

Federal health care programs are vital not only to our Nation's children, seniors, and disabled, but also to the brave men and women who served our country. While the President's budget includes an increase for VA funding, I highly doubt it will keep pace with the health care demands of our returning veterans. I am also dismayed by his cut of almost \$40 million to medical and prosthetic research, programs that have helped our wounded veterans return to a normal life. Once again, the President has placed the burden of health care cost increases on veterans themselves by proposing to increase co-payments and introduce enrollment fees for VA medical care. Congress has opposed those efforts in the past, and we will continue to do so.

Finally, as a member of the Homeland Security Committee, I am concerned about the impacts of the President's budget on our Nation's capacity for response, resiliency, and recovery in the wake of a national catastrophe. The budget calls for an unprecedented 79 percent cut to the State Homeland Security Grant Program, which awarded \$34.8 million to Rhode Island from 2004 to 2007. The budget would also eliminate the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response, SAFER, Grant program and would slash funding for the Assistance to Firefighters Grant program, despite clear evidence that more resources are needed to adequately staff and equip fire departments. Local law enforcement would also suffer under the President's budget, which would cut funding to the Community Oriented Policing Services, COPS, program and to Justice Assistance Grants, JAGS, which have reduced crime in communities nationwide. Our State and local law enforcement must have the resources they need to be effective, and I will fight to block these proposed cuts.

It is obvious that the President's budget does not reflect America's priorities. So, we must ask, what are the President's priorities? While he recommends raising health care costs for veterans, the President wants \$70 billion more to continue the war in Iraq, though Defense Secretary Gates stated today that that number could climb to \$170 billion. While he wants Congress to permanently extend his tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans, his budget does not contain a long-term fix for the Alternative Minimum Tax, which if left unaddressed could mean a significant tax increase on our middle class. While he slashes programs for our most vulnerable citizens, his refusal to follow fiscally responsible budgeting practices would mean more deficits in the coming years, burdening future generations with crushing interest on the national debt. These priorities are wrong for America. I am confident that Congress will develop a more humane and careful roadmap for the coming year, and I look forward to working with the Democratic leadership toward that goal.

INTRODUCTION OF COLORADO FOREST INSECT EMERGENCY RE- SPONSE ACT

HON. MARK UDALL

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, February 6, 2008

Mr. UDALL of Colorado. Madam Speaker, today I am introducing an additional bill to ad-

dress the danger to Colorado's communities, water supplies, and infrastructure from the increasing risk of very severe wildfires on our forested lands.

I have put a priority on reducing those risks since I was elected to Congress. In 2000, with our then-colleague, Representative Hefley, I introduced legislation to facilitate reducing the buildup of fuel in the parts of Colorado that the Forest Service, working with State and local partners, identified at greatest risk of fire—the so-called “red zones.”

Concepts from that legislation were included in the National Fire Plan developed by the Clinton Administration and were also incorporated into the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003. As a Member of the Resources Committee, I had worked to develop the version of that legislation that the committee approved in 2002, and while I could not support the different version initially passed by the House in 2003, I voted for the revised version developed in conference with the Senate later that year—the version that President Bush signed into law.

Since then welcome progress has been made—in Colorado, at least—in developing community wildfire protection plans and focusing fuel-reduction projects in the priority “red zone” areas, two important aspects of the new law. But at the same time nature has continued to add to the buildup of fuel in the form of both new growth and dead and dying mature trees.

In recognition of the serious nature of the problem, the entire Colorado delegation—both here in the House and in the Senate, too—worked together to reach consensus on a broad-scale legislative response. The result was legislation—H.R. 3072 and S. 1797, the Colorado Forest Management Improvement Act of 2007—which I introduced last year in the House with the cosponsorship of the entire Colorado delegation and which Senators SALAZAR and ALLARD introduced in the Senate. Together with two bills I introduced last week—H.R. 5216, the Wildfire Risk Reduction and Renewable Biomass Utilization Act and H.R. 5218, the Fire Safe Community Act—the bill I am introducing today is designed to complement the Colorado Forest Management Act to respond to the increasingly widespread extent to which our State's forests are being altered by infestations of bark beetles and other insects.

These insects help to balance tree densities and set the stage for fires and thereby the generation of new tree growth. And when forests are healthy and there are adequate supplies of water, their effects are relatively low-scale and isolated. But under the right conditions—such as drought, unusually warm winters, or when there are dense stands of even-aged trees—the insects can cause large-scale tree mortality, turning whole mountainsides and valleys rust red. And that is happening now in many parts of Colorado, as was made unmistakably clear recently when Federal and State foresters reported that the beetle infestation first detected in 1996 grew by a half-million acres last year, bringing the total number of acres attacked by bark beetles to 1.5 million, and has spread further into Front Range counties east of the Continental Divide.

