

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. JOHN P. SARBANES

OF MARYLAND

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 28, 2007

Mr. SARBANES. Madam Speaker, on vote No. 563, an amendment offered by Mr. ANDREWS, I was recorded as "nay." I intended to be recorded as "aye." I thank the Speaker for providing me with the opportunity to correct the record.

TRIBUTE TO VASIL AND FLORENCE RUCHO

HON. JAMES P. McGOVERN

OF MASSACHUSETTS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 28, 2007

Mr. McGOVERN. Madam Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Vasil and Florence Rucho of West Boylston, MA, on the occasion of their 50th wedding anniversary. Mr. and Mrs. Rucho's life together exemplifies the finest qualities of the institution of marriage, and their commitment to their family, their faith and each other should serve as an example to us all.

Vasil married the former Florence George at St. Nicholas Romanian Orthodox Church on June 30, 1957. The young couple met while working at the Table Talk Pie Company in Worcester, MA, and romance soon blossomed. Shortly thereafter, they married and were blessed with two wonderful children, Melanie and Christopher.

Despite the demands of raising a young family, Vas and Flo always found time to help others and gave freely to their church, their family and their friends. They never failed to lend a helping hand to a neighbor in need, and were there to celebrate the joyous moments as well as to lessen the burden in times of pain and sorrow.

Together Vas and Flo share an extraordinary work ethic and devotion to their family that is altogether too rare in these more modern times. After they were married, Vas continued to work at the Table Talk Pie Company while taking on a second job at the family business, Dian's Flower Shop. Mrs. Rucho was widely known in the close-knit Main South neighborhood as one of the first women to work at the local McDonalds. Her friendly face and warm smile graciously welcomed countless families that came to dine at the restaurant. Despite their rigorous work schedules, Vas and Flo made certain that every summer their family vacationed together with friends on Cape Cod for 2 weeks. Those vacations are fondly remembered by all.

In later years as their children married, Vas and Flo became "Maya" and "Papu" to their five beautiful grandchildren. Their daughter Melanie and her husband Fr. Peter have two children, Nicholas and Alexandra. Their son Christopher and his wife Julie have three sons, Matthew, Brian and William. Family dinners at Vas and Flo's home are a feast to savor. Neighbors and family members alike eagerly look forward to the magnificent array of Christmas decorations adorning their yard each holiday season. For Vasil and Florence, there is no greater joy in life than to be sur-

rounded by their children and grandchildren, especially during the holidays.

Madam Speaker, too often in this Chamber we take notice of world leaders and historic events without recognizing the families that are truly the bedrock of America. Vasil and Florence Rucho have together over half a century demonstrated they are one such family. It gives me great pleasure to humbly ask that the United States House of Representatives join me in congratulating Vasil and Florence Rucho on the occasion of their 50th wedding anniversary. I look forward to joining them and the entire Rucho family this Saturday evening, June 30, at a celebration in honor of this tremendous milestone in their remarkable life together.

THE MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORPORATION IN AFRICA

HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 28, 2007

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Madam Speaker, this afternoon the Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health held a hearing on the Millennium Challenge Corporation in Africa. The MCC program, which was announced by President Bush on March 14, 2002 and established in January 2004, marked an incredible new approach to U.S. foreign assistance. It is based on the principle that assistance is most effective when it promotes good governance, investments in people, and economic freedom. Its goal is to reduce global poverty through the promotion of sustainable economic growth.

Grants from the Millennium Challenge Account are limited to countries with a per capita income less than \$3,465. In addition, eligible countries must have an established record that satisfies 16 performance indicators in the three areas I just noted. One of the most important is a pass/fail test for fighting corruption. Seven grants—called compacts—have been signed so far for countries in Africa, with a total value of about \$2.4 billion. Additional compacts are pending for the Continent.

The establishment of the Millennium Challenge Account is innovative in several respects. For one, it mandates that program proposals be developed solely by qualified countries themselves with the involvement of a broad base of their civil society. It also provides assistance to countries without regard to U.S. strategic foreign policy objectives, providing an opportunity to countries that may normally be overlooked by the United States as well as other bilateral donors. However, it cannot be said that the MCC for that reason does not serve U.S. interests. In fact, authentic development as envisioned by the MCC principle leads to a more prosperous, peaceful, and just world for all of us.

Finally, I would assert that MCC is most laudable because it recognizes the potential of the poor to lift themselves and their country out of the clutches of poverty if they are provided with the necessary infrastructure and tools. An important correlative to this is the incentive provided by MCC to the recipient country's government to focus on and respond to the needs of the poor segment of their population. The MCC provides an important means of empowerment for those who have the greatest difficulty attaining it.

