

IN APPRECIATION OF MEMBERS OF CONGRESS AND IN TRIBUTE TO SUPPORTIVE AND CAPABLE STAFF

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. BONIOR) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. BONIOR. Mr. Speaker, first of all, let me apologize to my friend, Elie Abboud, who has been waiting for me for an hour and a half to have lunch. I did not expect this to happen, and I am overwhelmed by the wonderful tributes and comments of my colleagues.

I want to thank the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. SOUDER) and the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. BEREUTER) for their comments, and for spending the time that they have here on the floor throughout this hour-and-a-half, 2 hours.

Mr. Speaker, I came to the floor this afternoon, or actually I came this morning, but it is afternoon now, to pay tribute to my staff.

Before I do that, I want to express my appreciation to all the Members who came to this well and spoke so lovingly and so wonderfully concerning my service here.

It means a great deal to me to, number one, have such wonderful friendships of people that I admire and respect, and to have them publicly express their feelings and their thoughts. It was quite an emotional and heartfelt experience and well received, I might say, and I thank them for it.

The gentlewoman from California (Ms. PELOSI), of course, is going to be our next whip and a great leader of our country, and she already is, but more greatness awaits her; and my friend, the gentleman from California (Mr. GEORGE MILLER), who, with me, has had so many battles over so many years on education, labor issues, Central America; we go back a long time, and he is one of the best.

Of course, there is the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WOOLSEY), who I have come to admire and respect, and is about as genuine and as real and as committed to people as we can find in this place; and the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. BROWN), who was here and has now left, who will commence the leadership on the trade issue. He is already a great leader in it, but he will be even more so in the days and weeks and months ahead.

Thanks to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. EDWARDS) and the chief deputy whip, the gentleman from California (Mr. FARR); the gentlewoman from Connecticut (Ms. DELAURO), who spoke with such eloquence and love; the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR); the gentleman from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS), who always proves that I am bipartisan; the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. WU); the gentleman from Maine (Mr. ALLEN); the gentlewoman from Nevada (Ms. CARSON); the gentleman from Guam (Mr. UNDERWOOD), who is going to be the next Governor of Guam; the gentleman from Texas (Mr. GREEN);

the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. FRANK); the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PAYNE); the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. WATT); and the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. SOUDER), I thank him for his comments.

Thanks also to Harold Volkmer who came here, I saw him on the floor. Many of you knew him; he served many years in the House. He was a classmate of mine, and was very instrumental in getting me elected whip.

□ 1315

So I thank them all and I look forward to a final year of service with them here. We are going to do wonderful things for our country together.

I take this floor tonight to express my appreciation to people who have made it possible for me to be the whip of my party and be a leader in my party, and that is my staff. They are an extraordinary group of people, some of whom I will miss dearly. Although I am sure we will be in contact with each other over the years and the months as they go by, but some of them are leaving now, and they have been part of my whip staff, and I want to express my thoughts and feelings to them today.

Bridget Andrews will be coming over to the Rayburn staff with me for the next year and she is just a bright, thoughtful, caring, quiet but smart woman, and I am really honored to have her and look forward to working with her.

Brian Taylor, who is here on the floor as well, Brian has been with us a short time, but he has done a great, great job, and he has got all the abilities to be a great legislative assistant in this institution, and I wish him all the best. He has had the obligation of answering the phone when someone calls to find out what is going on and he does a great job. He knows how this place works now. He is a wonderful person.

Then Kim Kovach, who I will dearly miss. She started off not too long ago with us, a couple of years ago, several years ago, and she has done everything in the office, and she did our trade stuff for us on fast track. She has just progressed in such a wonderful fashion. She is caring, she is decent. She is going back to Pittsburgh. She got married. She is a lovely person, and whoever gets her in employment in Pittsburgh is going to be very, very fortunate. I wish Kim all the best in her endeavors.

I also want to take this opportunity to thank Howard Moon, who came from the gentleman from California's (Mr. MATSU) staff. Howard is one of our floor people here, and he will continue on in that capacity in the next session of this Congress. He and Kristen are very special people, smart, hard-working, thoughtful, competent, all the things someone would want in a staff person, and I wish Howard all the best and I will miss him. We will see him, though, on the floor. So I guess I

will not miss him that much. He will be around.

