

a group of dedicated and tireless professionals: the members of the American Society of Nephrology (ASN). Many members, including those from the 7th Congressional District of Illinois, are gathering at the ASN's 32nd Annual Meeting. I rise to congratulate the ASN for its achievements.

For some, Nephrology is not an everyday word. However, there is no doubt that we are all too familiar with terms like "diabetes" and "hypertension." These two diseases, Mr. Speaker, happen to be the leading two causes of total kidney failure, or End Stage Renal Disease (ESRD). In 1997, approximately 361,000 Americans suffered from ESRD and required life-saving dialysis or kidney transplants. While we know the terrible human suffering ESRD imposes on thousands across the country, the economic costs are staggering as well. Recent statistics show that the direct economic cost of health care for kidney failure, stemming largely from the Federal Government, is more than \$15 billion per year.

Unfortunately, ESRD represents only the tip of the iceberg. It is estimated that 12.5 million Americans have lost at least 50% of their normal kidney function. Further, it must also be mentioned that renal disease affects certain populations disproportionately. For example, African Americans, Native Americans, Latinos and people over the age of 50 are at higher risk for developing kidney disease. This must change.

There is no cure for kidney disease. But there is room for hope. Medical research offers us great promise to reduce the human suffering and enormous costs imposed by ESRD and kidney disease. As a result, I have long supported increased funding for the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Further, in order to draw attention to important health care issues in my own district, I staged a series of town hall meetings this past summer. These meetings proved that our citizens are actively concerned about issues like health care. Furthermore, my town meetings demonstrated that we owe it to our constituents to continue to work to provide them important information because, as the saying goes, "Knowledge is power." The same is true for research.

While kidney disease does have a devastating impact on our citizens, research has found that the progression of the disease can be slowed if diagnosed and managed early. Some more good news centers on the fact that there are dedicated individuals who are focused on finding ways to beat this disease. Recently, these researchers and experts in the field of Nephrology met to discuss and identify research priorities and obstacles that could impede us from reaching our goals. These discussions were summarized and drafted in the recently released paper, "Progress and Priorities: Renal Disease Research Plan." This project, sponsored by the National Institutes of Health's (NIH) National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK), was made possible through the work of the American Society of Nephrology and other members of the Council of American Kidney Societies (CAKS). I urge all my colleagues to read through this seminal report and to share copies with their constituents.

Mr. Speaker, thank you for providing me this opportunity to acknowledge the work performed by the American Society of Nephrology (ASN).

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. RONNIE SHOWS

OF MISSISSIPPI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, November 2, 1999

Mr. SHOWS. Mr. Speaker, because of unanticipated delays in my flight from Jackson, Mississippi, on Monday, November 1, 1999, I was unable to cast recorded votes on rollcalls 550, 551, and 552.

Had I been present for rollcall 550, I would have voted "yea" to suspend the rules and pass H.R. 348, a bill to authorize the construction of a monument to honor those who have served the Nation's civil defense and emergency management programs.

On rollcall 551, I would have voted "yea" to suspend the rules and pass H.R. 2737, a bill to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to convey to the State of Illinois certain Federal land associated with the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail to be used as an historic and interpretive site along the trail.

On rollcall 552, I would have voted "nay" against suspending the rules and passing H.R. 1714, a bill to facilitate the use of electronic records and signatures in interstate or foreign commerce.

BURNING POPE IN EFFIGY SHOWS INDIA'S RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE

HON. JOHN T. DOOLITTLE

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, November 2, 1999

Mr. DOOLITTLE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to condemn the recent act of burning the Pope in effigy by a Hindu fundamentalist group in India. My friend Dr. Gurmit Singh Aulakh, President of the Council of Khalistan, brought this disgraceful act to my attention. It was reported in India Abroad.

An organizer of the march criticized the Delhi Archbishop for contacting the Pope about religious persecution in India. The Pope is visiting India soon and the Hindu militants demand that the Pope declare all religions the same.

This follows the rapes of four nuns in India by individuals described by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad as "patriotic youth." Hindu fundamentalists have murdered four priests. Hindu fundamentalists also killed Australian missionary Graham Staines and his two little boys by surrounding their Jeep and setting it on fire. They have burned churches, prayer halls, and Christian schools.

Sikhs, Muslims, and others have also suffered from similar treatment. They, too, have seen their religious shrines desecrated and attacked and religious leaders kidnapped, tortured, and murdered by the Indian authorities and their Hindu fundamentalist allies. These are people who espouse total Hindu domination of every facet of life in India. In this light, is it any wonder that so many of the minorities in India's multinational empire, such as Christian Nagaland, the Sikhs of Punjab, Khalistan, the Kashmiri Muslims, and so many others seek independence from India?

It is time for Congress to encourage freedom for people of the subcontinent. I submit the Council of Khalistan's press release on the burning of the Pope's effigy into the RECORD.

