

Pennsylvania physicians paid over \$350 million in malpractice insurance premiums, which ranks them second in the Nation, nearly 10 percent of the Nation's total, despite having less than 5 percent of the Nation's physicians.

There are countless stories like these, not only in my district, but across this country. In 2002, an American Medical Association analysis found that 12 States were in crisis. That number has now reached 19, and they include Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, West Virginia, Ohio, Kentucky, North Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Mississippi, Arkansas, Missouri, Illinois, Texas, Wyoming, Nevada, Oregon and Washington. Together, these States represent almost half the population of the entire country.

America's medical liability system is broken. Jury awards are a big part of that problem. In 2002, 52 percent of all awards were for \$1 million or more. Today that average is over \$3.5 million. In the city of Philadelphia, juries awarded more than the entire State of California, which is outrageous. If left unrestrained, these jury awards will continue to spiral out of control.

One of the most serious consequences of the medical malpractice crisis is patients' access to care. Physicians are being forced to limit services, retire early or move to other States where medical malpractice reform has taken place.

During my tour, I met an ear, nose and throat physician who is trying to recruit another doctor for his practice. He told me that when he goes to these conferences and speaks to the residents or other physicians, as soon as they hear he is from Pennsylvania, they say, "No way." In fact, last year not a single orthopedic resident that was trained in Pennsylvania stayed in Pennsylvania to practice medicine due to the medical malpractice situation in our State.

Not just doctors and hospitals pay for this medical malpractice insurance, but all patients pay the escalating costs of this crisis. Health and Human Services estimates that medical liability costs add \$60 billion to \$108 billion to the total cost of health care each year, \$47 billion annually to what the Federal Government pays for Medicare, Medicaid, VA and health care for Federal employees.

Costs are further increased by additional unnecessary tests and treatments that are performed by physicians practicing defensive medicine, trying to avoid being sued.

The solution to all of this is reform. The House passed, as I said, three times, medical liability reform, proposing a cap of \$250,000 on noneconomic damages. The HEALTH Act, H.R. 5, of which I am a cosponsor, which we passed in the spring, would still allow for unlimited economic damages, while also establishing a reasonable limit on the pain and suffering awards.

I salute the President for bringing this to the forefront in his State of the

Union message and as he traveled the country the past couple of days talking about the need for medical malpractice reform in this country. I would also urge the other body to move this important legislation, so that we can give the relief needed, the much-needed relief, to our health care system.

JUSTICE AND EQUITY FOR MEMBERS OF THE UNITED STATES MERCHANT MARINE

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

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to ask the Congress to correct an injustice that has been inflicted upon a group of World War II veterans, the World War II United States Merchant Mariners.

World War II Merchant Mariners suffered the highest casualty rate of any of the branches of services while they delivered troops, tanks, food, airplanes, fuel and other needed supplies to every theater of the war. Compared to the large number of men and women serving in World War II, the numbers of Merchant Mariners were small, but their chance of dying during service was extremely high. Enemy forces sank over 800 ships between 1941 and 1944 alone.

Unfortunately, this group of brave men were denied their rights under the GI Bill of Rights which Congress enacted in 1945. All those who served in the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force or Coast Guard were recipients of benefits under the GI Bill. The United States Merchant Marine was not included.

Mr. Speaker, the Merchant Marine became the forgotten service. For four decades, no effort was made to recognize the contribution made by this branch of the Armed Forces. The fact that merchant seamen had borne arms during wartime in the defense of their country did not seem to matter.

No legislation to benefit merchant seamen was passed by Congress until 1988 when the Seaman Acts of 1988 finally granted them the status of veteran and a "watered down" GI Bill of Rights. Some portions of the GI Bill have never been made available to veterans of the Merchant Marine.

While it is impossible to make up for over 40 years of unpaid benefits, I propose a bill that will acknowledge the service of the veterans of the Merchant Marine and offer compensation for years and years of lost benefits. My bill, H.R. 3729, the Belated Thank You to the Merchant Mariners of World War II Act of 2004, would pay each eligible veteran a monthly benefit of \$1,000. That payment would also go to their surviving spouse.

The average age of Merchant Marine veterans is now 81. Many have outlived their savings. A monthly benefit to compensate for the loss of nearly a lifetime of ineligibility for the GI Bill

would be of comfort and would provide some measure of security for veterans of the Merchant Marine.

