

Address of Requesting Entity: 312 Court-house Square, Suite 12, Bay Minette, AL 36507

Description of Request: Provide an earmark of \$275,000 to provide additional buses and security fencing for the Baldwin Rural Area Transportation System (BRATS). Two additional buses will help meet the growing demand of BRATS that currently provides public transit services in Alabama's largest county covering 1,500 square miles. The high cost of living in Baldwin County has also increased the demand for BRATS as area workforce is moving further away from tourist attracting coastal areas. Baldwin County is currently the 65th fastest growing county in the country (U.S. Census Bureau). Approximately, \$200,000 [or 73%] will be used to acquire two new buses; \$50,000 [or 18%] will be used for security fencing; and \$25,000 [or 9%] will be used to provide bike racks for buses. The Baldwin County Commission will provide the required matching funds.

RECOGNIZING THE EXTRAORDINARY PUBLIC SERVICE OF VICKIE WALLING

**HON. JOHN S. TANNER**

OF TENNESSEE

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Monday, December 14, 2009*

Mr. TANNER. Madam Speaker, I rise today to ask you and our colleagues to join me in recognizing and thanking Vickie Walling for her years of distinguished work on Capitol Hill. Vickie is retiring at the end of this year after 35 years of public service to the 8th District of Tennessee and to our country.

Vickie and I are from the same hometown, Union City, though she is fortunate to be a number of years younger. She attended Union City High School and the University of Tennessee-Martin, where, incidentally, she was roommates with another woman many of us greatly respect, UT Lady Vols Head Coach Pat Summitt.

Vickie came to work in the House of Representatives in 1974 and soon after joined the staff of Congressman Ed Jones, my predecessor in representing the 8th District in this chamber. She immediately began to distinguish herself as a dedicated staff member and a leader among her peers on Capitol Hill.

Fortunately, Vickie and other members of Mr. Jones' superb staff agreed to continue their service to the 8th District when Betty Ann and I were honored to come to DC in 1989 following Mr. Jones' retirement. In fact, many of Mr. Jones' former staff members—Kathy Becker, Margaret Black, Betty Hardin, Doug Thompson and Vickie—still serve alongside us to assist and represent West and Middle Tennesseans.

Over the years, Vickie has become a true leader not just within our office but across Capitol Hill. Her dedication, tireless work ethic and keen understanding of legislative issues such as health care, bipartisan welfare reform and strategic demobilization have put her in a class all her own. Vickie has also been instrumental in helping us form and develop the Blue Dog Coalition, having been there when we first began meeting almost 15 years ago. Since then, with Vickie's help, we have been able to grow the Coalition to more than 50

Members, and the Coalition has become an important voice in representing millions of Americans.

Many of us in this chamber and others have sought Vickie's guidance and counsel over the years. Her insight and honesty are invaluable.

I often tell our constituents that serving in elected office is similar to a turtle finding itself on top of a fence post; one simply cannot get there alone. Vickie and the others serving in the 8th District offices are dedicated public servants whose work is crucial to ensuring our constituents are well-represented. Though they may not know her as well as we do, Tennesseans have been very well served by Vickie's many efforts on their behalf.

Madam Speaker, please join Betty Ann, our staff, our colleagues and me in expressing gratitude to Vickie Walling for her commitment to service and helping enact effective public policy. We wish Vickie all the best in her retirement and know her daily presence here will be greatly missed.

STATEMENT ON IRANIAN DIGITAL EMPOWERMENT ACT

**HON. JAMES P. MORAN**

OF VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Monday, December 14, 2009*

Mr. MORAN of Virginia. Madam Speaker, I rise today to introduce the Iranian Digital Empowerment Act.

In the aftermath of Iran's disputed 2009 presidential elections, millions of Iranians flooded the streets to stand-up to their government and make their voices heard. Empowered by communication services like Twitter and Facebook, Iranians were able to organize and communicate freely outside of the watchful eye of their government in what has become the first popular democratic uprising of the social media age.

The Iranian people are among the most pro-Western people in the Middle East, and despite suffering under a totalitarian regime, their struggle to create a freer and democratic Iran continues to this day. This weekend marked the 6-month anniversary of fraudulent presidential elections. Once again, the Iranian people took to the streets in non-violent protest. The government of Iran has sought to counter the peaceful efforts of the Iranian people, launching unprecedented efforts to block access to Internet technology, infiltrate electronic social networks, and restrict Iranians from communicating freely. Unfortunately, due to outdated language in provisions regarding information services, U.S. sanctions have had the unintended consequence of denying the Iranian people the tools necessary to communicate freely and circumvent government monitors online.

