowance benefit.

My bill also would expand the eligibility criteria for states and their political subdivisions to receive plot allowance payments. A provision that would allow plot allowance payments for all veterans who are eligible for burial in a national cemetery would correct a long-standing inequity for peacetime veterans as well as support the state cemetery grants program. Veterans with peacetime service are not distinguished from veterans with wartime service regarding their burial benefits in a national cemetery. Veterans who elect to be buried in a state cemetery, likewise, should not be subject to differing categories of eligibility for the plot allowance benefit.

A third burial option for veterans—the one that offers a location closest to their residence—is a veterans cemetery owned by an agency or political subdivision of a state. Local cemeteries owned by a county or city are authorized to receive the veteran's plot allowance if the veterans is buried without charge for the cost of a plot or interment in a section that is used solely for the interment of persons eligible for burial in a national cemetery. Like state veterans cemeteries, these local, government-owned cemeteries are limited to plot allowances for veterans with wartime service.

Witnesses at my Subcommittee's recent hearing testified that they believed that if the amount of the plot allowance benefit were increased to a sum more closely approximating the actual cost of interment, and if the eligibility criteria for receipt of the plot allowance by cemeteries owned by a political subdivision of a state were expanded to include peacetime veterans who were eligible for burial in a national cemetery, that those community cemeteries would be encouraged to establish or expand special sections for veterans.

Mr. Speaker, it is important that Congress reaffirm this Nation's commitment to provide an appropriate resting-place of honor for its veterans. My legislation would provide states and their political subdivisions with the incentive to expand the necessary supplement to our national cemetery system so that America might properly memorialize the sacrifices her veterans have made to keep this Nation free. I urge my colleagues to support their veterans through the support of my solution to this bipartisan issue.

CONDEMNING INTERNATIONAL PARENTAL CHILD ABDUCTION

HON. GEORGE W. GEKAS

OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 22, 1999

Mr. GEKAS. Mr. Speaker, today I rise to condemn the continuing crisis of international parental child abduction. Six years ago, in the 103rd Congress, in response to an instance of

international child abduction in my home State of Pennsylvania, I formulated legislation which created punitive measures to respond to these crimes. I had hoped that when we passed that measure, now Public Law 103-173, the International Parental Kidnapping Crime Act of 1993, that tragic instances of child abduction would be halted. Unfortunately, I was wrong.

Imagine that your former spouse—who does not have custodial rights of your children—comes to your home and picks up your kids for a weekly visit. Then imagine that you discover your spouse has taken your children to a foreign country, and you have little recourse in getting your children back. Sadly, this happens more than 1,000 times each year.

Prior to passage of this legislation, there was no Federal law that addressed this heinous crime. Now, this law provides both deterrence and prevention. For anyone convicted of unlawfully kidnapping their child and taking him or her overseas, a one- to three-year jail term and stiff fines can be expected. In addition, this legislation established educational programs for judges and others involved in custody proceedings that continue to serve as preventive measures. By passing that law, Congress for the first time put the weight of Federal law behind our desire that children never be taken away from a loving parent.

Yesterday the House of Representatives debated and passed the Gibbons amendment to H.R. 2415, the American Embassy Security Act. Representative GIBBONS, like myself six years ago, has diligently worked with the State Department in order to find a resolution to this same problem that plagues families across the country. His amendment helps prevent international child abduction by ensuring that in order for a child to be issued a passport, certain requirements must be met by her/his legal guardians.

I applaud the efforts of Representative GIBBONS and I wholly support his amendment. As Members of Congress, we should do all we can to end the nightmare of international parental child abductions.

TRIBUTE TO MR. JOSEPH E. BEASLEY ON HIS RETIREMENT FROM THE INTERNATIONAL UNION OF OPERATING ENGINEERS LOCAL #66

HON. RON KLINK

OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 22, 1999

Mr. KLINK. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in order to honor my longtime friend, Mr. Joseph E. Beasley. On June 30th, Mr. Beasley retired from the International Union of Operating Engineers, bringing to a close a career that spanned five decades.

After serving his country in the military, Mr. Beasley joined the work force in Pittsburgh. Soon after, he joined the Union and began what would become a 49 year association with the Operating Engineers. Mr. Beasley served in a wide variety of capacities during this tenure, distinguishing himself through dedication and hard work.

Mr. Beasley's career began with his election to the position of Financial Secretary for the Local Union in 1972. He held this position until his 1981 election to Business Manager, a seat

he held until his retirement. In addition, Mr. Beasley served as Vice-President of the Pittsburgh Building Trades Counsel and Chairman of the Local 66 Pension and Annuity and Welfare Funds.

