

Madam Speaker, I urge you and my colleagues to join me in congratulating the Mount Kemble Home on the celebration of 125 years of serving Morris County's women, in one of New Jersey's finest municipalities.

HONORING MR. SY STERNBERG

HON. NITA M. LOWEY

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, June 18, 2008

Mrs. LOWEY. Madam Speaker, I rise today to recognize the accomplishments of Mr. Sy Sternberg and to congratulate him on his retirement as the Chairman of the Board and Chief Executive Officer of New York Life Insurance Company, the largest mutual life insurance company in the United States and one of the largest life insurers in the world.

A native of Brooklyn, New York, Mr. Sternberg earned a bachelor of electrical engineering degree from the City College of New York in 1965 and an M.S.E.E. degree from Northeastern University in 1968.

Before joining New York Life in 1989, Mr. Sternberg spent 13 years at the Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Company, where he was most recently senior executive vice president.

Mr. Sternberg is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations and the Business Roundtable and serves on its Task Forces on International Trade and Investment, Security and Fiscal Policy and the Leadership Committee of the Lincoln Center Consolidated Corporate Fund. Mr. Sternberg is also a Board of Trustees member for Big Brothers Big Sisters of New York City, New York-Presbyterian Hospital, Northeastern University and the Hackley School in Tarrytown, NY.

In 1999, Mr. Sternberg was appointed by President Clinton and served through 2002 as one of three United States representatives to the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Business Advisory Council (ABAC). In January of this year, Mayor Bloomberg of New York City appointed Mr. Sternberg as co-chair, along with former Mayor Dinkins, of the Mayor's task force on Career and Technical Education Innovation.

Mr. Sternberg is most importantly the proud father of two grown daughters, Jodi and Donna, and resides in Purchase, NY, with his wife, Laurie, and their son, Matthew.

Madam Speaker, I am proud to recognize my good friend Mr. Sy Sternberg for a successful career in finance and unparalleled devotion to charitable causes. I urge my colleagues to join me in honoring his tremendous accomplishments.

WHISTLEBLOWER PROTECTION
LEGISLATION

HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, June 18, 2008

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Madam Speaker, today I am introducing legislation that would close a loophole in the Department of Defense's whistleblowers' protection statute (10 U.S.C. Sec. 2409) and expand this safeguard

to include the men and women of the DOD contracting business who report abuses to their superiors.

Under current law, an individual is only protected—and therefore eligible for remedies—if he or she reports workplace security concerns to “a Member of Congress or an authorized official of an agency or the Department of Justice.” While I understand the importance of encouraging individuals to take their concerns to certain authorities, I believe it is imperative that we include in this authority an employee's superiors.

It seems only natural, that once someone recognizes a problem within their work environment, they report it to their superiors. This is part of a normal progression of attempting to resolve issues and challenging tasks on the job. Few people initially contact their Congressman or the Department of Justice when they first observe an irregularity on the job.

It is also important to note that many former military members migrate to the security contracting industry. Many of these men and women have years of previous service to our nation, have grown to respect their chain of command and understand the benefit it can provide in the workplace. When they have come to the conclusion that additional steps must be taken or when they have identified a significant problem in the work environment, these professionals are trained and encouraged to report their concerns to their superiors to enable them to assess the situation and foster a solution.

Similarly, many in the federal security contracting industry come from a law enforcement background with a comparable command structure and respect for their superiors.

The legislation I introduced today will ensure that those who identify problems within firms subcontracted by DOD are still afforded standard whistleblower protections even if they notify their employer about possible violations before they notify an agent of the federal government. The legislation does not require employees to notify their employer first and it does not preclude them from contacting federal officials, it simply protects employees who point out potential violations to their employer, the federal government or both. If an employee is dismissed prior to his/her notifying the government, but after notifying their employer, they will receive the necessary protections as well.

The current loophole was brought to my attention by a New Jersey resident who worked for a private security firm that guards military installations in my district and throughout the country. This individual witnessed and documented a number of events that raised serious concerns regarding the contractor's ability to ensure the safety and security of the base and the surrounding community.

Base security is not an issue to be taken lightly—anywhere and including in my state of New Jersey. As we all recall, in May of last year, the New Jersey U.S. Attorney's office arrested five men who were planning to attack another New Jersey installation, Fort Dix. After a thorough and aggressive law enforcement effort to thwart this attempted terror attack, the men accused have been detained and are awaiting trial. Still, the vulnerabilities at our military bases exposed by this incident cannot be minimized or dismissed.