In an effort to assist the Iranian people fighting for a change in leadership, I am introducing the Iranian Digital Empowerment Act. This legislation will clarify that U.S. laws are not intended to prohibit the export of software that would enable the Iranian people to communicate freely by circumventing their government's censorship efforts. U.S. sanctions intended to change the behavior of the Iranian government must not have the effect of stamping out the voice of the Iranian people.

TRIBUTE TO MARTHA TWARKINS

**HON. JOHN T. SALAZAR**

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Monday, December 14, 2009*

Mr. SALAZAR. Madam Speaker, I rise today to honor Martha Twarkins, a Legis Congressional Fellow from the Brookings Institute, a specialist with the United States Forest Service and, for the past year, a dedicated and invaluable member of my staff.

Throughout the year, Ms. Twarkins has contributed her considerable expertise and ability to legislative responsibilities in my office, and I could not be more grateful for or appreciative of her hard work.

Throughout her tenure in my office, Ms. Twarkins has worked diligently to mitigate the effects of the bark beetle epidemic on communities in Colorado and across the western United States. She has also provided oversight and direction to many of my legislative priorities concerning the Forest Service, including securing an additional \$40 million to help with the emergency bark beetle crisis.

She was an important resource on grazing and water rights, and a key advisor in the consideration and proposal of many new wilderness designations to forever protect our most beautiful public lands.

Additionally, Ms. Twarkins was my key liaison to the House Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming. Ms. Twarkins advised me on the committee's work on issues from fighting climate change in developing countries to creating a roadmap to Copenhagen. I truly appreciate her guidance on this committee.

Ms. Twarkins will always have a special place in my heart. My entire staff joins me in wishing her the best of luck as she resumes her position with the Forest Service, and with all her future endeavors.

BIPARTISAN CONGRESSIONAL DELEGATION TO NATO PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY MEETINGS

**HON. JOHN S. TANNER**

OF TENNESSEE

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Monday, December 14, 2009*

Mr. TANNER. Madam Speaker, during the period November 8–16, 2009, I led a bipartisan House delegation to NATO Parliamentary Assembly (NATO PA) meetings in Edinburgh, Scotland, and to additional bilateral meetings in Belfast, Northern Ireland. The delegation also conducted bilateral meetings in Edinburgh. Joining me as Ranking Member of the NATO PA delegation was the Hon. JOHN SHIMKUS. The delegation included Representatives JOHN BOOZMAN, JO ANN EMERSON, BARON HILL, CAROLYN MCCARTHY, JEFF MILLER, DENNIS MOORE, MIKE ROSS, DAVID SCOTT, ALBIO SIRE, MIKE TURNER and staff. The NATO PA delegation had a highly successful trip that examined a wide range of political, economic and security issues on NATO's agenda, as well as issues involving U.S. relations with Northern Ireland and Scotland.

The NATO Parliamentary Assembly consists of parliamentarians from all 28 NATO member states. The NATO PA meets twice yearly in

plenary session in a member state and provides a unique forum for elected officials to analyze and debate challenging issues facing the Alliance. The NATO PA, through its deliberations, also provides guidance to the NATO leadership in Brussels. In addition to the 28 member states, parliamentarians from countries such as Russia, Georgia, Afghanistan, and others participate in the sessions as associate states or observers. Through these sessions, delegates have the opportunity to learn first-hand the views and concerns that other countries have over the key security issues of the day. An invaluable aspect of the meetings is the chance to meet and come to know members of parliaments who play important roles in their own countries in shaping the security agenda that their governments pursue at NATO. These contacts endure, and can provide an invaluable private avenue to Congress and the Administration for insights into each ally's particular approaches to an issue.

The key issues on the agenda of the NATO Alliance as well as on the NATO PA agenda include the conflict in Afghanistan, the future of NATO and the writing of its new strategic concept, as well as more specific issues including relations with Russia, energy security, missile defense, and emerging challenges such as piracy and cyber security. Each of these issues was vigorously debated by the parliamentarians. Relations with Russia and the new strategy towards Afghanistan and Pakistan were two of the issues that dominated the session. Many members of the Alliance continue to question whether Russia is intent on pursuing an increasingly assertive security policy including efforts to intimidate neighboring states, through the threat of force. There was also concern expressed that Russia would continue to use its energy supplies as a political lever to influence European policy. It was clear from our meetings that not only the United States and NATO, but the European Union as well, are concerned about Moscow's posture on a variety of issues. And, while there were differences of opinion over how to structure future relations between NATO, the NATO PA and the Russian delegates to the Assembly, most felt that dialogue between NATO, the NATO PA, and Russia was important and should continue. Many delegates referenced the U.S. commitment to a new, constructive relationship with Moscow and expressed hope that through those promising relations, Russia's attitude toward NATO could become more positive.