In addition to his work on the local level, Mr. Beasley also served as an International Trustee and the eleventh General Vice President of the International Union of Operating Engineers. Most recently, he served as the Vice-President of the Pennsylvania AFL-CIO and as Secretary Treasurer of the Northeastern States Conference of Operating engineers.

Mr. Beasley's accomplishments throughout his career have gained him the respect and admiration of his colleagues. He has proven himself a great asset to not only the state of Pennsylvania but also hard working men and women across this country.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank Mr. Beasley for all his efforts throughout his nearly fifty year career. I wish him the best in his much deserved retirement.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. HERBERT H. BATEMAN

OF VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 22, 1999

Mr. BATEMAN Mr. Speaker, I was regrettably absent and missed rollcall vote No. 327 on July 21, 1999. The vote was on the Bilbrey amendment to H.R. 2415, the American Embassy Security Act. I include in the RECORD that I would have voted "aye" had I been present.

MILITARY RECRUITMENT THROUGH EFFECTIVE PRESENTATIONS TO AMERICA'S YOUNG PEOPLE

HON. JIM SAXTON

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 22, 1999

Mr. SAXTON. Mr. Speaker, we know that today our armed forces are facing serious shortfalls in recruitment. Already, these shortfalls are having a dangerous impact on our Nation's military readiness. We will have all the best tools, and no one to fight the war. In part, the problem may be caused by a blessing: America's flourishing economy, which leads our young people to enter a booming job market rather than the rigors of military service. Therefore, it is essential for our national security that our government do all it can to support our armed forces in effectively communicating to young people of recruitment age the advantages and benefits of service.

Honor, patriotism, and the desire for adventure still engage and motivate America's young men and women. America's armed forces offer the opportunity to be part of something meaningful, to learn self-discipline and sacrifice. For many idealistic young people, that offers them an experience unmatchable elsewhere. So we have to get the message out about what service in the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines means to their country, and what opportunities such service entails. And we must recognize that in today's world,

we are competing with some of the most effective marketing and recruitment techniques ever devised by U.S. companies, which quite reasonably want to catch as many of the best and the brightest as they can for themselves.

Therefore, it is essential that we convey our message by the most effective means possible, employing language and images engaging to young Americans of recruitment age. Programming messages by the U.S. Navy have scored significant recruiting success in recent months, partially reversing the downward trend of Navy recruitment. Programming directed toward high school students for post-graduation enlistment can be particularly well targeted and unusually effective means of increasing awareness of the military service option and positive attitudes towards it. As a result of this exposure, students in the Channel One schools are more likely to consider enlisting.

Mr. Speaker, the use of innovative methods to educate and encourage young people about the benefits of service to their country is essential in today's marketplace. Our national security demands such an effort. At the same time, service in the United States military truly provides young Americans with an opportunity to gain by giving to their country. I intend to work hard to ensure that our government expands its support for our armed forces' efforts in this direction.

CONGRATULATING THE SULPHUR ALL STAR BASEBALL TEAM

HON. CHRISTOPHER JOHN

OF LOUISIANA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 22, 1999

Mr. JOHN. Mr. Speaker, I would like for my colleagues to join me today in congratulating the 8-year-old Sulphur All Star Baseball Team which has earned a trip to play in the Little League World Series this July 22-25.

The Sulphur All Stars have won their last three tournaments to reach this point. In the process, the All Stars placed 2nd in the State of Louisiana and was also awarded a trophy for the "Best Defensive Team." Mr. Speaker, we are extremely proud of these young men and I wanted to briefly recognize the players and coaches at this time. The All Star players are Brady Landry, Tyler Kuykendall, Jon Thomas Chargois, Jeremy Abshire, Sha Hale, Charlie LaBoeuf, Phillip Ivey, Keith Lemelle, Jonathon LeBlanc, Mackenzie McGuane, Corbett Reed, Evan Harris, Kade Guillory, and Jacob Theriot. The All Star coaches are Terry Kuykendall, Eugene LeBlanc, Von Chargois, Mike Evans, Len Lemelle, Shannon Theriot, Buckie LeBoeuf, Jamie Guillory, Jim McGuane, and Don Hale.

I want to wish the Sulphur All Stars all the best in the World Series and I will be rooting for them from Washington!

PRIVATIZATION OF THE UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

HON. PHILIP M. CRANE

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 22, 1999

Mr. CRANE. Mr. Speaker, remember that old excuse "the check is in the mail"? In the