The individual who brought this loophole to my attention reported to his employer what he

believed were unfulfilled contract requirements that resulted in questions regarding the firm's ability to provide adequate security. After his boss dismissed his concerns, he then scheduled a meeting with the base security personnel to discuss the matter. Before this meeting could occur, the individual was fired by the firm and barred from the base. At that time, he brought these concerns to me. However, since the law requires that a potential whistleblower be a current employee at the time he/she discloses pertinent information to a federal official, it was too late for him to be eligible for protections and/or remedies. Specifically, my legislation would expand the universe of those to whom an individual can properly report concerns to include the individual's chain of command, before and after any retribution, so that the individual will be protected and have the right to be reinstated if an investigation shows that the individual was punished for bringing the matter to the attention of proper authorities.

As we are all aware, in recent years the Department of Defense has looked increasingly to private security contractors to guard and police our military installations across the country. The men and women filling these positions deserve to be protected when they report violations and concerns to their superiors and especially if they are subsequently punished in an attempt by their employer to downplay or even cover up a violation. It is imperative that we amend the law to ensure that these employees are eligible for the same remedies as other whistleblowers.

INTRODUCTION OF THE RETIREE
HEALTH ACCOUNT ACT OF 2008
(H.R. 6288)

HON. JOHN M. McHUGH

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, June 18, 2008

Mr. McHUGH. Madam Speaker, I rise to discuss legislation, the Retiree Health Account Act of 2008 (H.R. 6288), that I introduced yesterday, June 17, 2008. This bill is designed to help Americans prepare for the medical costs they will incur in retirement.

When Americans engage in retirement planning, too often they don't contemplate the medical expenses they will incur. If they do, they often make significant underestimates or mistakenly believe that such expenses will be entirely met through Medicare. Often, they fail to recognize that Medicare coverage contains numerous gaps and that beneficiaries must pay deductibles, coinsurance, and copayments. For example, the monthly Medicare Part A premium currently ranges from \$233 to \$423 while Part B and average Part D premiums are \$96.40 and \$27.93, respectively. In addition, under Part B, beneficiaries must pay an annual deductible of \$135 and 20 percent of covered services. At the same time, Part D beneficiaries have a \$275 deductible and then must pay a 25 percent coinsurance levy for drug costs up to \$2,510, the entire amount for purchases between \$2,510 and \$5,726, and approximately 5 percent of all drug costs thereafter.

Current estimates indicate that an average American couple both aged 65 could need as much as \$295,000 to cover premiums for

health insurance coverage and out-of-pocket expenses during retirement. Moreover, these costs are increasing. For example, between 1985 and 2005, the Consumer Price Index (CPI) for medical care rose by 185 percent compared to 82 percent for all other goods and services.

During this time period, families headed by persons aged 55 to 64 saw their real expenditures on health care rise from \$2,459 to \$3,410 (about 40 percent) while average spending by families headed by persons aged 65 to 74 likewise increased from \$2,993 to \$4,176. Similarly, families headed by persons above age 75 saw their annual health care spending increase from \$3,006 to \$4,210.

Through all of the above, the health insurance coverage provided to retirees has been shrinking. From 1993 to 2004, the percentage of employers with 500 workers or more offering health insurance to pre-Medicare eligible retirees fell from 46 percent to 28 percent. At the same time, the number of employers offering retiree health insurance to Medicare eligible retirees also decreased from 40 percent to 20 percent.

In this environment, it is important to note that, while the United States tax code provides incentives for the prefunding of both pension benefits and retirement savings, it does not provide similar incentives for the prefunding of retiree health benefits.

Accordingly, the Retiree Health Account Act would provide Americans with tax incentives to set aside funds for health costs. It would accomplish this by establishing Retiree Health Accounts (RHAs), which would be structured very similarly to 401(k) plans. For example, RHAs would have, the same maximum employee inflation-indexed contribution and annual addition limits. In addition, individuals 50 years or older would be allowed to make annual catch-up deferrals of up to \$5,000.

Once a RHA account owner reaches age 55, he or she would be able to withdraw monies tax free, provided the funds are used to purchase qualifying medical care. Prior to age 55, monies could be withdrawn, but would be subject to a 10 percent penalty and ordinary income taxes. This penalty would be suspended, however, if the owner had become disabled or if the monies were used to cover health insurance premiums during periods of unemployment or to defray unreimbursed medical expenses. Similarly, RHA funds could be withdrawn without penalty, but subject to taxation, pursuant to a qualified domestic relations order. Finally, upon death, while a spouse could inherit a RHA without paying taxes, RHA funds would otherwise be subject to applicable income or estate taxes.

