

work side-by-side with Wyland to create a beautiful indoor mural. Niagara's Whaling Wall is a regional treasure that has helped foster a greater appreciation and awareness for our world's oceans.

Madam Speaker, I want to again commend the Wyland Foundation for their commitment to protecting the world's oceans, and their partnership with the Aquarium of Niagara.

#### PERSONAL EXPLANATION

### HON. JEFF MILLER

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Wednesday, March 14, 2007*

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Madam Speaker, I missed rollcall Votes No. 136–138 on March 12, 2007 and rollcall votes No 139–141 on March 13, 2007. It was six suspension votes H.R. 85, the Energy Technology Transfer Act, H. Res. 136, Commending the Girl Scouts of the United States of America on the occasion of their 95th anniversary, and H. Res. 89, Expressing the sense of the House that a day should be established as Dutch-American Friendship Day, H. Res. 64, Expressing the sense of the House that the Government of Bangladesh should immediately drop all pending charges against Bangladeshi journalist Salah Uddin Shoaib Choudhury, H. Res. 228, Recognizing the 186th anniversary of the independence of Greece and celebrating Greek and American Democracy, and H. Res. 222, Expressing the support of the House for the Good Friday Agreement as a blueprint for lasting peace in Northern Ireland, respectively. I was detained and could not make it to the floor for this vote.

If present, I would have voted rollcall Vote No. 136, "yea," roll call Vote No. 137, "yea," rollcall Vote No. 138, "yea," Vote No. 139, "yea," rollcall Vote No. 140, "yea," and rollcall Vote No. 141, "yea."

#### TRIBUTE TO HARRIS COUNTY JUDGE ROBERT ECKELS

### HON. JOHN ABNEY CULBERSON

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Wednesday, March 14, 2007*

Mr. CULBERSON. Madam Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute and wish a happy 50th birthday to my dear friend and colleague, Harris County Judge Robert Eckels. Until last week, Judge Eckels was the presiding officer of the Harris County Commissioners Court—the governing body of the county, and the only member that is elected countywide. The position involves executive, judicial, and legislative functions in the third most populace county in the United States. There are 34 municipalities within the county, including the county seat and the fourth largest city in the country, the City of Houston. More than 1.2 million people live in unincorporated Harris County and rely on the county to be the primary provider of basic government services. The term County Judge in Texas is comparable to a County Executive or County Mayor in other parts of the country.

Judge Eckels has been in public service for more than 25 years. He recently retired from

public service after a distinguished career to join the private sector. He and his wife, Jet, are dear friends of mine and my wife, Belinda.

Robert Eckels was first elected to the Texas Legislature in 1982. When he began his service in January of 1983 he was only 25-years-old. Few thought he would have much impact his first year, but he passed 8 of 13 bills in his legislative package. Robert's quiet demeanor frequently led fellow members to urge the enforcement of the "no mumble rule" so they could understand what he was saying, but his understated nature was also key to his success in Austin. He did not care who got credit for passing legislation, so long as it was good law that did not have to fix later. He understands the legislative process, legislative language and the legislative intent as well as anyone I know.

Robert also cared about his colleagues. He would approach Members towards the end of our legislative sessions to ask them how their legislative agendas were coming along. If a Member complained that their most important bill was in trouble in committee or on the House floor, he would help his colleagues amend their priority onto another bill or find some other way to pass their bills.

In 1991 the Texas Monthly Magazine described his character in its biennial article at the end of the Legislative session entitled "The Best and the Worst Legislators." In that piece he was named an Outstanding Legislator for his work in ethics reform and redistricting, "the session's most thankless issues." It said "Eckels wrote a bill that outshone its rivals as silver outshines dirt." Other quotes describe his character, "Eckels is unselfish to the point of being sacrificial. He's the Good Samaritan of the House; he finds hurt people by the side of the road and helps them get well."

In 1994 Robert decided to leave the Legislature, over the protests of many of his House colleagues, myself included, to run for the office of Harris County Judge. He saw an opportunity to work on the issues that were most important to him and his vision for the county he grew up in and served with distinction in the Legislature. He won the election and his opponent in that election later became a member of his advisory group.

#### TRANSPORTATION

Judge Eckels believes as I do that one of the most important priorities in our county is improving the major transportation corridors so people do not spend hours stuck in traffic jams. Judge Eckels also believes, as I do, that mobility is vital to our county's future. He served as chairman of the Transportation Policy Council for the Houston-Galveston region and was a major author of the 2025 Regional Transportation Plan.

Judge Eckels was also Chairman of the Alliance for I-69 Texas and the Texas High Speed Rail & Transportation Corporation. Texas House of Representatives Speaker Tom Craddick appointed him to the Study Commission on Transportation Financing to look at the broader issues facing the State of Texas. It was Judge Eckels who spearheaded an effort to turn abandoned railroad right-of-way running through my District into major traffic arteries which bring hundreds of thousands of daily commuters into and out of downtown Houston. Today, as a result of his vision and leadership, the Westpark Toll Way, the country's first entirely electronic toll road, is an innovative addition to the Harris County Toll Road Authority.

