

Hamas. The Passover attack was a grotesque display of terrorism and violence, yet it was quickly defended by Hamas. Sami Abu Zuhri, the official spokesman for Hamas, stated at the time that the attack was “a natural result of the continued Israeli crimes” against Palestinians and that “our people are in a state of self-defense and they have every right to use all means to defend themselves.” It became clear to me that, without regards to the pressing needs of the Palestinian people, Hamas was ready to ignore its own cease-fire policy in favor of extremist political rhetoric that further isolate and weaken the PA and endangers the humanitarian situation of the Palestinian people. It was a chilling reminder of Hamas’ tendency to favor violence over peace and political posturing over progress, all at the expense of Palestinian people’s welfare.

The Passover bombing and the Hamas response to the bombing was a turning point in my consideration and analysis of H.R. 4681, the Palestinian Anti-Terrorism Act of 2006. I believe that a stronger message must be sent by the United States to Hamas that we will not support a government that continues to embrace terrorism. H.R. 4681 is an appropriate vehicle to send that message. The bill intensifies the pressure placed on the Hamas-led PA by not only restricting direct U.S. aid to the PA (which has already been suspended by Secretary Rice), but also restricting U.S. assistance to NGOs working in the West Bank and Gaza, subject to exceptions based on humanitarian needs. It expresses the sense of Congress that PA-controlled territories should be deemed as terrorist sanctuaries; denies visas to any PA officials or affiliated persons; and restricts the travel of any PA representative to the UN outside of a 25-mile radius of the U.N. headquarters building in New York City. Finally, the bill directs the President to prohibit international financial institutions from directly assisting a Hamas-led PA, and prohibits any U.S. officer or employee from having any official contacts with members or official representatives of Hamas.

In examining H.R. 4681 leading up to the vote, the bill had raised several significant questions for me: Is additional financial and political isolation the most effective means to induce changes to Hamas policy towards Israel? Will such noose-tightening prompt the Palestinian people to insist that Hamas change its policy or will it inadvertently lead to humanitarian crisis and civil unrest in the West Bank and Gaza? Will political and financial sanctions firmly aimed at Hamas serve to strengthen the role of Mahmoud Abbas, the moderate President of the PA or further radicalize Hamas while undermining the position of President Mahmoud Abbas? While these are difficult questions with which to wrestle, I eventually decided that H.R. 4681 sends an important and necessary message to PA that the United States will not tolerate a terrorist-controlled government’s role in obstructing the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

First, I believe H.R. 4681 provides the United States the additional leverage it needs to push Hamas toward the acceptance of Israel and the rejection of violence. The Act amends the Foreign Assistance Act (FAA) by adding a new section prohibiting direct financial transfers by the United States to the PA until the President certifies that no part of the PA is controlled by a foreign terrorist organization (FTO) designated by the United States

and Europe and no member of an FTO serves in a senior policy making position in the PA, the PA has publicly acknowledged Israel’s right to exist and recommitted itself to previous agreements and understandings with Israel and the United States, and the PA has taken effective steps and made progress toward a number of objectives including purging its security services of individuals with ties to terrorists, dismantling terrorist infrastructure, and halting anti-Israeli incitement. I believe these are reasonable and necessary benchmarks that Hamas must make in order to demonstrate its capability to be a responsible government.

Furthermore, I believe the bill’s humanitarian provisions address my concern that the increased sanctions advocated by the legislation would unnecessarily hurt the Palestinian people. Make no mistake, I do not believe that the Palestinian people should be punished for exercising their right to elect the representatives of their choice. In March 2005, Hamas accepted a temporary cease-fire with Israel in exchange for Abbas’ agreement to allow the group into PA’s electoral system. Throughout the process, the Bush Administration stood on the sidelines, assuming that Hamas’ political participation would either transform the group or marginalize it. Indeed, Secretary Rice stated last fall that the United States had “to give the Palestinians some room for the evolution of their political process.” As a result, Hamas entered the field for the 2006 legislative elections. Understanding the widespread public dissatisfaction with the PA’s corruption under the control of the Fatah party and the sour economy, Hamas ran on a platform of clean governance and reform, rather than ideology. Subsequently, observers widely agree that Hamas was democratically elected by the Palestinian people not for its ideological platform, but for its practical appeal in improving the day-to-day living conditions of Palestinians.

I strongly believe Palestinians should not be punished for exercising their Democratic choice in electing their representatives. Yet, with nearly 50 percent of the PA’s residents living below the poverty line, unemployment on the rise, and government salaries already not being paid, Hamas’ ongoing pursuit of extremist rhetoric demonstrates to me the party’s inability to put the interests of the Palestinian people above its terrorist ideology and its unwillingness to govern in a responsible manner. I believe H.R. 4681, which provides an exception to the restrictions for basic human needs such as food, water, medicine, and sanitation services and allows the President to provide other targeted democracy or rule of law assistance, strikes a balance in both pressuring Hamas but also ensuring that necessary assistance reaches the Palestinian people in Gaza and the West Bank.