In addition to Retiree Health Accounts, this legislation would also allow individuals to establish Individual Health Accounts (IHAs). These accounts would be similar to Individual Retirement Accounts (IRAs) in structure and provide for the costs of retiree health care. For example, like IRAs, IHAs would have an annual contribution limit of \$5,000, indexed to inflation, with individuals age 50 or older eligible to make annual catch up contributions of \$1,000, also indexed for inflation. Unlike IRAs, however, contributions to IHAs would be prohibited once an individual becomes Medicare eligible. In addition, as with RHA funds, IHA funds could be withdrawn tax free if used to purchase medical care by an owner age 55 or older and without penalty if used before age

55 to meet the special circumstances of disability, unemployment, and extraordinary medical expenses. Likewise, IHA funds would not be subject to penalty if distributed pursuant to a qualified domestic relations order and could be inherited tax free only by a spouse.

To encourage lower-income Americans to take advantage of the opportunity to contribute to RHAs and IHAs, the Retiree Health Account Act would provide a refundable tax credit of up to \$1,000 for eligible individuals. This tax credit would be indexed to inflation and the maximum lifetime credit would be \$5,000.

Health care costs continue to increase while employer-sponsored retiree health benefits erode. However, we can help Americans prepare to meet their future health care costs by giving individuals an incentive and mechanism to help themselves. Accordingly, I ask my colleagues to join with me as I work to enact legislation authorizing Retiree Health Accounts.

PASSENGER RAIL INVESTMENT AND IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 2008

SPEECH OF

HON. CAROL SHEA-PORTER

OF NEW HAMPSHIRE

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, June 11, 2008

The House in Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union had under consideration the bill (H.R. 6003) to reauthorize Amtrak, and for other purposes:

Ms. SHEA-PORTER. Mr. Chairman, I rise today to voice my support for H.R. 6003, the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008. And I would like to thank Chairman OBERSTAR for his leadership on this issue.

Mr. Chairman, as gas prices continue to rise and our highways become more congested, it becomes even more critical for us to support and encourage mass-transit alternatives. Amtrak will surely continue to play a significant role as one of these alternatives.

My home State of New Hampshire is served by the Amtrak Downeaster, connecting Portland, Maine to Boston. The Downeaster has truly been a success story from the beginning of its service in 2001. Ridership numbers have continued to increase year after year, highlighting the importance of Amtrak service to the region. In fact, so far this fiscal year, ridership of the Downeaster has reached nearly 300,000.

Yet even a rail line as successful and as important to our region as the Downeaster has difficulties turning a profit. While there are improvements to be made at Amtrak overall, passenger rail service in general requires investment and dedication. As we have seen with the Downeaster, this dedication yields significant returns in tourism and business dollars that come as a result of improving access to the communities served.

I look forward to voting in favor of H.R. 6003 and urge my colleagues to do the same.

TRIBUTE TO MR. GREY FLOWERS
FERRIS

HON. BENNIE G. THOMPSON

OF MISSISSIPPI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, June 18, 2008

Mr. THOMPSON of Mississippi. Madam Speaker, I rise to salute one of Mississippi's finest politicians and agriculturist, former State Senator and farmer, Mr. Grey Flowers Ferris. Grey was a lifelong advocate for public education and a marvelous steward of farmland. His steadfast devotion to his family, friends, and farming are remarkable and will never be forgotten.

Madam Speaker, not long after graduating from college and pursuing a career in politics, Ferris returned to his passion of farming. As a child he grew up on a farm with four other siblings and it was then when he discovered his love for farming.

Madam Speaker, as a local farmer and family man, Ferris developed a passion for creating a better future for the children of Mississippi. Ferris was elected to the first board of the Vicksburg-Warren School District and served working to unite the school systems. With the deep divisions in local education in the Warren County, Mississippi, region, Ferris decided to run for State Senate to better address the State's education challenges. During his two terms in MS State Senate, Ferris was elected to serve as chairman of the Senate Education Committee and worked to reform education in rural and underfunded areas in Mississippi. He served as a lead author of the Adequate Education Act, which regulated the way money was allocated and spent among public schools.

Madam Speaker, Grey not only worked hard to advocate for education but he was lover of the environment and a first class citizen. He was well-respected by his peers not only for who he was but more so for what he did.

Madam Speaker, Grey saw the need to and retained the desire to change the world. Grey stared racism in its ugly face and combated it. The people of Mississippi hold him with high regard and respect.

Madam Speaker, Grey Ferris was a man who saw the ability to serve the public as a privilege—not just an obligation. He served the citizens of Mississippi well through his continuous efforts of seating on the board of the Vicksburg Art Association, the Mercy Regional Medical Center, the Soil and Water Conservation Commission, the Mississippi School Board Association and the William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation.

Grey Ferris wore many hats—an advocate of education, a protester for equality, devoted family man, committed farmer, and fine and just politician who worked to ensure fairness among all citizens of Mississippi. Today, Madam Speaker, it gives me great pride to recognize and honor the many contributions and continuous service of Grey Flowers Ferris to the State of Mississippi.