

IN RECOGNITION OF JOSEPH W. NIGRO, JR.

HON. STEPHEN F. LYNCH

OF MASSACHUSETTS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, April 27, 2005

Mr. LYNCH. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in honor of a man whose professional life has been dedicated to improving the lives of working men and women in Massachusetts and across our nation.

Mr. Speaker, it is my duty to inform the Membership of the House that my dear friend, Joseph W. Nigro, Jr. is retiring from the post of General Agent of the Boston Metropolitan Building Trades Council in Boston, Massachusetts.

Mr. Speaker, Joe Nigro is a remarkable leader with a long and illustrious career in the American Labor Movement. Joe Nigro was initiated into the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Local 103 on November 21, 1960 and from the beginning he has been a shining example of dedicated service to his union, his community and his family and for these reasons is entirely worthy of Congressional recognition as well as the appreciation of this nation. Joe's personal integrity, hard work and determination illustrate the best characteristics of those who serve the working men and women of this country.

Over the last 18 years in his position as General Agent of the Boston Metropolitan Building Trades Council, Joe Nigro has made enormous contributions to the men and women of the building trades, not just in Massachusetts but across the country. Under Joe Nigro's leadership, the United States Supreme Court confirmed the legal right to use Project Labor Agreements on public projects creating job opportunities for union construction workers across the nation.

As a member of the Massachusetts State Legislature and Chair of its Commerce and Labor Committee, I witnessed Joe's passionate advocacy on behalf of working families. From securing benefits for workers who had lost their jobs, to training the next generation of America's workers, Joe has worked to ensure that the views and interests of working people are at the forefront of our state and national policy.

Mr. Speaker, Joe Nigro has also been a man committed to his community and has dedicated many hours and much energy to various charities including the South Boston Neighborhood House, the Muscular Dystrophy Association, the Boys and Girls Club of Boston, as well as the Fiske Family Inn Foundation.

On a personal note, I believe that one of Joe's greatest accomplishments has been little recognized over the years: that is, his remarkable ability to maintain "labor peace" among the building trades during times of enormous challenge within the labor movement. As the former President of the Ironworkers Union in Boston, I can assure you that this was a monumental task.

Mr. Speaker, it is my distinct honor to take the floor of the House today to join with Joe's wonderful family, friends, and brothers and sisters in the Labor Movement to thank him for his service and congratulate him on his much-deserved retirement. I hope my colleagues will join me in celebrating Joe Nigro's distinguished career and all his future endeavors.

RECOGNIZING HARLINGEN HIGH SCHOOL FOR THE 2005 INSPIRATION AWARD

HON. RUBÉN HINOJOSA

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, April 27, 2005

Mr. HINOJOSA. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to ask my colleagues to join me in congratulating Harlingen High School for being selected for one of the 2005 College Board Inspiration Awards. Harlingen High School is one of three exemplary high schools in the nation being honored for their steadfast commitment to fostering student success in some of America's most poverty-stricken communities.

Each school receives a prize of \$25,000 to use in furthering its academic goals. The Inspiration Awards recognize outstanding work in improving the academic environment and helping economically disadvantaged students achieve the promise of higher education. I would like to congratulate the superintendent, Dr. Linda Wade, the principal, Richard Renaud, the teachers, students, and entire school community for this prestigious award.

Harlingen High School is truly an inspiration for all of us who value education and academic excellence for all students. For the Hispanic community, it reaffirms our core faith in our own potential. Over 87 percent of the students at Harlingen High School are Hispanic, and many of them are bilingual. Their motto is "in relentless pursuit of student success." Harlingen High School stands firm on three major commitments it has made to the community. These are: To create a positive learning environment for all students; responsibly develop and maintain student-centered educational programs; and a commitment to making graduation the beginning of successful participation as positive and progressive citizens.

Harlingen High School has succeeded in the face of many challenges. More than half of its students participate in the free and reduced price lunch program and over 90 percent of the Hispanic students are considered to be "at risk." A number of the students are the children of migrant and seasonal farm workers, and many of these young people work in the fields themselves.

Supporting teachers, building strong community partnerships, and fostering family engagement have been the foundation for Harlingen High School's success in achieving a 75 percent college-going rate. Harlingen counselors have also made sure that students and families know where they can find the resources to help finance college. In addition to helping Harlingen families with the federal student aid process, school counselors guided Harlingen students to over \$2 million in scholarship money.