Finally, I believe the approach of economic and diplomatic isolation of Hamas will help strengthen the position of PA President Mahmoud Abbas and lead to the creation of pragmatic, reform-minded activists and parties. H.R. 4681 has been amended to allow for exceptions to the ban on direct assistance permitting the United States to maintain an open dialogue with President Abbas. It allows the president to use a national security waiver to provide assistance to the office of the PA president for non-security expenses directly related to facilitating a peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or for the per-

sonal security detail of the PA president. Emboldened by U.S. and Israeli opposition to Hamas, Abbas recently announced that it will call a national referendum on accepting a Palestinian state alongside Israel that would implicitly recognize Israel’s right to exist. Abbas is ready and willing to demonstrate to the international community that there is a Palestinian partner for negotiations with Israel, and the United States should seize this opportunity to continue press for a breakthrough in long-stalled peace efforts.

I sincerely hope that H.R. 4681 will play a constructive role to secure permanent peace in the Middle East.

THE IDENTITY THEFT PROTECTION FOR THE DECEASED ACT

HON. SUSAN A. DAVIS

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, May 25, 2006

Mrs. DAVIS of California. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to address a horrible form of identity theft.

We have heard plenty lately about the need to take swift action to prevent this serious crime. Just this month, one of the largest data security breaches in history occurred when the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) lost the names, Social Security Numbers, and the dates of birth of over 26 million Americans. We hear a lot about security breaches and the identity theft of living Americans. One aspect of the crime you do not always hear about is the misuse of personal information of deceased Americans.

This is a serious issue for many reasons. For one, it is their loved ones who pay the price. Months or even years after a family member passes away, surviving spouses or other relatives will begin to receive credit card bills or even phone calls from bill collectors. A predator can go onto certain websites and purchase Social Security Numbers that are sold for purposes of tracking family histories and genealogy. The predator then uses the Social Security Number to apply for credit cards, loans, and other forms of consumer credit.

There were even reports that a predator was misusing the personal information of a New York resident who died in the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. In another case, a woman began to receive bills addressed to her daughter who had passed away 17 years before.

In my hometown of San Diego just recently, the local news media shed light on another unfortunate case. A predator took information on a woman published in an obituary and used it for identity theft crimes. It was up to her son to repair the damage and put an end to the abuse. I cannot imagine the emotional toll these cases must take on surviving relatives, and I rise today to take action to prevent further cases of this crime.

It is time Congress acted to block this form of identity theft from continuing. Predators can collect this information with relative ease giving them a steady supply of Social Security Numbers, dates of birth, and the information they need to commit these horrible crimes. Furthermore, this form of identity theft can ruin the good names and pristine credit histories of

those who are deceased. Unless we take action, family members will continue to suffer from the misuse of their loved one's personal information.

My legislation, the Identity Theft Protection for the Deceased Act, requires that the federal government inform each national credit bureau when an individual passes away. In turn, the credit bureaus will flag the histories of those who have deceased and potential creditors will know not to issue lines of credit or new loans to those attempting to misuse their personal information.

Mr. Speaker, I urge that we act to stop this vicious form of identity theft and protect the relatives of America's deceased.

TRIBUTE TO MARY WILLIAMS

HON. JAMES E. CLYBURN

OF SOUTH CAROLINA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, May 25, 2006

Mr. CLYBURN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to a dedicated employee of the State of South Carolina with whom I have had the extraordinary pleasure of working with as she prepares to retire from public service. Mary Lee Williams has served for more than twenty-five years on the staff of the South Carolina Human Affairs Commission (SHAC).

In 1983, during my tenure as South Carolina Human Affairs Commissioner, I selected Mary as the agency's employee of the year. My comments at the time were "being a receptionist in any office is difficult, but when that difficulty is compounded by having to serve as a first point of contact to people who feel that they have been unfairly treated in the workplace, the job becomes nearly impossible." I commented in my recognition that Mary "has over the years demonstrated that she has the capacity to do the nearly impossible." I know the same is true today.

Mary Williams is a native of Richland County and is a product of its public schools. She joined us at SHAC in 1980, where she continues to serve ably as an Information Specialist. Her demeanor is friendly and helpful, and she always treated those seeking the Commission's help with dignity and respect.

Mary draws her strength of character and her strong work ethic from her faith. She has been a member of Bethlehem Baptist Church for fifty-three years. There she lends her talents to singing in the Musical Choir, serving in the Women's Ministry, and teaching Sunday School classes.

She has a beautiful voice and has been a member of Columbia, South Carolina's Capital City Chorale for a number of years. The Chorale has performed on NBC's Today Show and I have had the pleasure of sponsoring them in Washington, DC on two occasions. She also shared her talents as a soloist during a Black History Month program I keynoted at the Dorn Veterans Hospital in Columbia, and has been awarded a Certificate of Appreciation from the Veterans Administration for her service.