On Afghanistan, there was continued support for the ISAF mission among the allies and a willingness to provide the additional civilian and financial support necessary for the reconstruction effort there. However, there was great interest in knowing how the Obama Administration will re-adjust U.S. and NATO strategy and how many additional U.S. military forces will be committed to the conflict. Our delegation was clear that this was not a U.S. war and that NATO's role in Afghanistan continues to be a critical factor.

Before the opening sessions of the Assembly's plenary the U.S. delegation received a detailed briefing from our Deputy U.S. Ambassador to NATO, John Heffern, who addressed several of the issues that would be debated during the NATO PA sessions, particularly regarding Russia and NATO's ongoing role in Afghanistan. Mr. Heffern also reviewed the recent Administration decision on European mis-

sile defense and the alternative plans being discussed with our allies.

Over two days of the NATO PA session, extensive meetings of the Assembly's committees took place. There are five NATO PA committees. In each, parliamentarians presented reports on issues before the Alliance. The reports were debated by all members of the committee who often made counter-arguments or suggestions for amending a report. Members of the U.S. delegation were present and active in each committee meeting.

The Political Committee heard three very interesting presentations. Former German General Klaus Naumann focused on the future relevancy of transatlantic security relations. A second presentation on the recent elections in Iran and their implications generated some interesting questions and debate. The third presentation addressed the challenge of international terrorism. Our colleague Rep. CAROLYN MCCARTHY asked if the al-Qaeda terrorist organization was developing new training and planning bases outside of the Afghanistan/Pakistan region that the west should be watching. The Committee received presentations on three reports including one from our colleague, Rep. MIKE ROSS, a committee rapporteur, who discussed possible transatlantic cooperation with Pakistan. Mr. ROSS's presentation was well received by the Committee. Other reports debated included "Resetting Relations with Russia" that featured several interesting comments from the Russian delegates, and "NATO's relationship with Georgia" that included a discussion on the current situation in Georgia and where relations between Georgia and NATO now stands. There were still differences of opinion on who was responsible for starting the war in Georgia and how to deal with Georgia's aspirations for eventual membership in NATO.

The Committee on the Civil Dimension of Security is currently chaired by our colleague, Rep. JO ANN EMERSON. This committee discussed reports prepared by committee rapporteurs addressing security challenges and cooperation in Central Asia, and Moldova's internal challenges and prospects for Euro-Atlantic integration. The Committee also heard a presentation on lessons learned in the U.K. from the London terrorist bombing and an address from Georgian Vice Prime Minister Baramidze. The focus of the committee's work in this session was on the growing challenge of piracy off the coast of Somalia, which included a formal report on the subject. The Committee also approved a resolution recognizing this challenge and calling for a more coordinated international approach.

The Defense and Security Committee discussed three reports which reexamined NATO's ongoing operations in Afghanistan, addressed NATO's territorial defense capabilities, and covered the issue of cyber security. The Committee also conducted a joint session on the threat of piracy with the Committee on the Civil Dimension of Security. The Defense Committee adopted a resolution on Afghanistan, which among other things urged NATO governments and parliaments to: reaffirm their commitment to assisting the Afghan government to provide a secure and stable environment; to endorse the resource and approach advocated by the ISAF Commander; and to supply, as a matter of absolute priority, the personnel, equipment, and funding necessary to speed the development of the Afghan Na-

tional Security forces, in order to promote a transition to Afghan leadership. Our colleague Rep. JOHN SHIMKUS urged more commitment by NATO members to the mission in Afghanistan and stressed the need to reassure Eastern European allies about their security. Our colleague Rep. MIKE TURNER stressed the need to move forward with an all-NATO missile defense program.

The Economics and Security Committee debated three reports focused on food prices and their implications for security, on energy production in Central Asia and its potential contribution to transatlantic energy security, and a long discussion on the global financial crisis and its impact on member nations. In that third discussion, a number of members suggested that it would be useful to explore how the financial crisis was impinging on national defense budgets in allied countries. The Committee also heard presentations on the security aspects of food-related crises, global energy market trends, and managing defense budgets in times of global recession.

Finally, the Science and Technology Committee discussed three extremely timely reports. One interesting report addressed climate change and its relationship to national security. This was followed by a presentation on the Arctic by the British Ambassador to Norway. Another report addressed the current efforts being used to combat the spread of weapons of mass destruction. This was preceded by a presentation on Iran's nuclear ambitions by Professor Ali Ansari from the University of St. Andrews. A third report provided a look at the resurgence of nuclear power as a source of clean energy and was accompanied by a presentation on the role of nuclear energy in the U.K.'s energy strategy.