Harlingen High School has expanded access to AP courses for all of its students, and for Hispanic students, in particular. Hispanic students comprised 80 percent of the 298 students in grades 9–12 who took at least one Advanced Placement (AP) Program® examination. To prepare students for AP courses and college, Harlingen starts in 8th grade with a pre-AP Program. They couple this with an extensive Parent Involvement Program that conducts outreach meetings at different neighborhood community centers to impress upon parents the importance of helping teens prepare for college.

This is what is possible when we invest in excellence in the Hispanic community. I urge my colleagues to join me in saluting Harlingen High School for its achievement and applauding the College Board for sponsoring the Inspiration Awards. May each year be more competitive than the last.

10TH ANNIVERSARY OF SERVICE LEARNING PROGRAM AT TVI

HON. TOM UDALL

OF NEW MEXICO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, April 27, 2005

Mr. UDALL of New Mexico. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the 10th anniversary of the Service Learning Program at TVI Community College in my home state of New Mexico. Service Learning is a collaboration of academic instruction, civic engagement and work experience that complements traditional college curriculum. Classroom learning is supplemented with relevant community service followed by self-assessment through group reflection. The concept of Service Learning is not new; the innovation is in promoting it as an essential part of the higher learning experience.

Dr. Rudy Garcia started the TVI Service Learning program in 1995 with 30 local non-profit agencies and 45 students. Ten years later, over 8,000 students have participated in nearly 42,000 hours of education-based community service. Funded by grants, this initiative has achieved program sustainability by building agency partnerships to deliver unique and relevant learning experiences for students while meeting community needs. The TVI Service Learning program fosters an ethic of civic engagement, best illustrated by the 35% of students who stay on as agency volunteers after completing the required hours for their program.

Service Learning at TVI is more than just volunteerism; students translate what they have learned in the classroom into hands-on experiences that develop skills for future employment. The non-profit community agencies are mentors to the Service Learners and partners to the educators who strive to increase academic success and student retention. Local employers also benefit, as Service Learning helps build a stronger, more experienced labor pool; a college degree combined with related work experience is the key to success in today's job market.

Dr. Garcia's Service Learning program has won numerous awards, including the Community Engagement Collaboration Award and the National Bellwether Award for Best Community College Instruction Program. The Campus Compact has designated TVI a Training College for institutions interested in Service Learning, Civic Responsibility and Community Partnerships. TVI and Dr. Garcia were also selected by the Pew Partnership for Civic Change to provide their Leadership Training program.

Mr. Speaker, I have had many Service Learners in my district offices, and as a public servant I welcome every opportunity to mentor these students in community service and civic responsibility. I endeavor to provide relevant work experience, while recognizing the tremendous contribution of our Service Learning

students as they apply these leadership principles and become peer mentors and role models in our community.

GULF ISLANDS NATIONAL
SEASHORE GRANT RECOGNITION

HON. JEFF MILLER

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, April 27, 2005

Mr. MILLER of Florida. I rise today to recognize Gulf Islands National Seashore for receiving a grant from the National Park Foundation and Unilever.

Unilever's Recycling at Work competitive grants program funds enhancement projects such as seating, boardwalks, overlooks, pull-outs and educational/interpretive displays using sustainable lumber throughout the National Park System. The projects highlight the environmental leadership of the National Park Service in demonstrating how people may live more lightly on the land through the use of sustainable materials and techniques.

In Northwest Florida, Gulf Islands National Seashore is proud to be a part of this program. As a result of the generous grant, the park will construct the only accessible nature trail on the seashore. This trail will be a universal design boardwalk made of recyclable materials which will not only enhance the visitors' experience, but will also protect the fragile underbrush of the forest.

Mr. Speaker, this grant, in conjunction with the Florida National Trails Association's hard work and manpower, will greatly benefit all those who visit Northwest Florida's scenic wonders. I, along with Northwest Florida, am very appreciative of Unilever's generosity.

INTRODUCING THE MEDICARE
MENTAL HEALTH MODERNIZA-
TION ACT OF 2005

HON. FORTNEY PETE STARK

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, April 27, 2005

Mr. STARK. Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce the Medicare Mental Health Modernization Act of 2005. Medicare's mental health coverage is woefully inadequate. Instead of the standard 20 percent coinsurance payment required of beneficiaries, mental health services require a 50 percent copayment. Further, only limited community-based treatments are covered and, unlike treatment for physical illness, there is a 190-day lifetime cap on mental health hospitalization days. The bill we are introducing today eliminates this blatant mental health discrimination under Medicare and modernizes the Medicare mental health benefit to meet today's standards of care.