Mary has also found time to serve her community as a volunteer. She has donated her services to the Meals-On-Wheels program for 17 years. For five years, she served on SHAC's United Way Annual Campaign team. She has been an active member of both the

National Association of Human Rights Workers and the South Carolina State Employees Association.

Mr. Speaker, I ask you and my colleagues to join me in congratulating Mary Ann Williams on her retirement from the South Carolina Human Affairs Commission. She is a wonderful example of a dedicated public servant who has made a true difference in the lives of others. On a personal note, I thank Mary for her friendship and support over the years. I wish her the best and Godspeed in her future endeavors.

THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA MEDICAID REIMBURSEMENT ACT OF 2006

HON. ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON

OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, May 25, 2006

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Speaker, I introduce the District of Columbia Medicaid Reimbursement Act of 2006 today to raise the federal medical assistance percentage (FMAP), the federal contribution from the federal government, to 75 percent from 70 percent and to reduce the District's unique role as the only city that pays the full local cost of Medicaid, a program that is carried by states and counties in our country. New York City, the jurisdiction that powers the economy of New York State, contributes a 25 percent local share to Medicaid while the state pays 25 percent, less than the District's statutorily mandated 30 percent contribution. I introduce this bill because the District's continuing responsibility for most Medicaid costs that are typically borne by entire states is a major component of the District's structural deficit and threatens the stability of the city itself.

The District's Chief Financial Officer reports that rapidly increasing Medicaid costs put the city at risk. In FY 2005, these costs accounted for \$1.4 billion or 22 percent of the city's gross funds budget. Total program costs have risen 42 percent since 1999, and are projected to increase by another \$39 million this year. Yet the District, unlike other large cities which have lost significant populations, has no state and no state economy to share this burden. More than 25 percent of District children and adults are enrolled in Medicaid compared to 12 percent in Maryland and just 9 percent in Virginia. On average, the District spends over \$7,000 per enrollee, while Maryland and Virginia spend \$5,509 and \$5,177, respectively, reflecting serious health conditions that are concentrated among big city residents.

The D.C. Medicaid Reimbursement Act of 2006 is the seventh in the "Free and Equal D.C." series. This series of bills addresses inappropriate and often unequal restrictions placed only on the District and no other U.S. jurisdiction. Although today's bill cannot address the entire structural problem that the District faces because the city is not part of a state, the bill would eliminate the greater percentage the District pays than any city by allowing a 25 percent city contribution, rather than a contribution even greater than New York City.

In 1997, as part of the Balanced Budget Act, Congress recognized that state costs were too costly for anyone city to shoulder. To

alleviate the resulting financial crisis, Congress increased the federal Medicaid contribution to the District from 50 to 70 percent, and took responsibility for a few state costs—prisons and courts—relieving the immediate burden, but the city continues to carry most state costs.

In 1997, a formulaic error in the Medicaid Disproportionate Share Hospital (DSH) allotment reduced even the 70 percent FMAP share, and as a result, the District received only \$23 million instead of the \$49 million due. I was able to secure a technical correction to the Balanced Budget Act of 1999, partially increasing the annual allotment to \$32 million from FY 2000 forward. I appreciate that last year, Congress responded to my effort to get an additional annual increase of \$20 million in the budget reconciliation bill, bringing D.C.'s Medicaid reimbursement payments to \$57 million as intended by the Balanced Budget Act. This amount did not reimburse the District for the years a federal error denied the city part of its federal contribution, and in any case, of course, was not intended to meet the structural problem this bill partially addresses.

The District has taken important steps on its own to reduce Medicaid costs through greater efficiency, and to treat and prevent conditions that prove costly when hospitalization or expensive treatments become necessary. The District Medicaid agency won federal recognition as one of only two Medicaid programs nationwide to exceed the federal government's child immunization goal for school-age children at 95 percent, and improved its fraud surveillance, recovering \$15 million in fraudulently billed funds. The city's novel D.C. Health Care Alliance, for which federal approval is pending, would allow coverage of residents and provide more early and preventative care, avoiding huge Medicaid costs when health conditions become severe and Medicaid becomes the only option.

I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting this increase that will help my city's most needy residents.

IN APPRECIATION OF MS. CATHY SAYRE

HON. C.A. DUTCH RUPPERSBERGER

OF MARYLAND

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, May 25, 2006

Mr. RUPPERSBERGER. Mr. Speaker, I proudly rise before you today in appreciation of an educator who has devoted 39 years of her life to bettering the lives of our children. Ms. Cathy Sayre is truly worthy of recognition for her dedication to Solley Elementary in Anne Arundel County.

Ms. Sayre is a graduate of Western Maryland College. Shortly after earning her degree she informed her parents she did not want to be a lab technician as planned, rather she would pursue a career in education; we are certainly glad she did. Ms. Sayre has been an instrumental part of the developmental process of many children.

As an elementary teacher, Ms. Sayre taught first, second, third, and fourth grades as well as a combination of second and third grades. She has educated over 1,200 students in her career. She is admired by peers and adored by her students.

Teachers are often the unsung heroes of the education field. They play a critical role in