My goal in introducing legislation dealing with this issue is not to eradicate insects in our forests—nor should it be, because insects are a natural part of forest ecosystems. In-

stead, I seek to make it possible for there to be more rapid responses to the insect epidemic in those areas where such responses are needed in order to protect communities from increased wildfire dangers.

The bill I am introducing today would add a new section to the Healthy Forests Act, which would apply only to Colorado, to specifically address insect epidemics. It would authorize the Forest Service or Interior Department to identify as “insect emergency areas” Federal lands that have already been slated for fuel-reduction work in community wildfire protection plans and that have so many insect-killed trees that there is an urgent need for work to reduce the fire-related risks to human life and property or municipal water supply.

The Forest Service or Interior Department could do this on its own initiative or in response to a request from a State agency or a Colorado political subdivision (such as a county, city, or other local government). After receipt of such a request, a decision must be made within 90 days.

In any such emergency areas, the Forest Service or Interior Department would be authorized to remove dead or dying trees on an expedited basis, including use of a “categorical exclusion” from normal review under the National Environmental Policy Act, NEPA. Although categorical exclusions from NEPA are controversial, I believe they are appropriate for these emergency situations.

For the information of our colleagues, here is a more detailed outline of the bill:

COLORADO FOREST INSECT EMERGENCY RESPONSE ACT

This bill, based on provisions in the Udall-Salazar bill (H.R. 4875) of 2006, will add a new section to the Healthy Forests Restoration Act to specifically address the forest insect epidemic in Colorado.

It would authorize the Forest Service or the Interior Department, as relevant, to identify as “insect emergency areas” Federal lands in Colorado that have already been slated for fuel-reduction work in community wildfire protection plans and that have so many insect-killed trees that there is an urgent need for work to reduce the fire-related risks to human life and property or municipal water supplies.

The Forest Service or Interior Department could make such a determination on its own initiative or in response to a request from any Colorado State agency or any Colorado political subdivision (such as a county, city, or other local government). The relevant Federal agency must respond to such a request by making a decision within 90 days.

The bill would reduce the extent to which analysis under the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, NEPA, must be done prior to implementing fuel-reduction—i.e., thinning or tree-removal projects in insect-emergency areas. This would be done in two ways:

(1) by allowing the abbreviated NEPA reviews to be used for projects on any lands covered by a wildfire protection plan for a Colorado community in or adjacent to an insect-emergency area (the Act now allows this only for projects on lands within 1.5 miles of a community's boundaries); and

(2) by allowing the Forest Service or Interior Department to forego NEPA analysis entirely through use of a “categorical exclusion” with regard to a project involving only lands that are both within an insect-emergency area and covered by a community wildfire protection plan.

Before making a decision to exempt a project from NEPA review, the Forest Service or Interior Department would have to consult with relevant Federal and State agencies, seek comments from the public, and follow existing procedures for such decisions.

HONORING THE COCKE COUNTY NAVAL JUNIOR RESERVE OFFICER TRAINING CORPS

HON. DAVID DAVIS

OF TENNESSEE

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, February 6, 2008

Mr. DAVID DAVIS of Tennessee. Madam Speaker, I rise today to congratulate the Cocke County Naval Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps (NJROTC) program for their achievements this past year. In 2007, the Cocke County NJROTC program was ranked number one in the State of Tennessee and number six in the United States in competitions including academics, athletics, and military drill.

In addition to achieving such great accolades in competitions, the Cocke County NJROTC planned, coordinated, and completed 2,153 community service hours in the Cocke County, Hamblen County and Knox County areas during the 2006 to 2007 school year.

The Cocke County NJROTC is a citizen leadership program designed to develop informed and responsible young men and women who embody honor, self-reliance, self-discipline, and respect to authority in a democratic society.

This achievement is a true honor to all the young men and women involved in the Cocke County NJROTC program. The rankings, each respectively, show the dedication and commitment to service and our Nation.

It is exciting for me to see the young men and women of Cocke County NJROTC establishing such high standards at a young age and it bestows great promise for the State of Tennessee and our Nation alike.

Madam Speaker, I ask that the House join me this evening honoring the Cocke County NJROTC program for their commitment to excellence, dedication, and promise as future leaders of America.

HONORING NANCY HILTON FOR ENCOURAGING OUR NATION'S MILITARY

HON. JEB HENSARLING

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, February 6, 2008

Mr. HENSARLING. Madam Speaker, today I rise to recognize a talented and patriotic citizen, Nancy Hilton, for her efforts to honor and encourage our Nation's military.

Overwhelmed with the sacrifices made by our men and women in uniform. Ms. Hilton sought a unique way in which she could personally honor the military. On a road trip to the East Coast, Ms. Hilton decided to hand-stitch an American flag and wasted no time in doing so. On the road with no pattern, she purchased a store-made American flag and created a self-made pattern. Three years later,

after investing 214.5 hours and over 20 miles of yarn, Ms. Hilton proudly displays the 24-by-13 foot, 43 pound flag at her home in Athens, Texas.