On Tuesday, the final day of the plenary, the general assembly had the opportunity to hear a presentation from NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen in his first formal address to the Assembly as Secretary General. Rasmussen urged the Parliamentarians to help re-build understanding between NATO and the publics of each member state especially with respect to the NATO mission in Afghanistan and the relevance of NATO itself. The Assembly also heard from Admiral James Stavridis, Supreme Allied Commander in Europe who asked NATO Parliamentarians to help the Alliance deal with the pace and complexity of the challenges the Alliance faces from a dynamic and constantly changing international environment. The SACEUR urged the NATOPA to help provide political input and guidance to NATO as the Alliance re-writes the strategic concept that will define NATO's future roles and missions. We also heard from the Honorable David Miliband, the UK's Foreign Minister who reaffirmed that the commitment of European military forces to Afghanistan, now under intense questioning throughout Europe, need not be an endless exercise as long as the international community and the Afghan government step up and provide the necessary resources and political will to develop a stable, reliable government in Kabul that can rid itself of corruption and provide the necessary security and public services that its citizens demand. Finally, the delegates heard from Lord Robertson, former Secretary General of NATO and the current President of Chatham House.

Finally, Madam Speaker I am pleased to report that Rep. JO ANN EMERSON was re-elected Chairperson of the Committee on the Civil

Dimension of Security along with DENNIS MOORE, JOHN SHIMKUS, JEFF MILLER, JOHN BOOZMAN, BEN CHANDLER, and CAROLYN MCCARTHY who were all re-elected as Vice-Chairpersons of their respective Committees. Our colleague MIKE ROSS was also re-elected as the Rapporteur for the Political Committee's subcommittee on Transatlantic Relations. Our newest additions to the officer list include MIKE TURNER who was elected Vice-Chairperson of the Science and Technology Committee and DAVID SCOTT who was elected as a Rapporteur also on the Science and Technology Committee.

In sum, Madam Speaker, the fall session of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly in Edinburgh was a success and as President of the Assembly, I took pride in the deliberations and participation of the delegates from all 28 member nations and our associate and observer members. For Members of the House or Senate interested in reading the Committee reports or presentations mentioned in this statement, they are all available on the NPA web site at [www.nato-pa.int](http://www.nato-pa.int). I also want to take this opportunity to thank Dana Linnet, and Don Pena and all of the fine men and women of our embassy in London and Consulate in Edinburgh for the wonderful job they did assisting the delegation.

#### BELFAST

Prior to the NATO PA plenary, the U.S. delegation traveled to Belfast, Northern Ireland. The delegation received a country briefing, which included a general overview of the history and the current political and economic situation in North Ireland, from our Consul General Kamala Lakhdir and Deputy Consul General Kevin Roland. One of the main issues discussed was the need to resolve remaining challenges related to policing and justice. The briefers expressed the hope that more progress will be made on those fronts in the next few months. The delegation held bilateral meetings in Belfast in order to demonstrate support for the fragile peace process and assess growing economic development opportunities. At the Northern Ireland Policing Board, the delegation spoke with senior officials, police officers, and politicians regarding its work overseeing the Police Service of Northern Ireland. We discussed the increasing participation of Catholic police officers, efforts to improve community policing as a means of building trust within all neighborhoods, and remaining challenges regarding the contentious issue of devolving policing and justice issues from London to Belfast.

The delegation spent several hours at the Stormont Assembly holding discussions with First Minister Peter Robinson, Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness, and Speaker William Hay. These political leaders were frank about the challenges still facing Northern Ireland, particularly as regards policing matters. However, they also stressed the importance of economic development, jobs and infrastructure for enabling future progress. The delegation then observed a plenary debate in the Assembly.

Members saw first-hand efforts to stimulate economic development, including the attraction of foreign direct investment, in Northern Ireland. They visited Titanic Quarter, the largest commercial development site in Europe. The 186 acres will be developed as a blue-chip technology district, including apartments, a film studio, an entertainment section, and an

exhibition of the ship's history. The delegation also spoke with officials at the Northern Ireland Science Park who are working to bring together venture capitalists and entrepreneurs.