I owe a debt of gratitude to Ian Allison, Merchant Marine combat veteran, Co-Chairman of the Just Compensation Committee, for bringing to me the plight of the Merchant Mariners. To recognize Mr. Allison, his Co-Chairman, Henry Van Gemert, and the thousands of veterans of the United States Merchant Marine, I today introduce the Belated Thank You to the Merchant Mariners of World War II Act of 2004, today, January 27, 2004, the date of Mr. Allison's 84th birthday.

I urge my colleagues to join me in co-sponsoring this legislation. We can never make up for the years lost, but we can fix the injustice by passing H.R. 3729 as quickly as possible.

TRIBUTE TO MONTEREY CITY COUNCILWOMAN RUTH VREELAND

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

Mr. FARR. Mr. Speaker, I rise tonight in these hallowed halls of Congress to pay tribute to a colleague in public service, Monterey City Councilwoman Ruth Vreeland, killed in an automobile accident on Highway 101 in southern Monterey County just this last Sunday.

What a loss. This 68-year-old woman had the energy of 100 locomotives. Involved in everything, teacher, statewide education activist, 20-year city councilwoman, statewide League of Cities activist, Democratic Party activist, mother, member of various boards. She was always there, always prepared, and always wanting to do more.

Born in Chunking, China, she grew up in Szechwan Province where her parents worked as medical missionaries. Returning to Toronto, Canada, in 1940, and moving to San Francisco where her parents taught at the University of California, Berkeley, Ruth earned a bachelor's degree in arts and education from San Francisco State University. She also met her husband there, Dick Vreeland, and then continued on to the University of San Francisco to earn a master's degree in organizational development.

In 1956, she moved to Monterey Peninsula to teach school, and was elected to the Monterey City Council with the intention of protecting the quality of life in the city of Monterey.

"This town is more than buildings and streets; first it is people," she wrote in her campaign statement. She championed the tearing down of the waterfront buildings so that people could see the Bay where California began. She replaced the buildings with parks and recreational trails, the now highly successful Window on the Bay Project.

She served in a variety of leadership positions, including the League of California Cities Board of Directors, Institute for Local Self-Government, the 20th District Parent-Teacher Association, the Monterey Bay Task Force, Quota International, Women in Municipal Government, Friends Outside of the Monterey County, and the Overall Economic Development Committee of Monterey County.

She was also a Volunteers in Action Board Member, a Monterey City Council member since 1983, an alternate in the Monterey Bay Sanctuary Advisory Council and a former president of the Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments, the Monterey Peninsula Concert Association and the Winnie the Pooh Chapter of the Children's Home Society.

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She was involved in various organizations.

Tonight, in paying tribute, I would also like to recognize my colleague, the minority leader of the United States House of Representatives, the gentlewoman from San Francisco, California (Ms. PELOSI).

Ms. PELOSI. Mr. Speaker, I want to join our distinguished colleague, the gentleman from California (Mr. FARR), in paying tribute to Ruth Vreeland. I thank him, as one who admired her on behalf of so many who learned from her over the years, for my colleague's magnificent tribute to her, which I know he has not finished. I will not take a lot of time because I know he needs the time to put the full tribute into the RECORD.

As one who worked with her for over 25 years in the California Democratic Party, I know of her love of country. She was a true patriot. She loved our country. She loved its people. She loved its natural environment. She loved our civil liberties. She was a model citizen.

My daughter Christine, I know, would want to join with me, who worked with her on the platform committee, in expressing our sympathies to her family in saying that we will remember her with great affection, admiration, and respect.

I thank the distinguished gentleman from California (Mr. FARR) and thank him for his leadership in presenting the very, very excellent credentials of Ms. Vreeland to our colleagues.

Mr. FARR. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman from California (Ms. PELOSI) for joining us. I know her family and all her friends and people in elected government will be so touched because she was a big admirer of the gentlewoman. My colleague led the way for women in politics.