HINDU ACTIVISTS BURN EFFIGY OF POPE,

MARCH TO PROTEST CHRISTIAN ACTIVITY

THERE IS NO RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN INDIA

WASHINGTON, D.C., October 28, 1999.—Fundamentalist Hindu militants burned an effigy of Pope John Paul II on October 22 during a Goa-to-Delhi march to protest Christian religious activity in India, according to a report in the October 29 issue of India Abroad. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), a branch of the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS), a pro-Fascist, Hindu fundamentalist organization organized the march. The ruling BJP, which leads the 24-party governing coalition in India, is the political arm of the RSS.

Marchers are protesting large-scale conversions by Christians, according to the article. They are demanding that the Pope proclaim all religions equal during his visit to India next month.

Subhash Velingkar, an organizer of the march, condemned religious conversions. In the eyes of many Hindu activists, all conversions from Hinduism are "forced" conversions. Velingkar attacked the Archbishop of Delhi, Alain de Lastic, for communicating with the Vatican about the persecution of Christians in India. "Why should people from India complain to the Vatican?" he demanded.

Recently a nun named Sister Ruby was abducted by militant Hindus and forced to drink their urine on the threat of being raped. Four other nuns were raped last year. The VHP called the nuns "antinationals elements" and described the rapists as "patriotic youth." Another priest was recently murdered in India, joining four other priests who were murdered last year.

Christians have been subjected to a wave of violence since Christmas Day. Churches have been burned and schools and prayer halls have been destroyed. Missionary Graham Staines and his two sons, ages 8 and 10, were burned to death while they slept in their van by a mob of Hindus who surrounded the jeep and chanted "Victory to Lord Ram."

"We strongly condemn this march and the burning in effigy of the Pope," said Dr. Gurmit Singh Aulakh, President of the Council of Khalistan, the organization leading the Sikh Nation's struggle for independence from India. "The ordeal that the Christians are enduring is reminiscent of what the Sikhs, Muslims, and other religious minorities in India go through," he said. "There is no religious freedom in India," he said. "The VHP openly proclaimed that anybody living in India should be a Hindu or subservient to the Hindus."

March organizer Velingkar said, "Christians are brothers of the same blood." Dr. Aulakh dismissed that statement. "The Hindu fundamentalists say the same things about Sikhs being brothers of Hindus," he said. "If that is the case, then why do they continue to murder Sikhs, Christians, Muslims, and others in large numbers?"

India has murdered over 250,000 Sikhs since 1984, over 200,000 Christians in Nagaland since 1988, more than 65,000 Muslims in Kashmir since 1988, and tens of thousands of Assamese, Manipuris, Tamils, Dalits, and others. It continues to hold tens of thousands of members of these groups as political prisoners without charge or trial, according to a report by Amnesty International. Thousands have been illegally detained for as long as 15 years.

"Clearly there is no place for religious minorities in democratic, secular India," said Dr. Aulakh. "This only makes the case for freedom for all the minority nations of South Asia stronger," he said. "I call on President Clinton and the Pope to bring up the issues of religious freedom and self-determination on their visits to India," he said.

HONORING BARBARA WHEELER
FOR HER SERVICE TO PUBLIC
EDUCATION AND PUBLIC
SCHOOLS IN DOWNERS GROVE,
ILLINOIS

HON. JUDY BIGGERT

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, November 2, 1999

Mrs. BIGGERT. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Barbara Wheeler for her invaluable contributions to the children of DuPage County and the State of Illinois over the past 25 years.

Since 1974, Ms. Wheeler has been a dedicated member of the Community High School District Board of Education, DuPage County. She served in leadership roles as president of the school board for 15 years and vice president for 5 years. Throughout her career, she has made it a priority to ensure that the school board sets attainable goals to raise student achievement and to build a consensus among business, educators, and the community at large.

Ms. Wheeler is an active board member of the National School Boards Association (NSBA), serving as chair of the NSBA Central Region, a member of the Policies and Resolutions Committee, Secretary-Treasurer and President Elect. She served as President of the NSBA in 1998, when she championed a nationwide campaign to make our schools safer.

Besides her extensive work in the educational field, Ms. Wheeler is an energetic and committed community leader. She is a volunteer for the Illinois Department on Aging, George Williams College, the Downers Grove Chamber of Commerce, and the Downers Grove YMCA.

An Illinois native, Ms. Wheeler attended St. Dominic College, Northern Illinois University and the DePaul University College of Law. She is an active member of the Chicago and Illinois State Bar Associations and the American Bar Association. She has served as Assistant State's Attorney, Cook County, Illinois, and is in private law practice with the firm Wheeler, Wheeler and Wheeler in Westmont, Illinois.

I have had the privilege to know Barbara Wheeler for many years, and greatly respect her for the unwavering commitment she has made to excellence in education. While I can confidently say that the citizens of DuPage County wish her much success in her future endeavors, we must recognize that her wisdom and years of experience will be sorely missed by the school board, as well as by parents and students. DuPage County, the State of Illinois, and our nation are better places because Ms. Barbara Wheeler dedicated a portion of her life to the education of our children.