A glance at the various compacts and threshold programs in Africa highlights the extraordinary needs and the necessity of expanding those programs. The subcommittee held a hearing on Africa's water crisis just a few weeks ago on May 16th, where we lamented the fact that over 1.1 billion people in developing countries do not have adequate access to safe water and approximately 2.6 billion people live without basic sanitation. We heard testimony that the reasons for these deficiencies are rooted in inequalities. The poor not only have significantly less access to water, but even when they do have access, they pay significantly more for it. The MCC with its focus on programming for the poor is one mechanism that the United States is utilizing to address this issue at its root cause.

On the political level, it is worth noting that our parliamentary colleagues in developing countries do not always have the resources they need to fulfill their role in a democracy. The MCC threshold program in Malawi will provide the National Assembly of that country with the capacity for all 13 committees to meet and perform their oversight function—a first in Malawi's history.

As with all new programs, the MCC has encountered challenges in Africa that we examined in the course of the hearing. One of the greatest has been providing disbursements in a timely manner while ensuring accountability and sustainability. Another that we are encountering time and again in numerous development efforts for Africa, including programs for HIV/AIDS, is partner country capacity. It is extremely difficult to implement country-driven initiatives when the country itself is lacking educated, experienced personnel to do the work. However, neither of these or other challenges warrant scaling back on MCC programming, but instead provide the opportunity to search for solutions to these issues together with the recipient country government as well as other bilateral and multilateral assistance donors. The MCC is not the total solution to African development, but it is an important and significant contribution, both in terms of resources and philosophy, to a more global strategy.

VETERANS EDUCATION TUITION SUPPORT ACT OF 2007

HON. SUSAN A. DAVIS

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 28, 2007

Mrs. DAVIS of California. Madam Speaker, I rise today to introduce the Veterans Education Tuition Support Act of 2007 or the VETS Act to address some of the difficulties our military personnel when they are activated while attending college.

Thousands of military reservists have been activated to fight in Iraq and Afghanistan directly from their college campuses. Unfortunately, students who serve in the military face unique hardships when called upon to defend the United States.

Most colleges and universities refund tuition and fees to students when the activation occurs during the academic calendar. However, instances have occurred when a servicemember has not been reimbursed.

Servicemembers have also been known to face difficulties reregistering for classes after

returning home after activation. In addition, activated military personnel have received collection notices for student loans while serving in combat zones.

The goal of the VETS Act is to provide our servicemembers with certain rights when they must delay their educational pursuits to defend our country.

The legislation requires colleges and universities to refund tuition and fees for unearned credit, and in addition, guarantee our servicemembers a place when they return home.

The bill would also amend the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act to treat student loan debt the same way it treats other forms of debt by capping interest at 6 percent during deployments.

Finally, the legislation would give servicemembers 13 months to begin paying their student loans after an activation should they decide not to return to school immediately.

The deferment will give them time to readjust back to civilian life should they decide they need extra time to go back to school.

Senator SHERROD BROWN has introduced the VETS Act in the U.S. Senate and I am proud to introduce companion legislation in the House of Representatives.

The VETS Act is centered on the recommendations made by the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) based on the experiences of the group's members.

Madam Speaker, I urge passage of this legislation to give rights and protections to the servicemembers activated while attending a college or university.

INTRODUCTION OF THE POLLINATOR HABITAT PROTECTION ACT

HON. EARL BLUMENAUER

OF OREGON

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 28, 2007

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Madam Speaker, today I am introducing, along with my colleagues, ALCEE HASTINGS and RANDY KUHL, the Pollinator Habitat Protection Act. This legislation amends the Department of Agriculture's conservation programs to put a greater emphasis on increasing habitat and establishing cropping and integrated pest management practices to protect native and managed pollinators.

The bill also states that the Secretary of Agriculture should designate pollinator protection as a "national priority resource concern" for the conservation programs administered by the Department.

As Congress prepares to reauthorize our national agricultural policies, raising awareness and placing a greater emphasis on pollinators and their habitat could not come at a more important time—particularly as research and newspaper headlines continue to highlight the collapse of bee colonies and general population declines and threats to pollinators.

The risks to our food supply and ecosystems from which pollinators are declining cannot be underestimated. Pollinators are integral to the very survival of an astounding number and variety of plant life that sustains us. The numbers tell the story—nearly 75 percent of the world's flowering plants, more than two-thirds of the world's crop species, and one out

of every three mouthfuls of food have a direct connection to pollinators. Disruptions of localized pollinating systems and declines of certain species of pollinators have been reported on every continent except Antarctica.