Throughout her life, many of these organizations honored her outstanding commitment and service to our Bay community with awards. The Volunteers in Action honored her community service. The Sierra Club honored her for outstanding achievement. Planned

Parenthood named her an Outstanding Woman in Politics. The Monterey Rotary named her an Outstanding Teacher. Furthermore, the Fisherman's Wharf named her the Wharf Rat of the Year in 1995. The California Democratic Party recognized her for outstanding services. J.C. Penney gave her the Golden Rule Award. And the Old Monterey Business Association recognized her for exceptional dedication. The Monterey Civic Club honored her for being a community volunteer. Finally, the Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments recognized her for 20 years of service.

As I mentioned earlier, and as you can see from this lengthy list of accomplishments, Ruth was always moving, always involved. Her friends wondered if she ever had time to sleep. She adored her family and always seemed to be on her way to visit the next child. In fact, the tragic accident that led to her death occurred as she returned from visiting one of her three daughters, Lauren, Amy and Meslissa. Among the three of them, they have seven of Ruth and Dick's grandchildren.

Ruth and Dick's home blended the elements of Ruth Vreeland's youth in China with Japanese culture that Dick Vreeland picked up in the Army.

She was also involved with various organizations including the Monterey Vista Homeowners Association, Community of Caring, League of Women Voters, American Association of University Women, California Teachers Association, Monterey Bay Teachers Association, Responsible Hospitality, California Elected Women's Association for Education and Research, Monterey Main Street Program, National Organization of Women, Old Monterey Preservation Society, Sierra Club, ACLU, State Theater Preservation Group, Monterey Civic Club, Monterey History and Art Association, American Association for Retired Persons, California Retired Teachers' Association, and the Unitarian Church.

She cooked Chinese food and raised the children to use chopsticks. A proud naturalized citizen from Canada, Vreeland also instilled civic values in her daughters. "She believed in this country because she was naturalized in it and she taught me what patriotism is," her daughter said.

Vreeland also continued to tackle the large-scale problems that had always energized her. The Sierra Club recognized her in the 1980's for fighting offshore drilling and sewage spills. She traveled to Sacramento and Washington to promote education and local government, rising to leadership roles with the Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments and the League of California Cities.

Vreeland was active in Democratic Party politics and was not afraid to bring progressive political causes to Monterey. She challenged the city in 1988 for not having enough women and minorities in management positions, and a decade later she discouraged the council from subsidizing the Boy Scouts because of its exclusionary policies toward gays.

In the months before her death, Vreeland's last big project was saving education and local government in the face of California's budget crisis, a problem epic enough to discourage even the most ardent community activist.

But not Ruth Vreeland.

America will miss her. She came to this country to do good—we are all better for it and will miss her forever.

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

(Mr. CONYERS addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

FOCUSING CONGRESS' ATTENTION ON THE BASIS FOR THE WAR IN IRAQ

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

Mr. HINCHEY. Mr. Speaker, as we begin this second session of the 108th Congress, there is a great deal of very important work that remains for us to accomplish.

Primarily, among those things that need to be done is simply this: this Congress needs to focus its attention on the basis for the war in Iraq, why we are there; why that war was carried out; and what were the basic reasons behind it.

We were told initially by the administration that there was a connection between Iraq and the attack on our country of September 11, 2001, and that there was a relationship between al Qaeda and Saddam Hussein. That has proven to be completely false.

Subsequently, this Congress was told repeatedly, even in classified briefings right here on the floor of the House of Representatives, carried out by the Secretary of Defense and others, that the reason we were going to war in Iraq was because of the fact that Iraq possessed chemical and biological weapons, so-called weapons of mass destruction. And as the President put it, Iraq constituted a deep and ongoing threat to the United States; and as Vice President CHENEY put it, Iraq constitutes an imminent threat to the United States because of these so-called weapons of mass destruction, chemical and biological weapons, which were alleged to be in Iraq in large numbers.

We have now come to learn quite clearly that that was wrong, that there were no weapons of mass destruction, no chemical or biological weapons in any significant amount held in Iraq by Saddam Hussein or by anyone else. Many of us knew that. Many of us knew that 15 months ago when this Congress voted on a resolution authorizing the administration to carry out a war in Iraq. We knew it, we said so, and we voted against that resolution.

Nevertheless, many others were taken in by what was coming out of the White House and elsewhere within the administration. And they voted for the war in Iraq, many of them, based on the belief that they were being told