

In addition to being an effective political lobbyist for progressive politicians, Rascón's achievements extend from being a once active water board member to generous community provider. From 1997 to 2001, he served as a Board Director for the Metropolitan Water District MWD in southern California. During his position as a member of the board, he worked to ensure that everyone in Los Angeles County have safe drinking water. He served important roles in the MWD, such as being Vice Chairman of the Subcommittee on Organization and Personnel and an active member of the MWD's Budget and Finance and Legal and Claims committees.

As an active leader in his community, Mr. Rascón is involved in numerous charitable and educational activities in Los Angeles County. By collaborating with other prominent labor organizations, his LIUNA Local 300 has helped raise over \$120,000 in scholarship funding for the children of southern California union members.

Mr. Sergio Rascón is an advocate for every working American in the United States. I am honored to recognize his illustrious career of exceptional and tireless leadership during this year's Cinco de Mayo week in the Latino community. May his legacy continue to live forever.

#### INTRODUCTION OF THE SMALL BUSINESS HEALTH FAIRNESS ACT OF 2004

##### HON. JOHN A. BOEHNER

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Wednesday, May 5, 2004*

Mr. BOEHNER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to join my colleague, SAM JOHNSON, in introducing the "Small Business Health Fairness Act of 2004."

I have long felt that the most pressing crisis we face in health care today is the number of uninsured Americans, which currently stands at more than 41 million. And the problem is not going away. With health care costs continuing to rise sharply across the country, more and more employers and workers are sharing the burden of increased premiums. Health care costs rose by 14 percent in 2003, and surveys project another increase of 13 percent this year. As costs escalate, the ranks of the uninsured will increase as well.

Today we introduce the "Small Business Health Fairness Act of 2004," which represents a bipartisan solution to this problem. The bill gives small businesses the opportunity to band together through bona fide trade associations and purchase quality health care for their workers at a lower cost.

The bipartisan bill would increase small businesses' bargaining power with health care providers, give them freedom from costly state-mandated benefit packages, and lower their overhead costs by as much as 30 percent—benefits that many large corporations like GM and UPS and many unions already enjoy because of their larger economies of scale.

President Bush addressed this point directly last year during a speech at the Women's Entrepreneurship Summit, where he said, "Small businesses will be able to pool together and spread their risk across a large employee

base. It makes no sense in America to isolate small businesses as little health care islands unto themselves. We must have association health plans." The President is right, and we should help level this playing field so that small businesses can offer quality coverage to their workers.

Importantly, the bill addresses both the access and cost issues at the heart of the health care reform debate, giving uninsured working families new hope for a solution that can give them access to quality health care. Small businesses in most states are stuck with disproportionately high costs because they have to choose from fewer than five providers, so AHPs offer them a new option for them to choose from. By pooling their resources and increasing their bargaining power, AHPs will help small businesses reduce their health insurance costs. Most importantly, AHPs will expand access to quality health care for the people for whom it is currently out of reach: uninsured working families.

I urge my colleagues to join Mr. JOHNSON, Mrs. VELÁZQUEZ, Mr. DOOLEY, Mr. BURNS and I in this effort, and to cosponsor this important legislation.

#### INTRODUCTION OF THE SMALL BUSINESS HEALTH FAIRNESS ACT OF 2004

##### HON. SAM JOHNSON

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Wednesday, May 5, 2004*

Mr. SAM JOHNSON of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce the "Small Business Health Fairness Act of 2004."

Today we introduce an important component of the Bush administration agenda—the "Small Business Health Fairness Act"—to allow the establishment of certified, federal, association health plans (AHPs).

AHPs will significantly expand access to health coverage for uninsured Americans by: (1) Increasing small businesses' bargaining power with health care providers, and (2) Giving employers freedom from costly state-mandated benefit packages. As such, AHPs will increase the number of insured Americans by up to 8 million people. According to figures released by the U.S. census bureau, one in seven Americans lacks health insurance.

You might ask, just who are these uninsured?

Well . . . they are working people who simply don't have access to insurance, can't afford it, or their employer can't afford to participate in a plan for them. Sixty percent—or 24 million—of uninsured Americans work in small businesses. Some of these people are offered insurance and turn it down because they can't pick up their part of the tab. According to the same census report, the increase in the number of uninsured comes solely from declining coverage in the small employer market. And there is no sign that the trend will reverse, or even slow. Health insurance costs are still rising and many small employers are forced to drop health coverage, while some cannot offer it in the first place.

