

## INTERNATIONAL PATIENTS' CARE

**HON. KEN BENTSEN**

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, September 28, 1999*

Mr. BENTSEN. Mr. Speaker, today I am introducing legislation to address the time limitation placed on international patients and attending family members who remain in the United States while receiving medical treatment. I am grateful for the Texas Medical Center in Houston for bringing this important issue to my attention.

Many international patients who obtain pre-arranged care in the United States require long-term medical treatment and lengthy hospital stays. However, a provision in the 1996 Immigration Reform Act instituted a time limit on "voluntary departure" status that has restricted health care facilities from providing sufficient care to some patients.

Each year, hospitals and health care facilities across the United States provide pre-arranged treatment and health care assistance to more than 250,000 international patients, who come from many nations around the world. At the Texas Medical Center in Houston, more than 25,000 international patients are seen each year. These patients come to the United States because of the high quality health care that is the best in the world.

Since the 1996 immigration reforms were enacted, many medical patient visitors have entered the United States under the Visa Waiver Pilot Program, which allows a maximum 90-day stay. After 90 days, these patients and their attending family members are eligible to apply for voluntary departure, which allows an additional stay of 120 days. Upon completion of the 120 days, these individuals must request "deferred action" status, which allows them to stay in the United States for an extended period, but places them under illegal status. Consequently, these patients—whose lives are often dependent on return visits to the United States for further medical treatment—are barred from entering the United States from between 3 and 10 years.

After I brought this issue to the attention of the INS and the Department of State, each agency has worked to strengthen their staff knowledge of medical patients, and to better screen prospective international patients at U.S. embassies and during inspections. However, due to the relaxed rules governing participation in the Visa Waiver program, many patients have continued to come to this country unaware of its strict length-of-stay restrictions.

Mr. Speaker, I was a strong proponent of the immigration reforms passed by Congress and signed by the President in 1996. Overall, I believe these were tough, but needed reforms that cracked down on illegal immigration. I have worked closely with law enforcement authorities in my district to clamp down on illegal immigration, and I have supported legislative efforts to provide the INS with the resources to safeguard the integrity of our borders while also holding the agency to high professional standards of law enforcement. In this case, though, I believe it is entirely appropriate to make a concession to the small number of international patients who travel to the United States for life-saving treatment.

The bill I am offering today would authorize a 3-year pilot program allowing the Attorney

General to waive the voluntary departure 120-day cap for a very limited number of international patients and attending family members who enter the United States under the Visa Waiver program. It would implement a tough, restrictive process for these patients, to ensure that only those truly in need of long-term medical care could obtain such a waiver. This legislation would require these patients to provide comprehensive statements from attending physicians detailing the treatment sought and their anticipated length of stay in the United States. In addition, the patients would be required to provide proof of ability to pay for their treatment and the daily expenses of attending family members. This legislation would strictly limit the number of allowable family members and limit the total number of waivers to 300 annually. To safeguard against fraud and abuse, this legislation would require the INS to provide Congress with an annual status report detailing the number of international patients waivers allowed each fiscal year. Should the INS fail to release this data, Congress would be authorized to discontinue these waivers.

In drafting this legislation, I consulted with the Texas Medical Center to determine an accurate, workable number of annual waivers for this legislation. After contacting a number of medical institutions throughout the United States, the Texas Medical Center estimated that approximately 1000 annual waivers will be needed to meet the total number of international patients who fall out of legal immigration status due to long-term health care needs. Despite this estimate, I believe 300 annual waivers will provide an adequate starting point to address this situation, while providing an appropriate safeguard against fraud and abuse.

Mr. Speaker, I realize that there are many members who are hesitant to make changes to the immigration law Congress adopted in 1996. I know that I am loath to do anything more than a surgical fix to the underlying statutory scheme. However, I am convinced that the reforms enacted in 1996 were not intended to target nonimmigrant visitors who enter this country to receive preapproved, life-saving medical treatment. I believe we have an obligation to protect the status of legal, international patients who owe their lives to the high-quality medical care they receive in the United States. Working together, in a bipartisan manner, we have taken great strides in strengthening our immigration laws. We should not allow our hard work to be diminished by the unintentional consequences of otherwise highly effective immigration reforms.

I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting this important effort.

## HONORING JACKIE WAITLEY

**HON. BOB SCHAFFER**

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, September 28, 1999*

Mr. SCHAFFER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor Jackie Waitley of Liff, CO, immediate past president of Colorado Cattle Women who recently was recognized for her leadership and hard work on behalf of the organization.

Jackie, born in Boston, MA, is a true westerner. Growing up in a Denver suburb, she ro-

manticized about living on a ranch riding and rodeoing. Meeting her husband Frank at Hastings College, both went to work for a short time as school teachers in Peetz, CO, but soon realized their shared dream of ranching and raising cattle and owning the Waitley Cattle Co. Today, the mother of four children and grandmother of five granddaughters, she says, "The city girl has learned that it takes hard work, knowledge, skill, and cooperation from mother nature to operate a cattle ranch today."

Jackie understands America must count on rural areas, not dismiss them. Statistics confirm the importance of rural settings. Agriculture is still America's number one employer providing more jobs and paychecks than any other sector of the economy.

Jackie recognizes that sound policy to offset the effects of Colorado's population boom should focus on Colorado's best stewards of the land—its farmers and ranchers. Besides supplying safe and inexpensive food for our tables, farmers and ranchers provide valuable open space and wildlife habitat.

In fact, most of this nation's wildlife survives and thrives on private lands. To preserve these valuable assets we need to protect water and property rights and make it easier for farmers and ranchers to pass their land on to succeeding generations.

While certain antiproperty rights groups fight for more regulation and government intervention, the future of agriculture depends on aggressive advocates like Jackie. Preserving farms and ranches is one effective way to mitigate Colorado's booming urbanization.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I agree with Jackie who is concerned for this nation's moral foundation. A nation launched by planters and preachers, America's founding strength was mustered and sustained by the moral character of rural people. Their values of hard work, honesty, integrity, self-reliance, and faith in God thrive in abundance today in the character of Jackie Waitley.

## TRIBUTE TO DICK SPROD

**HON. SCOTT McINNIS**

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, September 28, 1999*

Mr. McINNIS. Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this moment to recognize a man who has recently passed away. Mr. Dick Sprod died August 30th. He was born in Meeker, Colorado, in 1917 and lived there throughout most of his life. He graduated from the Meeker Public School system in 1935. He was drafted into the United States Army Air Corps six years later, in 1941, where he served for four years. He earned the rank of Master Sergeant as well as a bronze star during his time with the service.

He married Angela Nassau in Grand Junction in 1946. Together they made their home on his family homestead and raised their family while ranching. They had three children and have since been blessed with six grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

During his time as a rancher Mr. Sprod was an active member of the St. James' Episcopal Church, a member of the Meeker Snowmobile Club, the Rio Blanco Cattleman's Association, and also served for 21 years on the White

River Electric Board. In addition to all of his responsibilities, Dick loved to travel and participated in the athletic pursuits of all of his children and grandchildren. Most recently, he

was an avid supporter of his granddaughter's involvement in basketball at Mesa State College.

Dick Sprod will be greatly missed by all who knew him. He was an important part of the

ranching community and his community of Meeker as a whole. He will be remembered for many years to come