#### HOMELAND SECURITY/EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Judge Eckels has always been deeply concerned with hurricanes and other natural disasters and the county's response to crises. He commissioned a study showing the impact of a Category-V hurricane coming into Galveston Bay, and he initiated planning procedures to ensure first responders had the proper training and equipment to take action.

He began to set up an interoperable communications system for Harris County that could be expanded regionally to allow communications among first responders across jurisdictional and disciplinary lines. Building such a system has required a strong leader like Judge Eckels to convince various agencies that rely on mission-critical communication to trust Harris County's Information Technology Department to build an interoperable system which was better than one they could run on their own.

Today, the Harris County Regional Radio System is a model communication system that has grown to support a shared infrastructure with more than 133 channels and 17 tower sites. It currently covers all of Harris County and parts of eight other counties, with the intent to expand even farther. As resources are available it will be expanded until it serves all 13 counties in the Houston/Galveston Area Council's service area.

There are more than 20,000 users from more than 400 different departments/agencies with nearly 2,000 mobile data-terminals and the system is growing quickly. The regional radio system is not only an essential response tool when disaster strikes, it can also be adapted to conform to the needs of the partners in day-to-day operations. Harris County has more than 90 different policing agencies operating in very close proximity. This system allows dispatchers to send the closest officer to the scene of an incident regardless of which agency the responder works for.

In his first State of the Union Address after 9/11, President George W. Bush called upon all Americans to dedicate at least two years of their lives—the equivalent of 4,000 hours—in service to others. He launched the Citizen Corps initiative to inspire and enable Americans to find ways to serve their communities and country. In response to the President's initiative, in August 2002, Judge Eckels created the Harris County Citizen Corps Council. The Council coordinates with volunteer groups such as the Red Cross, the Salvation Army, and the United Way to identify volunteer opportunities. The Citizen Corps programs include the Community Emergency Response Team, the Neighborhood Watch Program, Volunteers in Police Service, Fire Corps, and the Medical Reserve Corps.

When Hurricane Katrina caused the evacuation of more than 250,000 to the Harris County area, Judge Eckels coordinated and managed the relief effort to create comfortable, welcoming shelters. Approximately 27,000 evacuees came to "Reliant City," which was created in the facilities at Reliant Park and the George R. Brown Convention Center in a 20 hour period in August 2005. This was the largest sheltering operation in U.S. history.

Thousands of volunteers were needed to assist in the relief operation and within one hour of the initial call for assistance to the Citizen Corps, more than 1,000 volunteers arrived at the shelter. In all, more than 60,000

of our citizens came forward, received training from existing Citizen Corps members, and made the massive, weeks-long sheltering operation possible. The Judge said that Katrina was a blessing for our community because it showed us just how much we were able to give when our Louisiana neighbors needed a helping hand.

Just three weeks after the nation watched the devastation of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast by Hurricane Katrina, Hurricane Rita was headed straight for Harris County. An already exhausted team, led by Judge Eckels, shut down the last sheltering operation for Katrina evacuees and prepared for the next storm. With less than 48 hours before Rita was predicted to reach landfall on Galveston Island, Judge Eckels worked with Governor Rick Perry and Houston Mayor Bill White to begin the largest evacuation in U.S. history. Under Judge Eckels' watchful eye and calm demeanor, he gave frequent updates to motorists stranded in the exodus and assured them that help was on the way. While the unprecedented evacuation was difficult, it was considered a success. Before the storm reached the shore later that night, the roadways were empty and our citizens were out of harms' way.

The Judge's work during Hurricanes Katrina and Rita was recognized with a number of awards. In an article entitled "The Power of Government to Do Good" in *Esquire* magazine, Judge Eckels was named the Best and Brightest 0/2005, Citizen of the Year for his extraordinary leadership. "When the city of New Orleans evacuated to Houston, Harris County Judge Robert Eckels took them in. He was an island of competence in the face of catastrophe," *Esquire* wrote.

The Partners for Livable Communities, a nonprofit organization headquartered here in Washington DC, gave the Judge the "Bridge Builders Award" for his collaboration efforts during the hurricane crises. The Greater Houston Partnership named him one of "Houston's Greatest Individuals 2005." *American City and County Leader* magazine named Eckels "2006 County Leader of the Year."

Under his leadership, the Harris County Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management has become a national model for preparedness and response to emergency situations, natural or manmade. Considered an expert in local emergency management and response, Judge Eckels has testified before both the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate Homeland Security Committees and he serves on the State and Local Senior Advisory Committee to President Bush's Homeland Security Advisory Council.

#### HEALTHCARE

The population of Harris County has grown considerably in recent decades and with that growth has come a disproportionately large population of uninsured and underinsured. Judge Eckels realized long ago that the needs of this growing community cannot be met by government alone. Therefore, under his leadership, Harris County has forged strong partnerships with non-profit, private, public, and faith-based health care providers and clinics to coordinate medical services to the poor and indigent. The Harris County Healthcare Council was created to coordinate a more efficient health care delivery system. He has, throughout his tenure as County Judge, maintained that the Harris County Hospital District should

be there for those who have no where else to turn.

