

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

gentlelady from North Carolina (Mrs. CLAYTON). Her commitment to assistant people in the U.S. and the rest of the world feed themselves through the Farmer-to-Farmer program and other technical education programs will truly be missed in this Body during the next Congress.

Mr. Speaker a very special note of appreciation is extended to Dr. Fred Starr of the School for Advanced International Studies of Johns Hopkins University for the concepts that undergird this legislation and for his generous amount of time and advice to this member and my staff Alicia O'Donnell, as we drafted this legislation. The distinguished Dr. Starr first explained his views and proposal at an Aspen institute breakfast sponsored by the distinguished former senator from Iowa, Rich Clark.

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One important incentive which the U.S. can extend is assistance to address one of its most immediate needs, the need to rebuild Afghanistan's capability to feed itself.

Indeed, nearly all of the indigenous tools for food production and rural development in the Afghanistan area have been destroyed. The people of Afghanistan, necessarily, have eaten their seed stocks and most have slaughtered all of their breeding livestock to meet their immediate food requirements. Additionally, over 20 years of civil war and political unrest in Afghanistan have resulted in the destruction of the country's limited basic irrigation systems.

Unfortunately, the food production capabilities in the mountainous regions of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Pakistan have reached abject levels, too, thus results in a regional crisis.

Mr. Speaker, the Afghanistan and Central Asia Republics Sustainable Food Production Trust Fund Act that I have introduced directs the Secretary of the Treasury to enter into negotiations for the creation of a multilateral global trust fund to address the food production crisis in Afghanistan and the surrounding Central Asian Republics. Through the trust fund, non-governmental organizations, working in conjunction with local and regional entities, would receive grants to conduct food production in rural development projects, including microenterprise loan programs, in Afghanistan and in the impoverished mountainous regions of the countries I previously mentioned.

Upon the creation of the trust fund, the NGOs would be immediately eligible to receive grants to execute projects in the countries of the Central Asian Republics. This is a model laid out for us by Dr. Fred Starr, a very distinguished member of SAIS at Johns Hopkins University, in a breakfast for the Aspen Institute held in this Capitol building several months ago.

In order to provide the important incentive during critical stages of state-

building, Afghanistan would not be eligible for programming until the Secretary of State certifies that the people of Afghanistan have made substantial progress towards creating a national government which meets four criteria: one, has diverse ethnic and religious representation; two, does not sponsor terrorism or harbor terrorists; three, demonstrates a strong commitment to eliminating poppy production use for opium production; and, four, meets internationally recognized human rights standards.

Mr. Speaker, helping the people in the region feed themselves is not only benefits which we are creating for them, it is important to us and to other countries. It would provide an opportunity to build good will in a region which has been neglected by U.S. policymakers and U.S. assistance programs. We cannot leave a vacuum there like the one that was left behind after the Soviets were expelled from Afghanistan.

U.S. leadership, in creating a long-term trust fund, can be a critical step towards rebuilding confidence in the USA. When funds from public and private sources are gathered and distributed through a multilateral mechanism, it becomes much more difficult for governments in the region to dismiss the projects as ephemeral U.S. foreign policy initiatives. Additionally, providing programming funds for the Central Asian Republics and not solely to Afghanistan, which will certainly become the recipient of massive bilateral and multilateral human assistance programs, will further demonstrate the U.S. commitment to the entire region.

Mr. Speaker, I hope my colleagues will look at this legislation. I think it begins the process of seeking a long-term solution to the region's dire food production challenges; and, furthermore, it is a real incentive for them to move the kind of government which will bring peace and stability to the region.

Mr. Speaker, this Member would note that the Afghanistan and Central Asian Republics Sustainable Food Production Trust Fund is not intended to replace similar bilateral projects which USAID has begun to conduct in the region. Furthermore, the trust fund is not intended to supplant the very necessary emergency food assistance programs in Afghanistan and the surrounding Central Asian Republics.

Mr. Speaker, it is critical that the U.S. and the rest of the global community begin to seek long-term solutions to the region's dire food production challenges. Through the creation of the Afghanistan and Central Asian Republics Sustainable Food Production Trust Fund, the U.S. can take an important step toward that end.

INDIAN TRUST MANAGEMENT REFORM

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SIMPSON). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PALLONE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, the U.S. Government has repeatedly committed to a trustee relationship with the American Indian nations. Defined by treaties, statutes, and interpreted by the courts, the trust relationship requires the Federal Government to exercise the highest degree of care with tribal and Indian lands and resources.

At first, the Federal trust responsibility served to protect tribal lands and tribal communities from intrusion. However, in a push to acquire tribal lands and turn Indians into farmers, the Federal Government imposed reservation allotment programs pursuant to the General Allotment Act of 1887. Under these policies, the selling and leasing of allotted lands and inherited interests became primary functions of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Tribes lost 90 million acres and much of the remaining 54 million acres was opened to non-Indian use by lease. In sum, the Federal Government took the trust responsibility for Indian land upon itself in order to gain the benefit of vast tribal lands and resources that were guaranteed by treaty, executive order, and agreements for exclusive use by the tribes.

It is widely known, Mr. Speaker, that the BIA grossly mismanaged and squandered billions of dollars worth of resources that should have gone to the benefit of often impoverished American Indians. Today, the Secretary of the Interior is faced by a mandate from Congress to clean up the accounting and management of the Indian trust funds, and by a lawsuit alleging a great failure by the Secretary's trust responsibility for Indian lands. In response, the Secretary has proposed a plan to create a new Bureau of Indian Trust Asset Management and remove the trust functions from the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Mr. Speaker, in my opinion, this proposal will profoundly affect the BIA's management of 54 million acres of Indian lands, the administration of trust funds derived from those lands, and nearly every aspect of economic development, agriculture, and land management within Indian country.

I am greatly concerned that this plan is repeating the failure of the many trust reform efforts of the past. Recently, 193 Indian tribes unanimously adopted a resolution opposing this reorganization and transfer of the responsibilities of the BIA. I strongly believe that this reorganization effort cannot go forward until the Department consults with Indian tribes in the development of a business processes plan for trust reform, a clear plan for performing the basic trust functions of accounting, collections, recordkeeping inspections enforcement and resource management. The plan must include policies, procedures and controls.

The fundamental and consistent criticism of the Department's trust reform efforts over the last decade has been the failure to develop a plan for these