One in five members of our senior population displays mental difficulties that are not part of the normal aging process. In primary care settings, over a third of senior citizens demonstrate symptoms of depression and impaired social functioning. Yet only one out of every three mentally ill seniors receives the

mental health services he/she needs. Older adults also have the highest rate of suicide of any segment of our population. In addition, mental illness is the single largest diagnostic category for Medicare beneficiaries on disability. There is a critical need for effective and accessible mental health care for the Medicare population. Recent research has found a direct relationship between treating depression in older adults and improved physical functioning associated with independent living. Unfortunately, the current structure of Medicare mental health benefits is inadequate and presents multiple barriers to access of essential treatment. This bill addresses these problems.

The Medicare Mental Health Modernization Act of 2005 is a straightforward bill that improves Medicare's mental health benefits as follows:

It reduces the discriminatory co-payment for outpatient mental health services from 50 percent to the 20 percent level charged for most other Part B medical services.

It eliminates the arbitrary 190-day lifetime cap on inpatient services in psychiatric hospitals.

It improves beneficiary access to mental health services by including within Medicare a number of community-based residential and intensive outpatient mental health services that characterize today's state-of-the-art clinical practices.

It further improves access to needed mental health services by addressing the shortage of qualified mental health professionals serving older and disabled Americans in rural and other medically underserved areas by allowing state licensed marriage and family therapists and mental health counselors to provide Medicare-covered services.

Similarly, it corrects a legislative oversight that will facilitate the provision of mental health services by clinical social workers within skilled nursing facilities.

It requires the Secretary of Health and Human Services to conduct a study to examine whether the Medicare criteria to cover therapeutic services to beneficiaries with Alzheimer's and related cognitive disorders discriminates by being too restrictive.

The push for mental health parity is ongoing. We've made important strides forward for the under-65 population. Twenty-three states have already enacted full mental health parity and the Federal Employees Health Benefits Plan was improved in 2001 to assure that all federal employees and members of Congress are provided mental health parity. In April 2002, President Bush called for Congress to enact legislation to provide equivalence for private sector health insurance coverage of mental and physical conditions (though he has yet to endorse any legislation to achieve that goal).

What has been too-often missing from this overall mental health parity debate is the fact that the Medicare program continues to fail to meet the mental health needs of America's seniors and those with disabilities. That's why we've introduced the Medicare Mental Health Modernization Act. That's also why this bill has received support from numerous mental health advocacy and provider organizations including: the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill, the Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health, the American Association of

Geriatric Psychiatry, the American Psychological Association, the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, the American Mental Health Counselors Association, and the Clinical Social Work Federation.

It is past time for us to take action with regard to Medicare's inadequate mental health benefits. Over the years, Congress has updated Medicare's benefits for treatment of physical illnesses as the practice of medicine has changed. The mental health field has undergone many advances over the past several decades. Effective, research-validated interventions have been developed for many mental conditions that affect stricken beneficiaries. Most mental conditions no longer require long-term hospitalizations, and can be effectively treated in less restrictive community settings. This bill recognizes these advances in clinical treatment practices and adjusts Medicare's mental health coverage to account for them.

The Medicare Mental Health Modernization Act of 2005 removes discriminatory features from the Medicare mental health benefits and helps facilitate access to up-to-date and affordable mental health services for our elderly and disabled. I encourage my colleagues to support its passage into law.

HONORING THE CONTRIBUTIONS
OF STEVE LA MANTIA

HON. HENRY CUELLAR

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, April 27, 2005

Mr. CUELLAR. Mr. Speaker, I rise to recognize the many accomplishments of Steve La Mantia, Junior Achievement of Laredo Business Hall of Fame Laureate.

Mr. La Mantia grew up in McAllen, Texas, with his three brothers and sisters. He describes himself as having "grown up farming" on his family's farm on Mines Road. From an early age, he loved sports, and the persistence and competition that sports embody have become guiding values in his life.

He graduated from McAllen high school, where he played football, and attended college at Texas A&M, where he served as a referee. As a businessman, Mr. La Mantia has been tremendously dedicated to giving back to the educational community. Since 1991, he has been raising money for the Hispanic Scholarship Fund. In 2002, his family founded STARS: South Texas Academic Rising Scholars. STARS now provides students from the lower 22 counties of South Texas scholarship money to attend the college of their choice.

Mr. La Mantia is one of his community's most successful businessmen, working as Vice President and part owner of L&F distributors in Laredo. His work is a testament to the power of family businesses to thrive and create growth for our communities.

Mr. Steve La Mantia is a loyal Texan, a dedicated volunteer and philanthropist, and an exemplary businessman. I am happy that he has been chosen to receive the Laredo Junior Achievement Hall of Fame award, and I am proud to have had the chance to recognize him here today.