#### FLOOD CONTROL

In 1996 Judge Eckels asked Congress to help speed some of the critical flood-damage reduction projects to protect the citizens of our county. Under his leadership, the Harris County Flood Control District is now able to take the lead on flood reduction projects. As a result, our constituents along the Brays Bayou and White Oak Bayou are already receiving the benefits of flood mitigation years ahead of schedule.

#### CLEAN AIR

Harris County is committed to cleaning the air in our region. Judge Eckels is nationally recognized as an expert in devising and implementing acceptable air quality plans on the county level. He has testified before a U.S. Senate subcommittee on air quality issues and has appeared on national television news shows discussing environmental issues.

He also initiated new monitoring systems to ensure compliance with federal and state regulations, funding computer modeling to base our clean air decisions on the best information possible and searching for the newest and most cost-effective technologies to clean our air. Under his watch, the latest state of the art monitors that detect most of the 189 Hazardous Air Pollutants listed by the Environmental Protection Agency are in place in Harris County—paid for by environmental violators, not taxpayers.

#### CHILDREN'S ISSUES

Judge Eckels is passionate about children's issues. As fathers, he and I have shared many stories about raising our daughters. Like me, he always puts his family first. He and his wife, Jet, could not be more committed to their daughter, Kirby Rae.

That commitment inspired Robert to take a vital leadership role in the Do the Write Thing Challenge, a program of the National Campaign to Stop Violence. As chairman for the State of Texas, he has grown the program to an unprecedented size with more than 24,000 participants in 10 communities. Judge Eckels also spearheaded a collaboration that would become the Children's Assessment Center (CAC). The CAC gives victims on-site access to experts in abuse prevention, medical treatment, forensic examination, family counseling, therapeutic services and criminal prosecution. Each year, more than 5,000 sexually abused children, their siblings, and non-offending caregivers are served by this nationally recognized partnership of more than 20 agencies.

Judge Robert Eckels is a sound fiscal conservative who has always taken a business approach to government. Harris County applies common sense business principles to provide the best service at the least cost to taxpayers. Under his leadership Harris County introduced private sector competition to drive down the cost of government services. He led the reorganization of county departments and performance reviews, cut the number of departments in half, reducing service duplication, improving coordination and accountability and saving more than \$14 million each year.

Under his leadership the county's debt was restructured, saving more than \$60 million since 1995. Confidence in Harris County's financial footing has been restored. All of the major bond rating agencies have upgraded Harris County's bond ratings saving taxpayers

millions of dollars in interest each year. Most importantly, financial reserves are up, revenues are up, and spending is under control. Judge Eckels understands that when we decrease taxes here at the Federal level, and cut funding to state and local governments, they cannot and must not increase taxes at the local level. He has found new and innovative ways to deliver the same services that promote the quality of life we have all come to expect here in the greatest country in the history of the world.

I hope that Robert Eckels will reenter public life again someday because he is an exemplary leader. If he chooses not to, there is no doubt that he has left behind a strong legacy in Harris County. I will always value his friendship and counsel.

#### TRIBUTE TO SYDNEY EVERETT

#### HON. WM. LACY CLAY

OF MISSOURI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 14, 2007

Mr. CLAY. Madam Speaker, the St. Louis Post Dispatch recently published a series of articles to shed light on music education in the St. Louis Public Schools. The significant benefits conveyed by music education are immeasurable. Studies have found that education in the arts leads to success in society, school and life. I applaud the St. Louis Public Schools for recognizing the value of music education. I also commend Mr. Bob Dorries, the instrumental music teacher at McKinley Junior Classical Academy, a St. Louis magnet school, for his commitment to cultivating the gift of music in our children. I was especially impressed with the article's coverage of sixth-grader Sydney Everett's intense desire to master playing the clarinet.

In reading Steve Giegerich's articles, it is obvious that Sydney is an exceptional student who is dedicated to conquering new objectives and realizing her full potential. Sydney's love for music was instilled by her parents Sean and Deirdre Everett. They have always made music a part of Sydney's life. Her father, having taught himself to play the trumpet, shared his love for music with his children. Sydney exhibits that same drive and frequently takes the initiative to teach herself lessons before the class covers them.

Madam Speaker, it is with great privilege that I recognize Sydney Everett today before Congress. I encourage Sydney to continue her studies and remain committed to exploring new horizons.

The two articles from the St. Louis Post Dispatch chronicling Sydney's journey to master playing the clarinet follow this tribute.

[From the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Sept. 30, 2006]

#### LEARNING TO PLAY: WILL SYDNEY MAKE THE BAND?

(By Steve Giegerich)

It's no accident that a poster of Miles Davis is in the sight line of Bob Dorries' students as he stands at the blackboard to review scales, time signatures and other rudiments of music education at McKinley Classical Junior Academy.

Dorries put it there as a constant reminder of the link between the East St. Louis jazz icon and the potential heirs to his legacy who pass through Dorries' classroom each day.