

HONORING DR. SALVATOR ALTCHÉK

Mr. DODD. Mr. President, I rise today to pay tribute to Dr. Salvator Altchék, the beloved “\$5 doctor” of Brooklyn, NY, who passed away last month at the age of 92. I ask unanimous consent to print in the RECORD the beautiful obituary commemorating the life of Dr. Altchék written by Douglas Martin of the New York Times.

Dr. Altchék was warmly known as “the \$5 doctor” because he spent virtually his entire 67-year career treating anyone who showed up at his basement office in a working class section of Brooklyn Heights, charging them little or nothing for his services.

Despite treating thousands of people, and delivering thousands of babies, most people never heard of Dr. Altchék. That’s because he sought neither fame nor fortune. His only goal in life was to help as many people as possible. In so doing, he touched the lives of so many individuals and so many families. He was truly an American treasure.

I leave it to the words of Douglas Martin’s obituary to tell the story of Dr. Salvator Altchék, whose lifetime of selfless devotion to helping strangers will continue to serve as an inspiration to us all. I urge all of my colleagues to read this special tribute to a very, very special American.

There being no objection, the article was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From the New York Times, Sept. 15, 2002]

SALVATOR ALTCHÉK, “THE \$5 DOCTOR” OF
BROOKLYN, DIES AT 92
(By Douglas Martin)

Salvator Altchék, known for 67 years as the \$5 doctor to the melting pot of Brooklyn, especially the poorer residents of affluent Brooklyn Heights, died on Tuesday. He was 92.

He continued to work until two months ago, but gave up house calls five years ago. He delivered thousands of babies and generally attended to the health needs of anyone who showed up at his basement office in the Joralemon Street row house in the Heights where he lived, charging \$5 or \$10 when he charged at all. The office, with its faded wallpaper of Parisian scenes, cracked leather furniture and antique medical devices, had not changed much since Jimmy Rios got his first penicillin shot there half a century ago.

“You could walk into his office and he could tell you what you had before you sat down,” Mr. Rios said.

Dr. Altchék often made his house calls on foot, carrying his black medical bag. He treated the poorest people, angering his wife by sending one away with his own winter coat. He welcomed longshoremen and lawyers, store owners and streetwalkers. One patient insisted on always paying him \$100 to make up for some of those who could not pay at all.

A few years ago, a homeless man knocked on his door and said he had walked all the way from Long Island to have a wounded finger treated. He had last seen the doctor as a toddler growing up in Brooklyn Heights more than 50 years before.

The doctor sometimes greeted 70-year-olds he had delivered. While it is unclear whether

he was the oldest and longest-working physician in the city, he was very likely the only one nicknamed “the \$5 doctor.” When his practice opened, he treated Arab-Americans around Atlantic Avenue and was the favored doctor of the Puerto Ricans who began to live in the row houses of Columbia Place, near the waterfront, in the 1930’s.

“He wasn’t out to make money; he was out to help people,” said Sara Mercado, whose daughter was delivered by Dr. Altchék. People in her family were among his first patients.

Ramon Colon, in his book about a Puerto Rican leader, “Carlos Tapia: A Puerto Rican Hero in New York” (Vantage, 1976), wrote:

“He is a physician who treated the poor and never asked for money from the oppressed community. They paid when they had it, and he treated them as though they were Park Avenue residents.”

Salvator Altchék was born in 1910 in Salonika, then part of the Turkish Ottoman Empire, now part of Greece. As Sephardic Jews, with roots long ago in Spain, the Altchéks spoke Ladino, a form of Spanish spoken by Sephardim that dates back to the 15th century.

The family became part of New York’s ethnic rainbow when his father, David, who spoke a half-dozen additional languages, brought the family to the city in 1914, in steerage. They lived at first on the Lower East Side, but moved to Spanish Harlem, where they felt more comfortable with Spanish-speaking people.

Dr. Altchék’s father took a variety of jobs, including selling fudge at Macy’s. But as a professional fermentation engineer, his main income, even during Prohibition, came from the ouzo, cherry brandy and wine he discreetly made and sold.

Salvator Altchék and his seven brothers and sisters made deliveries. In a favorite family story, he delivered wine to a buyer who admired it and speculated on the vintage.

“That’s fresh,” the boy chirped. “He just made it.”

He graduated from Columbia and attended New York Medical College, then in Manhattan and now in Westchester County. Emanuel Altchék, the oldest brother and the first of three of the brothers to graduate from medical school, paid Salvator’s tuition. Salvator, in turn, paid his brother Victor’s way.

Salvator Altchék worked in Prospect Heights Hospital, long since closed. But he decided that he wanted his own practice. For more than half a century, he began his workday at 8 a.m., took a half-hour off for dinner at 5 p.m. and closed the office door at 8. He then made house calls, often until midnight.