In addition, the delegation observed a community event which included a basketball game between Catholic and Protestant teenage girls organized by an American NGO called Peace Players. Sponsored by the Belfast Lord Mayor on the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, the event was held at the Peace Walls that still divide the communities of Belfast. The Members also visited a cultural center in West Belfast (Catholic/Nationalist area), where Gerry Adams (MP-Sinn Fein party) stopped by and made brief remarks. Normandy

Madam Speaker, as has been a tradition with the U.S. delegation to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly when we travel to Europe over either Veteran's Day or Memorial Day, the delegation makes an effort to visit a U.S. cemetery to pay our respects to our service men and women. On this occasion, we visited Normandy, holding a solemn commemorative ceremony and laying a wreath at the memorial in the American Cemetery. These visits are perhaps the most memorable and poignant moments of the delegation's trip. As our colleagues know, the critical WWII European campaign was launched on the bloody beaches of Normandy and eventually resulted in the defeat of the Nazi regime. The delegation visited the resting place of almost 9,400 U.S. soldiers, sailors, and airman who died in the liberation of France, and Europe, on Omaha and Utah beaches. The beautiful cemetery and visitors' facility overlooking Omaha Beach and the Ranger monument at Pointe du Hoc are managed by the U.S. American Battle Monuments Commission. We were deeply honored to visit the cemetery and want to thank Mr. Dan Neese, the Cemetery Superintendent, for his hospitality and the fine job he and his staff do to preserve the memory of those U.S. servicemen who gave their lives in such a noble cause. We also wish to recognize and thank Anaëlle Ferrand, our Control Officer, and Walter Frankland, Deputy Chief of Staff, European region of the American Battle Monuments Commission for their fine assistance during our brief stay.

#### SCOTLAND

The delegation was pleased to receive a briefing by U.S. Consul General Dana Linnet (Principal Officer). Linnet gave a brief overview of some of the economic and political issues relating to Scotland, including the issue of devolution. The delegation also held several bilateral meetings in Edinburgh. We met with Scottish Justice Minister Kenny MacAskill to discuss his decision to grant compassionate release to Abdel Basset al-Megrahi, the convicted bomber of Pan Am flight 103 that exploded over Lockerbie, Scotland. We expressed our deep disappointment regarding the Minister's decision, raising numerous issues regarding his handling of the case. We discussed U.S.-Scottish trade and cultural links with officials from the Scottish government, and we spoke about current political developments with the Scottish Parliament's Presiding Officer Alex Fergusson. The delegation was particularly interested to learn about the legislation that called for a referendum on Scotland's independence from the U.K. In addition, the delegation met senior Scottish military officials to discuss challenges facing the

NATO alliance in Afghanistan including public support for the mission in Afghanistan which is low in the U.K. and for which more must be done to strengthen public support for the efforts there.

Madam Speaker, the NATO Parliamentary Assembly provides a unique opportunity for Members of Congress to engage in serious discussions on critical issues with our colleagues from other NATO member states, associate and observer states. I believe our delegation, and thus this Congress, benefits greatly from the information we exchange and the personalities we meet during these meetings. I look forward to our next NATO PA session in February in Brussels, Belgium.

In conclusion, I would like to again acknowledge the hard work and dedication of our Consular staffs in both Belfast and Edinburgh, for their hard work and dedication. I especially want to thank our entire military escort group from the United States Air Force, and Air Force Reserves, including our very fine pilots. Our diplomatic corps and military personnel provide a quiet but invaluable service in ensuring our safety and the success of our delegation business. This group of diplomats, service men and women was no exception. I thank them for their hard work and their dedication to duty.

#### REMEMBERING JODI ESQUIVEL

#### HON. TED POE

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Monday, December 14, 2009*

Mr. POE of Texas. Madam Speaker, on Friday October 30, 2009 Jodi Esquivel passed away after a two-year long battle with kidney cancer.

Jodi, a middle school English teacher in Nederland, Texas touched many lives in her short 27 years of life. Her smile was infectious and her unwavering strength and endless faith touched all those she met.

In 2007, after suffering months of back pain, Jodi was diagnosed with kidney cancer. She was in the early stages of her second pregnancy when results of an MRI showed a cancerous tumor in her kidney that had spread to her spine in three places.

Jodi leaves behind husband Justin and three year old daughter Hallie. Her family and friends celebrate Jodi for the love she shared with them and the lessons she taught them throughout her life.

#### IN HONOR AND RECOGNITION OF ADA MARIE HAGAN

#### HON. DENNIS J. KUCINICH

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Monday, December 14, 2009*

Mr. KUCINICH. Madam Speaker, I rise today in honor and recognition of Ada Marie Hagan, beloved mother, grandmother, great-grandmother and friend, whose lived her life with grace, wit, love and passionate commitment to family, community and social justice issues.

The matriarch of her family, Mrs. Hagan grew up in Youngstown, Ohio, the daughter of