Populations of a variety of pollinator species have been declining in recent years, due to a loss of habitat, improper use of pesticides and herbicides, and replacement of native plant species with non-native or engineered plants. The introduction of non-native, invasive species—either by accident or through farming practices—has significantly contributed to this problem.

I introduce this bill as one important step to address these problems by recognizing the contributions that pollinators make to our agricultural production and our food supply. Another step is the legislation of my colleague ALCEE HASTINGS, H.R. 1709, which I support and which authorizes research funding to strengthen native bee, as well as honey bee, populations. I look forward to working with the Agriculture Committee and the House to ensure pollinators and their habitats receive further attention and protection as we reauthorize the Farm Bill in the coming weeks.

IMMIGRATION REFORM

HON. GABRIELLE GIFFORDS

OF ARIZONA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 28, 2007

Ms. GIFFORDS. Madam Speaker, I rise today deeply disappointed that proposed legislation to deal with our failed immigration laws fell short today on a procedural vote in the other body.

An impressive bipartisan coalition of Senators—including Arizona Senators KYL and MCCAIN—worked tirelessly for the past several months to craft immigration reform legislation. Unfortunately, their efforts were not fruitful.

Doing nothing to address our nation's immigration crisis is irresponsible. The Federal Government cannot continue to shirk its responsibility to protect our borders. Today's failure leaves the burden of dealing with illegal immigration on State and local governments.

My district in Southern Arizona deals with the negative impact of illegal immigration every day. I will not relent in my efforts to find ways to remove the unfair burden placed on local law enforcement, health and social service agencies and our public schools.

I urge my colleagues and the leadership of the House to come together in a bi-partisan fashion to craft smart immigration reform that is tough, practical, and effective. We must roll up our sleeves and exhibit the leadership that is needed on this critical issue.

The House has already made some progress. I applaud our efforts to address the problems we face along our border in our Homeland Security Appropriations bill. This includes adding more border patrol agents and increasing the use of technology to secure our border. I also urge fully fund federal programs, such as SCAAP, that reimburse local law enforcement agencies for the apprehension and detention of illegal immigrants.

The cost and burden of illegal immigration remains primarily on the shoulders of local and state governments, especially those on the border. The fight for Comprehensive Immi-

gration reform goes on and it must remain a top priority in Congress. We must pass comprehensive immigration reform.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2008

SPEECH OF

HON. SHEILA JACKSON-LEE

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, June 26, 2007

The House in Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union had under consideration the bill (H.R. 2643) making appropriations for the Department of the Interior, Environment, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2008, with Mr. WATT (Acting Chairman) in the chair.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Chairman, thank you for this opportunity to speak in support of H.R. 2643, the Interior and Environment Appropriations Act of 2008 and to commend Chairman DICKS and Ranking Member TIAHRT for their leadership in shepherding this bill through the legislative process. Madam Chairwoman, I support this bill because it focuses our efforts on global climate change and ensures that America's water and air will be cleaner.

It is said the Arctic region is warming fastest, threatening the livelihoods of indigenous hunters by thawing the polar ice-cap and driving species like polar bears toward extinction by the end of the century. Today, more than one third of the world's population lives within 60 miles of a shoreline. Thirteen of the world's twenty largest cities are located on a coast. Because of their precarious location and unique meteorology, these cities are particularly vulnerable to the effects of global warming. As industrial and commercial centers, many are also net contributors of greenhouse gas emissions, extending the effects of global warming.

Given the earth is "committed" to rises in temperature over the next 30–40 years, it was only rational these futures be built into business models. But reducing emissions did not need to be at the expense of competitiveness: in fact, carbon trading, clean technologies, and sustainable energy generation all promised new opportunities for skilled jobs and economic growth.

Houston is also experiencing more frequent and more powerful storms and rain fall, in terms of flooding, some of the old structural solutions—the concreted bayous of Houston need additional measures to ensure the safety of the population. Unfortunately, Houston's development pattern had made such weaknesses more acute. The city represented "classic urban sprawl over coastal ecology." With its large, low density population and high density roads and impervious surfaces the city was highly vulnerable to flooding. Before the development arrived, the natural ecology of the Houston delta would have managed increases in rainfall and flooding. But the constructed environment had pushed back forest and wetland ecologies and undermined natural flood alleviation mechanisms.