He knew everyone, and everyone knew him. Walking down a street, he would recognize gay lovers, Mafia soldiers and prominent lawyers. He often greeted someone by grabbing his hand and taking his pulse. His passion for preventive medicine surpassed his tact.

“Hello, dear, you’re looking well,” he would say to a patient. “You put on a little weight, didn’t you?”

When his wife, Blanche, died 32 years ago, he fell into a depression. His sister Stella Shapiro heard him advise a patient to find another doctor. But he gradually recovered by throwing himself into his work.

He never remarried and was especially proud of the tall linden tree in front of his house, which he dedicated to his wife. He built a bench around it that neighbors and strollers could use.

In addition to his brother Victor and sister Stella, both of Manhattan, he is survived by his daughters, Susan Aroldi of Saddle River, N.J., and Phyllis Sanguinetti of Buenos

Aires; four grandchildren; and five great-grandchildren.

Dr. Altchék was a constant personality in a neighborhood that changed many times, from proper society enclave to wartime boardinghouse district to artistic bohemia to haven for young professionals. When Truman Capote, then a Brooklyn Heights resident, invited him to his famed Black and White Ball in 1966, the doctor did not know who Capote was until he finally recalled his face from the steam bath of the St. George Hotel, Caren Pauley, a niece, said.

Once when he was held up at gunpoint, Dr. Altchék said he could not give the would-be robber any money because he had a date with an attractive woman, Ms. Pauley recalled. The robber, recognizing him, reached into his pocket and gave him \$10.

Dr. Ozgun Tasdemir, a physician who immigrated from Turkey, made Turkish candy for him, having noticed his cache of Turkish desserts in the office refrigerator. She said he brought the latest literature on her ailment to share with her.

Dr. Altchék stopped making house calls only when he could no longer walk up steps easily. He did not renew his malpractice insurance when it expired in July. He began calling up other doctors, asking them to take his patients who had no insurance.

His brother Victor said that Dr. Altchék had correctly diagnosed the abdominal condition that led to his own death. His last spoken thought was to remember that he owed a patient a medical report.

NATIONAL 4-H YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM WEEK

Mr. DEWINE. Mr. President, I rise today, along with my friend and colleague from Oklahoma, Senator INHOFE, to pay tribute to 4-H, one of the strongest youth organizations in the country. I am proud to be a cosponsor of the legislation that Senator INHOFE introduced recently to designate October 6, 2002, through October 12, 2002, as “National 4-H Youth Development Program Week.”

4-H began in Clark County, OH. Just minutes away from where I grew up. In 1902, a century ago this year, A.B. Graham established a “Boys’ and Girls’ Agricultural Club.” There were approximately 85 children who attended that first meeting in the basement of the Clark County Courthouse in Springfield, OH. This was the start of what would be called a “4-H Club” within a few years. The first projects included food preservation, gardening and beginning agriculture.

4-H has grown from its 85 original members to approximately 300,000 in Ohio and over 6.8 million nationwide. One out of every six people in Ohio has been or is currently involved with 4-H youth development programs either as a member, parent, volunteer, or donor. The project selection has also grown from the original three to over 200. A sampling of today’s projects include health, family life, photography, aerospace science, bicycles, natural resources, safety, horticulture and nutrition.

We need organizations, like 4-H, to help guide our next generation of agriculturists, teachers, and even elected officials toward a better tomorrow. I

also am proud to say, that my wife, Fran, and I have had children go through the 4-H program for 24 straight years now, in fact, last year was our eighth and youngest child Anna's first year in 4-H.

4-H clubs have expanded from rural to urban areas, where they provide a new group of kids with essential leadership skills and community service involvement. National 4-H conferences have even become platforms for presidents and other national officials to voice their ideas for agriculture and other policies.

Although today's 4-H organization may be larger than the original 100 members and our communication has increased from town meetings to Internet chat rooms, the organization's principles of Head, Heart, Hands, and Health remain the same. Without question, the lessons and skills 4-H members learn will last a lifetime.

I am pleased to report that in Ohio, 4-H members, Nationwide Insurance, and the Ohio Farm Bureau have teamed together to create a brand new 4-H Center on the campus of The Ohio State University. The groundbreaking ceremony occurred just last month. This new Center will provide research, teaching resources, and service opportunities for youth, adult volunteers, and community organizations. The development of this Center is a result of partnerships, one of the many skills our youth learn through 4-H.

In closing, I take this opportunity to challenge other Senators to become involved in 4-H either as a parent or volunteer. I guarantee it will be one of the most rewarding experiences of their lives.

Mr. FITZGERALD. Mr. President, I rise today to recognize the week of October 6 as National 4-H Youth Development Program Week.

The need to provide a quality education and opportunities for our youth is ever-present. In order to ensure that our country continues to progress, we must encourage our youth to take active roles in their schools and their communities.