Jerry Hartz. Jerry has been with me now for, I do not want to get these things wrong, but it has been at least 15 years, since 1987. So let me do my math, about 15 years, and he will be continuing on serving this great institution, and he is an enormously talented individual, a floor person here who we relied on. Wonderful family. Jerry started in our offices when we were the chief deputy whip. There were just four of us in there Judy, my wife; Jerry, Kathy and then Sarah. I guess that is five, and he was so instrumental in our battles on Central America and disarmament issues and you name it, he is there. He is a great resource for this institution, and I wish Jerry all the best in his endeavors.

Sarah Dufendach and Kathy Gille have been with me the longest of the group. They worked on my first campaign 25 years ago. Sarah and Kathy and I, we all kind of grew up on the east side of Detroit, and as I said, they both worked on my first campaign, and Kathy came to work with me about 20 years ago, seems like 22, but she was in at the very beginning and she has been an enormous, wise consult to me. She has great instincts. She has great humanitarian instincts. She has great political wisdom and caring, and I am just going to miss her very, very much, but I know she is looking forward to the day when she can have a little bit of rest, as we all are, and I wish her and Doug much happiness. I know that it will be there in abundance for them. They put together well in their lives the different pieces that make life so profound and wonderful. The spiritual, the physical, the emotional, the educational, all those pieces they do very, very well, and she does extremely well.

Kathy traveled to Central America. She has been at all the battles that we have done over the years and the Vietnam veterans stuff, all the trade issues, worked on the Committee on Rules, as did Jerry, and she is just a very special person, and I thank her from the bottom of my heart for her service.

Then Sarah, who with Kathy, worked in that first campaign, has been with me in the office now for 25 years. She started in Michigan. She lived in the same community I did. She has worked in social services her whole life, and I consider this part of that. She has got enormous amounts of energy and optimism and can-do-it-iveness and is a deeply caring person and was the administrative and political part of our operation that was so very, very important. She did a great, great job for many, many years.

She is going on to wonderful things working for an organization called the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation, which was an offshoot of the original Vietnam Veterans of America. I guess it really was not an offshoot, but it is Bobby Muller who was instrumental in forming both of those organizations, one which is now a national

veterans organization. She is going to go work over there, and they do stuff like land mines.

They are the folks that got the Nobel Peace Prize for the work they did on land mine issues around the world. So it is a good place for Sarah because when she puts her heart and soul into something, she works hard at it, and there is nothing that could be more important than doing that kind of work, making sure we demilitarize our land so that our loved ones around the world do not lose their lives and their limbs. There will be other things I am sure that she will be doing over there but she is a great person, and I wish her all the best in her endeavors, and I thank her for her service.

Another person who I should mention is Chris Cook, who was with me for 25 years as well and left just recently. I have four people that were with me virtually the whole time, Kathy, Sarah, Ed Bruley, who is still there and Chris Cook, Christine Cook. And Christine left recently from the Michigan office and those now kind of form the team that we have operated with for two and a half decades. And I am going to miss Christine. I will see her. She is busy now as a grandma. We were all young when we started out in this business, but we have other responsibilities now in our lives. And she is handling that with great grace and she is a gracious, lovely woman and I miss her already.

Then let me finally say that my wife, Judy, who worked in our office, in the whip's office, chief deputy whip's office and then in the majority whip's office and in the minority whip's office was an enormous piece in making things work and is the central piece of my life. And she was just fabulous in doing all the wonderful things she does. Caring, loving and advocating and fighting for the things that are important to her, socioeconomic justice, racial justice. So she is a beacon of light for me and for many people, and I want her to know that. I look forward to marching through life with her.

To all the Hill staff who I had the pleasure to work with, thank you for your cooperation and for your support. To run a whip shop is not easy. You do not just need your staff. There is a lot of people that are involved and a lot of energy and a lot of heart and soul gets poured into these issues. And, I hope over the next year, to thank you all individually and to give you my best wishes in your careers.

Mr. Speaker, you have been very generous. This has been a long 5 minutes, and I want to thank you for your kindness this afternoon. I want to wish my colleagues a very happy holiday season; a happy Hanukkah which has passed; a merry Christmas and a spiritual Kwanzaa and a Ramadan Koran for those who just finished their holy season.