CONFERENCE REPORT ON H.R. 3064,
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA APPRO-
PRIATIONS ACT, 2000

SPEECH OF

HON. LANE EVANS

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, October 28, 1999

Mr. EVANS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in opposition to the DC/Labor-HHS Appropriations

conference report. There are many reasons to oppose this measure. Among the worst of the provisions contained in this conference report is the irresponsible across-the-board 1-percent cut in discretionary spending fashioned by the House Republican leadership.

It is the worst kind of cynicism to claim that a 1-percent across-the-board cut will correct waste and fraud in government programs. I'm strongly opposed to cutting the funding for veterans' medical care just approved by Congress. The majority whip has issued a press release that claims the cut in Veterans' medical care funding he is recommending would not affect health care for America's veterans. Veterans know better. You can't cut health care funding without cutting health care.

Congressman DELAY sent a press release to the leadership of major veterans service organizations defending the 1.4-percent cut in appropriations he originally supported, which affected veterans, among other discretionary programs. Let me state that three years of straight-line funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has left the agency struggling to meet the increasing costs of medical care for the growing number of enrolled veterans it treats.

Now the Republican leadership claims a \$190 million cut in veterans' medical care funding would do no harm. They maintain these funds can be squeezed out of the budget and be found in "mismanagement and waste." What the Republican leadership fails to acknowledge is the tremendous changes VA has already made to be more efficient. In the last few years, VA has closed thousands of beds, eliminated thousands of staff positions, and strengthened many of their auditing systems.

House Democrats have strongly supported proposals all year that would have added sums ranging from \$2 to \$3 billion to the President's initial proposal for veterans' medical care. Indeed we have all worked hard to improve funding for veterans. Veterans service organizations have called on Congress to appropriate up to \$3 billion more than the administration's original budget proposal for veterans' health care. Now many veterans services organizations have vehemently denounced the Republican leadership's proposed across-the-board cut. I quote from a letter signed by the executive directors of AMVETS, Disabled American Veterans, Paralyzed Veterans of America, and the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. regarding these cuts: "It seems disingenuous at best for Congress to recognize a problem in funding for veterans health care, provide the dollars with one hand to help solve that problem, and then take dollars away with the other. No one is fooled by this budget sleight-of-hand."

Mr. Speaker, no one is going to be fooled by this belated and disingenuous concern about government inefficiency. I urge my colleagues to vote "no" on this abrogation of responsibility. Vote "no" on this conference report.

It is already evident VA will struggle, even to deal with the unprecedented increase Congress has enacted and the President has signed into law. How will this affect the VA health care system? In many parts of the country, veterans must wait up to six months just to see a primary care doctor. VA has also unraveled mental health and long-term care programs which were once hallmarks of the

VA system. There are now even complaints that VA's highly-regarded special emphasis programs for which there is supposedly congressional protection—such as spinal cord injury and blind rehabilitation—are under attack.

VA has done much to streamline its services in recent years. Over five years, VA has reduced its workforce by almost 10 percent, closed hundreds of beds throughout the system, reduced its inpatient census by almost 30 percent and eliminated 37 percent of its inpatient treatments per year. It has integrated or consolidated 50 medical centers. In testimony before the Veterans' Affairs Committee this April, four Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) directors, commenting on the proposed future efficiency-derived savings, concurred that "all the low-hanging fruit has been picked." Savings available to the system in the future, the directors said, will be harder fought and more disruptive.

The Republican leadership has contended that VA could absorb further cuts "without having any effect on health care to veterans," citing figures from studies that were challenged earlier this year. For example, the majority whip's release contended VA could save a million dollars a day by eliminating some of its overhead in capital assets. But whether savings of this magnitude could be realized in the immediate future with significantly uprooting current VA programs is highly questionable. Even without the Republican budget cuts, "there isn't enough money in the budget now to tear down or renovate underutilized buildings, let alone to replace them with new, modern, smaller clinics. Any savings here will require investment, not magic, and will not come quickly."

Likewise, DELAY's release pointed to a report suggesting \$17 million is lost each year in fraudulent or improper workers compensation claims. Actually, testimony at the March 24 Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations hearing demonstrated that VA's workers compensation costs are not unusual, and that the answer is in heading off injuries and helping employees with rehabilitation. In fact, VA has been cutting these costs since 1994, and is completing automation of its claims system for better management, but savings are already part of the FY 2000 budget.

The DeLay release also noted his plan would not affect benefits checks. Of course, it wouldn't. That, at least, is still out of Mr. DELAY's reach. It's troubling that he would even mention compensation for service-connected disabilities and his restraint with regard to compensation for service-connected disabilities.

ON WALTER PAYTON'S PASSING

HON. BOBBY L. RUSH

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, November 2, 1999

Mr. RUSH. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to join in remembering an extraordinary athlete and person, Mr. Walter Payton.

Walter Payton was a hero on and off the football field. Throughout his life, he epitomized courage, determination and dignity. Self-motivated by a standard of excellence, he used his intelligence and God-given ability to excel in his professional and personal life. As