

Born in El Paso, Texas, on January 4, 1937, daughter of Mrs. Elvira Villegas, Vera has five brothers and two sisters. Her family moved to Delano in 1946. Married since 1955 to Johnny Figueroa, they have three children: Lorriane Melendez, 28 years of age, who resides in McFarland, Johnny Figueroa III, 24 years, of Delano, and Edmundo Figueroa, age 14, a student at Delano High School.

Attending Fremont Elementary, Richgrove Elementary, and Delano High School, Vera graduated in 1955. She worked as a Community Aide at Delano High School from 1979 to 1985, and currently works at the school as a Record Clerk, since 1985.

Vera has been an active community volunteer, freely giving of her time, efforts, and talent. She has served as a coach for Delano Parks and Recreation, coaching 3rd to 12th grades, all sports. In honor of her achievements and volunteerism, Vera was appointed Delano parks and Recreation Commissioner, July 1980—December 1984.

Vera is also known for dance. She has served as Dance Instructor at Albany Park and Fremont School for 2nd, 3rd and 4th graders.

She started dancing as "Vera" for the soldiers at Ft. Bliss and other places in Texas. While still in El Paso, she studied classical Spanish Dances. In Delano she continued to learn on her own. In the late 40s and early 50s she danced at both the Albany Park and Fremont Schools.

In the '70s she started the Figueroa Troup. It was multicultural group, featuring dances of Spain, Mexico, Russia, Hawaii, Japan and the Philippines. At one time the group included her daughter, and several other Cinco de Mayo Queen Contestants. They performed for the Boy Scouts Jamboree in Hayward and for the Men's Prison in San Luis Obispo. They performed in San Jose, Santa Ana, San Fernando, and Bakersfield.

Vera's love of dance and her Mexican culture inspired her to devote many hours to teaching the cultural dances of Mexico and Spain. She choreographed most Cinco de Mayo queen show pageants. She devoted thousands of hours to their celebration.

Vera served as Grand Marshal of the 30th Fiesta and Parade for Cinco de Mayo Fiesta, Inc., in Delano, in honor of her accomplishments and devotion to preserving the culture.

She also helped found Community of Concerned Parents for Better Education, (CCPBE), and has been President for four years. The group works for better education and greater parent participation. Under her leadership, CCPBE raised \$2,000 for the Fremont School Track. They also provide \$1,000 scholarship awards for Delano High graduates. Vera has always worked for better education for the community's economically and academically disadvantaged.

Vera has been a member of Delano High PTA and Terrace School PTA. As president of the CCPBE, she has been instrumental in helping with back-to-school nights at the Delano schools, contributing monies to Fremont School and many other local school activities.

It is a pleasure to honor Vera Figueroa, who has made and continues to make a difference for California youth and the Latino community.

SCHOOLYARD SAFETY ACT

HON. JENNIFER DUNN

OF WASHINGTON

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 14, 2001

Ms. DUNN. Mr. Speaker, we continue to see tragic examples that reinforce the need for immediate action to stop the violence in our nation's schools. Today I am reintroducing, along with my colleagues PETER DEFAZIO and ZACH WAMP, the Schoolyard Safety Act. This legislation is aimed at keeping America's youth safe in their schools by establishing an incentive program for States to create a 24-hour holding period for students who bring guns to school.

The tragic May 1998 schoolyard shooting in Springfield, Oregon best illustrates the need for this bill's incentive program for States to impose a 24-hour holding period. As you may recall, a student showed up at school with a gun. He was immediately expelled and sent home. He was not, however, held to undergo psychological evaluation, nor was he placed in juvenile detention for further questioning. The next day, the student returned to his high school with a gun and used it to kill two classmates, and later, his parents.

Several hundred times a year, young people bring guns to school, and disciplinary action is taken. But we know that simply expelling a child does nothing to protect innocent students, communities, or the troubled youth himself. When a student brings a gun into the classroom, concrete steps must be taken immediately to deal with the problem. A 24-hour holding period would put the student into a secure environment where he can receive the attention he needs. This will not only protect the safety of other students and the public, but will ensure that the student carrying the gun receives proper counseling.

The Schoolyard Safety Act gives States access to Federal Incentive Grants for Local Delinquency Prevention Programs if they seek to create a 24-hour holding period. It does not mandate another burdensome Federal program; rather, it gives States greater flexibility to use their Federal dollars how they see fit. We believe local officials and educators know best how to solve the problem of youth violence.

School shootings show us how easily gun violence can break the heart of a community. Every man, woman, and child across America have the right to expect to live on a safe street and send their kids to a safe school. Children who learn in fear are learning the wrong lessons and we have a responsibility to do whatever we can to prevent future tragedies.

INTRODUCTION OF THE VOTING EQUIPMENT MODERNIZATION ACT OF 2001

HON. STEVE C. LaTOURETTE

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 14, 2001

Mr. LATOURETTE. Mr. Speaker, today I introduced a measure called the "Voting Equipment Modernization Act of 2001" (VEMA) that will create a special tax "checkoff" segment on income tax returns so Americans can direct

\$1 to \$2 of their tax dollars to help defray the cost of replacing antiquated voting machines across the country.