In between stitching stripes, Ms. Hilton developed her crocheting ministry, The Love Stitchers. The Love Stitchers dedicate their time and efforts to making lap afghans for people in nursing homes and hospice centers. They also make special red, white, and blue starred and striped blankets for veterans. With 100 members in three cities, The Love Stitchers have made over 1,500 afghans.

Madam Speaker, on behalf of the Fifth District of Texas, I am honored to recognize Ms. Nancy Hilton not only for her talent, but for her thoughtfulness and devotion in caring for our military, veterans, and seniors.

RECOGNIZING THE LATINA STYLE 50 AWARDS

HON. JOE BACA

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, February 6, 2008

Mr. BACA. Madam Speaker, in 1998, a unique program was launched with the purpose of creating awareness in corporate America and its connection to the growing world of professional Hispanic women. LATINA Style Magazine serves as a reflection of this increasing diversity. Because of the magazine's dedication to informing its readers on career opportunities in corporate America, it was the catalyst for creating a prestigious analysis of Hispanic women's presence there. It serves to show the continued efforts for promoting diversity and providing career advancement for these Latina professionals.

Today we celebrate the LATINA Style 50 Awards, a program which highlights the 50 best companies for Latinas to work for in our country. LATINA Style recruits up to 800 Fortune 1000 companies to participate in a survey regarding their role in increasing the number of Latina professionals in America's workplace. The reports highlight each company's leadership programs, employee benefits and Latina representation in senior positions. This past August, the tenth publication of these studies went to print. Today I stand here honoring this 10th year anniversary of a highly notable and beneficial publication.

Because of the dream of its late founder, Anna Maria Arias, the LATINA Style 50 provides today to Latina professionals a resource when looking for information on mentoring programs, education opportunities, employee benefits, women's issues, and more in corporate America. With these resources we can continue to shed light and improve the status of Hispanic professionals in America's growing corporate world. LATINA Style's passion helps more Hispanic women become aware of companies that are providing nurturing environments, where they can continue to climb the corporate ladder. I commend LATINA Style on their commitment to open more doors to Hispanic women, and for their continued inspiration to all Latinas and Latinos in the United States who seek to serve the vital roles in America's social, political, and economic communities.

HONORING BAHAI COMMUNITY OF SAN JOSE

HON. ZOE LOFGREN

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, February 6, 2008

Ms. ZOE LOFGREN of California. Madam Speaker, I rise to acknowledge and honor Bahá'i Community of San Jose's 50th anniversary. The Bahá'i Faith, in just 150 years, has become an independent, second most widespread world religion whose five million followers are made up of more than 2,100 diverse ethnic, racial and tribal groups. The organization has more than 157,000 members in the United States.

The Bahá'i Faith includes teachings that promote the principle of equal rights for men and women, advocate compulsory education, abolish extremes of poverty and wealth, honor work performed in the spirit of service to the rank of worship, recommend the adoption of an auxiliary international language, and provide the necessary agencies for the establishment and safeguarding of a permanent and universal peace. The Bahá'i Communities of San Jose and of the United States operate more than one thousand grassroots social and economic development projects throughout the world.

This faith-based organization not only provides spiritual guidance for their members, but they also provide charitable work to the community at large. Some of their local civic activities include the membership in the Martin Luther King, Jr. Association, membership in the Network for a Hate Free Community, Juneteenth Festival, Second Harvest Food Collections, highway cleanup, and 22 years sponsorship of a service awards banquet recognizing notable individuals and organizations for their community service based on Bahá'i principles. Bahá'i Community of San Jose provides these valuable services at no cost to the Bahá'i Communities of the South Bay and the Santa Clara Valley Community at large.

In their 50 years of dedication and hard work. Bahá'i Community of San Jose has assisted thousands of people. Bahá'i Community of San Jose serves people of all beliefs, cultures, ethnicities and ages and serves a diverse population from various ethnic backgrounds.

It is indeed an honor and a privilege to have a warm, welcoming, and nurturing organization in my district that appreciates and honors the diversity that makes America, and specifically San Jose, California a most desirable place to live, work and raise a family.

FREEDOM FOR JUAN PEDROSO ESQUIVEL

HON. LINCOLN DIAZ-BALART

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, February 6, 2008

Mr. LINCOLN DIAZ-BALART of Florida. Madam Speaker, I rise to bring to the attention of our colleagues the unjustified arrest of yet another dissident, Juan Pedroso Esquivel, by the totalitarian dictatorship in Cuba.

Recently dictatorship thugs working to stifle free speech raided Mr. Pedroso's home after