We look forward to a good session the next part of this 107th Congress.

#### LEGISLATION TO BE CONSIDERED IN SECOND SESSION OF 107TH CONGRESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. BEREUTER) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. BEREUTER. Mr. Speaker, today I have introduced four bills for consideration during the next year and I want to call them at least briefly to the attention of the House for the Members and staff who will be watching or reading the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD.

The first of them is entitled the Lewis and Clark Voyage of Scientific Discovery Act, and it really is a comprehensive effort to foster the better management of the biological and physical health of the Missouri River.

The second and third bills relate to Afghanistan and Central Asian republics and the ability and assistance and authorization for that part of the world to produce food sufficient to feed themselves, at least on a sustainable or subsistence basis.

The second of the bills relates to a multi-lateral approach we would participate through the Treasury Department with cooperation and assistance with the State Department. It has 15 bipartisan cosponsors already, and it would utilize a trust fund with the fiduciary responsibility placed in the World Bank.

The third is a bilateral authorization program involving the State and USAID, and I will come back to those two bills briefly.

The fourth bill is a Rural Equity Payment Index Reform Act, and I had a chance to briefly mention that in a 1 minute address several hours ago. This bill will address a significant differential and reimbursement levels to urban and rural health care providers. The formulas used by Medicare programs to reimburse health care providers for beneficiaries' medical care, are not accurately measuring the cost of the providing services and are reimbursing physicians and other health care providers in a manner that disadvantages rural providers and, therefore, rural citizens.

Many rural communities have had great difficulty retaining physicians and other skilled health care professionals. Recruitment difficulties for primary and tertiary care remain more severe in areas with lower costs of living indices. It makes little sense, therefore, to pay physicians less in lower costs of living areas when these areas usually have the physician shortages.

The Rural Equity Payment Index Reform Act will lessen the disparity which currently exists between urban and rural areas. Specifically, the legislation would guarantee that we would have a gradual phase-in of a floor of 1.000 for the Medicare physician work adjuster, thereby gradually raising all localities with a work adjuster below 1.000 to that level.

Since it would be politically impossible to lower the work adjuster levels for health care providers in urban areas, the adjustment upward to the 1.000 floor would be enacted without regard to budget neutrality agreement in the present law, thereby requiring Congress to change law to authorize an increase in program expenditures.

While Congress has attempted to correct the inequities for hospitals, it has not addressed parallel problems with the physician component of our country's rural health infrastructure.

The Benefits Improvement and Protection Act of 2000 addressed inadequate payment for Medicare+Choice organizations, and took steps to stabilize and improve rural hospital payment. Nothing substantive in the legislation, however, addressed the underlying issues of inadequate reimbursement of the costs of providing physician services under Medicare Part B.

According to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, "physician work" is the amount of time, skill and intensity a physician puts into a patient visit. Physicians and other health care providers in rural areas put in as much or even more time, skill and intensity into a patient visit as do physicians in urban areas. Yet, rural physicians are paid less for their work under the Medicare program than those who practice in urban areas! This is not only unfair, but discriminatory against rural areas!

The amount Medicare spends on its beneficiaries varies substantially across the country, far more than can be accounted for by differences in the cost of living or differences in health status. Since beneficiaries and others pay into the program on the basis of income and wages and beneficiaries pay the same premium for Part B services, the geographic disparity results in substantial cross-subsidies from people living in low payment states with conservative practice styles or beneficiary preferences to people living in higher payment states with aggressive practice styles or beneficiary preferences. Physician work should be valued equally, irrespective of the geographic location of the physician.

The work geographic practice costs index for Nebraska is currently 0.949. According to this Member's calculations, establishing a floor of 1.000 would translate into a \$7,562,772 annual increase in Medicare payments to Nebraska physicians. We have information of the current index levels for other states that we can make available to interested Members.

Mr. Speaker, this Member urges his colleagues to support the Rural Equity Payment Index Reform Act.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to the Afghanistan bills, the two that I have introduced, I would say it is important that Members understand that as Afghanistan moves towards developing a new government, it is important for the U.S. to provide incentives for the people of Afghanistan to create a new national government which will move towards increased stability in the region.

I would like to thank the distinguished Members from both sides of the aisle who have agreed to serve as original co-sponsors of the measure, and, in particular, the distinguished