Mr. Speaker, the temporary election modernization checkoff on income tax forms will be separate from the current checkoff for the Presidential Election Campaign Fund. As with the presidential election checkoff, the voting equipment modernization checkoff will not increase a taxpayer's tax bill. Those filing individual tax returns would be able to contribute \$1 and those filing jointly could contribute \$2. More than 120 million individual income tax returns are filed each year.

The idea for a temporary election modernization checkoff came from a constituent of mine in Mentor, OH, who was embarrassed by events surrounding the November election and the accuracy of voting equipment across the country. In my home State of Ohio, 60 of the State's 88 counties use punch-card ballots similar to those used in Florida.

Mr. Speaker, right now we have a patchwork quilt of aging voting systems across the country and if the November election taught us anything it is that the patchwork quilt is a frayed mess. We have lottery machines that are far more modern and accurate than our current voting machines and that is just wrong.

My bill, the Voting Equipment Modernization Act of 2001, will establish a temporary checkoff on income tax returns that would allow taxpayers to designate \$1 to \$2 to the Federal Election Commission, which would then distribute funds to newly created Election Administration Improvement Funds in each State. The funding level for each State will be based on population derived from Census figures.

I believe Americans want modern voting equipment and know that State and local governments are not capable of bearing the enormous costs of replacing antiquated equipment. The cost of replacing voting equipment in each of the country's 191,000 voting precincts is estimated to cost at least \$4 billion and some estimates have voting modernization costs exceeding \$8 billion.

The current presidential tax checkoff has had mixed results, but I believe Americans will respond favorably to an opportunity to help defray the costs of new voting equipment if it will ensure accurate election results. Using Census figures as a guide, if 12 percent of Ohio taxpayers opted for the checkoff, it would amount to \$1.35 million in revenue that could be used to update voting equipment and pay to train poll workers.

Participation in the checkoff to help pay for presidential elections has fallen since it was first initiated in 1972, and studies show that only 12.5 percent of Americans checked the box on their 1997 returns. The remainder left the box blank or checked "NO." Through 1999, about \$1.2 billion had been designed for presidential elections.

I blame the low participation for the presidential checkoff on two factors: The public's unwillingness to help pay for increasingly hostile presidential elections, and widespread misunderstanding that checking off the box increases one's tax bill.

It is my belief that folks will be willing to do a tax checkoff if it will ensure that their vote will be counted and counted accurately. I think when folks realize this won't negatively impact their tax refund or tax bill, they will be willing to check the box.

Secretaries of State across the Nation agree that voting machines need to be modernized

but they realize the costs will be enormous. The voting modernization checkoff will be a temporary measure to generate funds, and will only appear on tax return forms as long as there is a need to pay for new voting machines.

Mr. Speaker, States will be able to use money generated by the checkoff to purchase and maintain modern voting equipment, and educate and train those using the new voting equipment, including those working the polls on election day. Decisions about specific equipment and training would be left up to the States. Also, Puerto Rico will be excluded from this plan because it does not pay Federal taxes.

Mr. Speaker, I believe VEMA offers a simple, common-sense solution to a problem that must be remedied as soon as possible so we can restore accuracy and integrity to our voting system. I urge my colleagues to support the Voting Equipment Modernization Act of 2001.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. JIM MATHESON

OF UTAH

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 14, 2001

Mr. MATHESON. Mr. Speaker, on Tuesday, March 13, 2001, I was unable to cast votes on rollcall votes 46 and 47. However, had I been present, on rollcall vote 46 I would have voted "yea", and on rollcall vote 47 I also would have voted "yea".

CONDEMNING HEINOUS ATROCITIES THAT OCCURRED AT SANTANA HIGH SCHOOL, SANTEE, CALIFORNIA

SPEECH OF

HON. JIM LANGEVIN

OF RHODE ISLAND

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, March 13, 2001

Mr. LANGEVIN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor the victims of gun violence at Santana High School, the countless lives that have been affected by this tragic incident, and the numerous similar tragedies that have happened over the past few years. The violence at Santana is deeply disturbing. No child should fear for her life in school, and no child should feel so alienated that he perceives violence as his only option.

When Charles Andrew Williams entered school on Monday, March 5, he had already cried out for help. He had told his friends his plan. He had even told his friend's parent. In all, Andy Williams told over 20 people what he planned to do. But no one took him seriously and now two children are dead. While this was clearly an act of rage, it was also one of fear and desperation.

And sadly, Andy was not alone. Within 48 hours of his arrest, 16 other children in California had been arrested or detained for suspicion of gun-related violence. In fact, since Dylan Kelbold and Eric Harris killed thirteen of their classmates at Columbine High School almost two years ago, over eighteen separate incidents of student-to-student gun violence

have occurred. Many more planned attempts to emulate this violence have gone unreported or perhaps never even known. Just six weeks ago in East Providence, Rhode Island, a hit list was found that was written by four fifth graders.