One hundred years ago, groups of concerned community members organized boys' and girls' agricultural clubs to provide better agricultural education to young people. These clubs adopted a model of learning by doing, and their popularity continued to grow. By addressing the needs of the local community, these small boys and girls clubs rapidly evolved into the National 4-H Program that now can be found in communities across America.

Today, 7 million youth and 50 million 4-H alumni participate in over 1,000 4-H programs, ranging from robotics and biotechnology to skateboarding and agriculture. These programs provide opportunities for youth to participate in innovative programs through which they can develop valuable, lifelong skills.

During my tenure as a U.S. Senator, I have enjoyed meeting with 4-H lead-

ers and members throughout the State of Illinois, and have seen first-hand how the 4-H program has changed the lives of our young people. I have also appreciated the extraordinary dedication that 4-H leaders bring to their clubs.

It was with pride that I cosponsored the resolution submitted by Senator INHOFE and Senator STABENOW declaring the week of October 6 as "National 4-H Youth Development Program Week." I hope that the 4-H program will build on the successes of the last one hundred years and hold true to the 4-H motto "to make the best better" in the years to come.

TRIBUTE TO ELECTION JUDGES

Mr. DAYTON. Mr. President, I am pleased today to pay tribute to those Americans who play a very special role in our democracy, the citizens who volunteer to serve as election judges. They work at the polls on Election Day, safeguarding our most precious right as Americans, the right to choose our leaders whom we then trust to govern, legislate on our behalf, and protect our rights and freedoms. Having received training in election laws and rules, judges open and close the polls, making a formidable commitment of time, energy, and stamina to work all day, often from before dawn until after dark. Some judges must promise to remain inside the polling place all day. They distribute ballots, tend to ballot boxes, count ballots, strictly adhering to prescribed procedures to ensure secrecy and accuracy of election materials. The judges process absentee ballots, help voters who require assistance, register new voters, and make certain that only qualified voters are permitted to vote. Recent history has taught us, all too dramatically, how important this process of validation is.

To undertake this form of volunteer service is truly to exercise one's civic responsibility while also facilitating that right and duty for one's fellow citizens. While voters with strong party interests might be drawn to the position, a judge's job is not to influence voters. To be an election judge is to be a citizen-activist on a very basic, very human level. The activities of a judge, although routine, figure among the most rewarding and meaningful that an ordinary citizen can perform. Older Americans, especially retirees, regard it as a welcome way to keep in touch with what's happening in the broader community and to connect with their neighbors.

Election judges are people of character and dedication. The official functions they pledge to perform are honorable and indispensable to our society. On Election Day, November 5th, many thousands of fine Americans will invest their time by fulfilling the role of election judge. We are most fortunate to have these conscientious citizens. I am proud to express my appreciation for their valuable service which makes our form of government work.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

HEALTH CARE HERO

• Mr. SMITH of Oregon. Mr. President, today I rise to salute Terry O. Finklein, a true healthcare and community hero for Oregon. Terry is the chief executive officer of Columbia Memorial Hospital in Astoria, OR. Columbia Memorial evolved from the north coast's oldest hospital in 1927, and has served the people of Clatsop County, OR for generations.

Not long ago, Columbia Memorial Hospital was on the brink of closing because of financial problems. Terry arrived at Columbia Memorial in late 1989 and promptly turned the financially troubled hospital around. When you lead a rural hospital, financial heroics are an ongoing necessity.

Over the last decade Terry's accomplishments include implementation of a \$3.5 million dollar hospital building project, successive 3-year JCAHO accreditations, creation of a Home Health Care program and the establishment of a Medicare certified hospice program.

Terry is counted among the pioneers of Oregon's statewide trauma system. He built a helipad on Columbia Memorial's front lawn, something everyone swore "couldn't be done", brought the hospital's Emergency Room and staff up to a standard of excellence that earned the hospital State designation as a Level III Trauma Center, and doubled the size of the ER.

Last year, Terry's community lost the services of five physicians in one week with the closure of a clinic. As most of my colleagues from rural States know, physician recruitment in rural communities is tough. So is the clinic business. In order to ensure that the residents of Clatsop County had access to stable health care, Terry took Columbia Memorial into the non-profit clinic business. He implemented the Columbia Memorial Hospital Women's Center, which is now staffed by three excellent physicians and a certified nurse midwife.

Statistically, Clatsop County's children are an at-risk population. Terry decided to tackle this issue at its roots by administering the Healthy Families program of Clatsop County. This program offers at-risk babies and parents a "how to" helping hand with regular home visits and access to other agencies as needed.

In Clatsop County, 45 percent of the population has incomes at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level. Combine that with a shortage of physicians, and access to health care becomes a major issue. About a year ago, Terry envisioned a federally funded clinic. "It can't be done," folks said. This time Terry went directly to his community partners for support. He received dozens of letters of support. He funded and implemented research and a grant proposal. He spent, and still spends, hours on project implementation.