The cost-saving benefits of AHPs would help the small employers of Main Street access coverage at a more affordable price. Let's face the facts. Costs are rising, busi-

nesses are dropping coverage and more people are left uninsured. Congress must address the uninsured problem and move forward with increasing the insured through Association Health Plans. It's the least Congress can do to ensure that the American people will receive better health care at a more reasonable price.

I urge my colleagues to cosponsor this important legislation.

#### COMMENDING FREMONT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

##### HON. BOB BEAUPREZ

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Wednesday, May 5, 2004*

Mr. BEAUPREZ. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to commend Fremont Elementary, a school located back home in my Colorado district, for displaying the kind of academic excellence that is to be recognized at a national level.

Fremont recently received word that they are one of the top three finalists for the 21st Century School of Distinction Award. Over 1,200 schools nationwide applied for this distinction. To be a finalist is an amazing honor for them.

The award is open to all public, private, charter and parochial schools. There are ten different categories of merit. Fremont is in the "Technology Implementation" category. Schools in this category have shown sensible improvement in the implementation of technology in at least one school program or the curriculum itself.

The review board will soon be making a visit to the remaining three schools and will make their final decision pending that visit. The awards program will conclude with a national awards ceremony in June. Also, the winner will be highlighted in a future issue of "Scholastic Administrator".

Recently, I had the honor of being able to read to the students at Fremont during their Celebrity Read Week. It was a pleasure to be in the presence of such great and enthusiastic young minds.

I am continually impressed with this school's administration and their dedication to educating these young leaders of tomorrow. The school and its staff raise the bar of academic expectations and set an example for all elementary schools, in and out of my district, to follow. I am proud to live in the same district as a school that exemplifies such superior academic programs.

I would like to wish the best of luck to Fremont Elementary with this award and with all future endeavors. This educational institution has shown amazing academic excellence and I would like to congratulate them for the distinction this has earned them.

#### IN RECOGNITION OF BROWARD COUNTY, FL

##### HON. E. CLAY SHAW, JR.

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Wednesday, May 5, 2004*

Mr. SHAW. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in recognition of two programs in Broward County, Florida, that were awarded Acts of Caring

Awards by the National Association of Counties on April 21, 2004. Broward County's Water Matters Program and Library Friends Tutoring Program were both recognized by the National Association of Counties for their outstanding performance and service to the community.

The Water Matters Program of Broward County was designed to educate residents in the Everglades area on the importance of water conservation and environmental responsibility. Broward County educates their citizens on environmental awareness in several different ways, including public service announcements and the development of an informational web page. The county also implemented Water Matters Day to further support the program, including hands-on activities for those who attend. The program is supported by a large number of volunteers, allowing it to exist on a very small budget.

The North Regional/BCC Library Friends Tutoring Program was designed to create intergenerational relationships through education. Volunteer tutors who participate in the program vary in age from high school students to senior citizens. The diligent work of this program has impacted over 400 children since 1995 and also operates on a minimal budget.

Mr. Speaker, we owe a debt of gratitude to those citizens of Broward County who seek to improve the environment as well as educate the youth of our nation through volunteer tutoring services. Broward County best exemplifies a county government that has achieved its full potential, setting an example for other county governments around the nation.

#### IN SUPPORT OF THE NATIONAL VISION STRATEGY

**HON. ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN**

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Wednesday, May 5, 2004*

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, as a Co-Chair of the Congressional Vision Caucus, I would like to recognize May as Healthy Vision Month, and to discuss the important recommendations of the Vision Problems Action Plan, A National Public Health Strategy as a way to prevent blindness and vision loss.

Good vision is critical to conducting activities of daily living, is a portal for language, and affects developmental learning, communicating, working, and quality of life.

Unfortunately, a large number of people are at risk for losing their vision. More than 80 million Americans have a potentially blinding eye disease, 3 million have low vision, 1.1 million are legally blind, and an additional 200,000 are more severely visually impaired. Despite the fact that half of all blindness can be prevented, far too many people do not access the care they need. If we do not take action, the number of blind and visually impaired individuals will double by 2030.

Awareness, early diagnosis and prevention are crucial for all. Healthy Vision Month, a component of Healthy People 2010, is a national eye health campaign to raise awareness about the various conditions that can affect eyesight and cause vision loss.

This week, a coalition of leading eye health experts, including Prevent Blindness America,

the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Lighthouse International, and the American Academy of Ophthalmology, released the Vision Problems Action Plan, A National Public Health Strategy. This important document will provide our nation with a framework for preventing vision loss.