Many of us are at a loss to explain this explosion of school violence in recent years, but everyone agrees that we must address the mental health needs of our children. Education Secretary Rod Paige has attributed the rash of school shootings to 'alienation and rage.' A recent Secret Service study concluded that the common theme underlying perpetrators of violent crimes in schools is depression. Three-quarters of children committing these crimes have talked about or attempted suicide. More than two-thirds report having been bullied by their peers. Disturbing emotions of alienation and rage in our nation's schools are real and pervasive and deep-seated. We must take steps to alleviate this pain and provide the help that our children are crying out for in these violent actions.

Our schoolchildren need professional counselors who can help them cope with the pressures of being a teenager. They need supportive adults in their lives. They also need a moral compass that will help them sort through the violence that permeates our culture. What they do not need is easy access to weapons. Whatever alienation Andy Williams was feeling, he could not have committed such a heinous act without the help of a .22 caliber revolver.

Guns are simply too accessible to children today, and American children are suffering the consequences. The accidental death rate among children from gunshot wounds is nine times higher in the United States than in the other largest 25 industrialized countries combined, and at least six loopholes still exist that allow children and violent offenders obtain guns. Guns alone do not kill children, but in times of extreme emotional distress they enable a disturbed innocent child to become a murderer.

Efforts to increase children's self-esteem and to reduce their access to guns will decrease the number of these incidents. While I applaud my colleagues in honoring the children and families of Santana High School, I urge you to let this be the first step toward change, not the last. As one whose life was forever altered when a gun accidentally discharged, I know first hand that guns are dangerous and far too often fatal. For the sake of our children, I implore my colleagues to pass meaningful legislation to end school violence once and for all.

TRIBUTE TO JOE ORTIZ CARDONA

HON. JOE BACA

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 14, 2001

Mr. BACA. Mr. Speaker, I would like to salute Joe Ortiz Cardona, of California. Joe has been recognized by Adelante, California Migrant Leadership Council and American Legion Merle Reed Post 124 as an outstanding individual who has made significant contributions to the improvement of education opportunities for Latino children in California.

A highly-respected community leader in Earlimart for more than 33 years, a Barber by

trade, Joe Cardona has spent most of his life helping others. He is active in improving the conditions of the people of Earlimart, in such areas as flood control, schools, health care, food and clothing acquisition and distribution, and support for families in need.

Joe was born in 1933 in Somerton, Arizona. His family migrated to Earlimart in 1940, where Joe enrolled in first grade at Earlimart Elementary School. Following the seasonal crops, Joe's family moved to Brawley where he graduated from eighth grade in 1948.

Joe enlisted in the Army in the late 1950's serving two years. In 1957, Joe studied and obtained his apprenticeship for Barbering from Moler Barber College, Fresno, California. In 1959, Joe married Cruz Amaya Cardona and raised four children, Larry, Joe Jr., Frankie and Vicki. In 1974, Joe was determined to receive a high school diploma. He enrolled in Adult Education at Delano Joint Union High School. Along with the forty-seven area citizens, he was one of the proud graduates of the commencement exercises in June 2, 1975.

Joe Cardona is a man of integrity, dependability and dedication. In 1967, understanding the poverty and hardships of some of the community members of Earlimart, he had an idea to have members of the community contribute to a fund, which could be used to assist families on the occasion of bereavement. With this idea the Earlimart Funeral Fund Association was formed and to-date Joe is still an active member of this organization, and besides the monetary support, you probably will see Joe attending the funerals and expressing his sympathy to the bereaved families.

Serving his country was one of Joe's proudest moments, and because of his active membership, he has received recognition for participation in the American Legion Post. Joe has proudly served in the position of president and commander of the American Legion Post. Representing the American Legion Post 745, Joe helps raise funds for scholarship to annually honor a deserving Earlimart Junior High School student.

Joe helped coordinate the first Food Link Program for the community of Earlimart in 1995, dedicating countless hours gathering volunteers, and through his example, others have continued to take on this responsibility. This program continues to serve the needy families of this community. During the flood of 1997, Joe helped form a Flood Control Committee, gathering local active members, as well as invoking assistance from political representatives to help disaster stricken families, and was also involved in the issue of the White River Dam. Joe recruits volunteers to assist with the annual clean-up day activities in the community. One of Joe's biggest accomplishments is the annual Christmas "Give Away" to the needy families of the Earlimart community.

Joe has received recognition by the California State Assembly and California State Senate for outstanding leadership and community services. Joe speaks very softly, and with his congenial and humble character, never boasts of his accomplishments. If you know Joe personally, you are aware of the relentless hours he has served on various committees expressing concerns. Although the town of Earlimart is not incorporated, the majority of the community will still refer to Joe as the "Town Mayor" and through his dedication and commitment he has made the difference!