This groundbreaking study recommends that, in order to reduce the occurrence of vision loss and its accompanying disabilities, our nation must concentrate our efforts three priority areas: prevention/public health, access to care and treatment including rehabilitation, and research.

Our public health and prevention campaign must ensure that vision programs at the National Eye Institute (NEI) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have the resources they need to improve communication and education campaigns, increase surveillance, epidemiology and prevention research; and implement appropriate programs, policies and systems changes.

In order to ensure access to and availability of treatment and rehabilitation services for individuals with vision loss, we must support programs at the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services (CMS) and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) that remove barriers and improve access to eye exams currently covered under Medicare, such as diabetic eye exams and glaucoma detection for high risk populations.

We must also strengthen the Medicare program to advance coverage for Medicare vision rehabilitation services as provided by orientation and mobility specialists, rehabilitation teachers and low-vision therapists including in patients homes and their environment.

Finally, we must bolster our research efforts to improve our understanding of the eye and visual system in health and disease, as well as developing the most appropriate and effective means of prevention, and access to treatment and rehabilitation.

This report provides the roadmap we need to raise awareness about vision loss, give individuals the tools they need to prevent it, and give hope to the millions already suffering from vision loss that better treatments for can be found.

We would like to thank all of the organizations involved in drafting this report, including the American Academy of Ophthalmology, the American Optometric Association, the Centers For Disease Control and Prevention, Lighthouse International, the National Alliance For Eye and Vision Research, the National Eye Institute (NEI) and most importantly, Prevent Blindness America. Prevent Blindness America should be commended for spearheading this effort, for bringing together these various groups, and for its almost century-long tradition of preventing vision loss.

#### HONORING EL GRUPO FOLKLORICO ATOTONILCO

**HON. KAREN MCCARTHY**

OF MISSOURI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Wednesday, May 5, 2004*

Ms. MCCARTHY. Mr. Speaker, I proudly rise to announce a celebration to honor El Grupo

Folklorico Atotonilco, a nationally renowned traditional Mexican folk dance troupe.

On May 6, 2004, they will be celebrating 25 years of performing outstanding traditional Mexican folk dances for audiences in the greater Kansas City area. The event at the Folly Theater in Kansas City is part of a week of celebrations commemorating the 142nd anniversary of Cinco de Mayo. May 5, 1862, is the date of the famous triumph of Mexican General Ignacio Zaragoza Seguin's small, poorly armed band of 4,500 men over a well equipped French army of 6,500 soldiers, which occurred against all odds. Mexican culture and heritage is traditionally celebrated in commemoration of this historic victory for independence.

El Grupo Folklorico Atotonilco was founded in 1979, when Maria Chaurand was asked to round up some neighborhood children and teach them a dance to entertain festival goers. It was an opportunity for Chaurand to share her love of dance and Mexican culture. Since then, the dance troupe has had over 700 children learn this art, and the dance company currently boasts 85 members, ranging in age from 5 to 40 years old. El Grupo Folklorico Atotonilco is also the most highly requested dance group on the state of Missouri folk arts roster.

Dance in Mexico is considered one of the most basic artistic expressions of the culture and spirit of its people. Each region has its own unique style and each dance is performed in its distinctive costumes native to that region. An extensive repertoire, presented in lavish costumes worn by energetic dancers, makes El Grupo Folklorico Atotonilco's program an exciting and educational experience. The swing of every folkloric skirt and the bow of every sombrero represent the rich cultural heritage and unique characteristics of Mexico's 32 states.

Over their last 25 years, El Grupo Folklorico Atotonilco dancers have showcased their talents in theaters and performance halls in: Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, Nebraska, Iowa, New Mexico, Texas, Illinois, California, Spain and Mexico. The dance troupe has received numerous awards and recognition for their performances and has garnered a reputation as one of the best Mexican folk dance companies in the country. In 1997, El Grupo Folklorico Atotonilco received the honor as the "Premiere Mexican Folk Dance Company in U.S." They are the sole recipient of that honor to this day.

Maria Chaurand has come a long way from her first Cinco de Mayo fiesta 25 years ago, when she coached 16 children in the art of sharing Mexican culture through regional dance and costume. Thousands of people throughout Kansas City and around the country have been thrilled to hear the exuberant beat and see colorful performances that have graced stages in many communities. Mr. Speaker, please join me in honoring Maria Chaurand and the dancers of El Grupo Folklorico Atotonilco for carrying on the folkloric traditions of old Mexico through the pagentry of music, costume and dance for the past 25 years. Viva El Grupo Folklorico Atotonilco!