

that my colleagues would agree with me when I say there is no greater love than this. We owe it to the men and women who have risked their lives for our freedom to ensure that procedures are being adhered to where VA benefits are concerned.

H.R. 2349 will benefit the well-being of the public by ensuring that employees and managers of the Veterans Benefits Administration possess the adequate skills that are necessary to fulfill their duties, and if any train employees when necessary. This is the least we can do to assist our service men and women when they seek to attain the benefits that they have already earned.

HONORING THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY OF COMUNIDADES LATINAS UNIDAS EN SERVICIO (CLUES)

HON. BETTY McCOLLUM

OF MINNESOTA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, October 18, 2011

Ms. McCOLLUM. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Comunidades Latinas Unidas En Servicio (CLUES) on its 30th anniversary celebration. For three decades, this vibrant non-profit community organization has been a life-line support for the Latino community in Minnesota.

Since its inception in 1981, CLUES has been charged with a noble mission to promote equality for all, seek to improve the health of individuals and families, and to transform the lives of all families in Minnesota, this organization has made a positive impact on the lives of so many individuals and families. The support services provided by CLUES that help individuals and families recover from chemical dependency, help people become self-sufficient through employment and educational opportunity, and offer a comfort zone for senior citizens to maintain their well-being are commendable.

As the representative in Congress for Saint Paul, Minnesota and the east metropolitan area, I have had the opportunity to work with CLUES executive director, Jesse Bethke Gomez and the staff and board to address the needs and challenges facing Latinos and our entire community in Minnesota. CLUES would not be successful without the caring and dedicated staff, volunteers and supporters who serve the public each day. They deserve congratulations for reaching this milestone, and gratitude for all that they do to make our community and our state a caring place that helps families and individuals realize their dreams for the future. I wish them the very best, and I look forward to celebrating their continued success.

HONORING THE REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN ON THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE RESTORATION OF AZERBAIJAN'S INDEPENDENCE

HON. BILL SHUSTER

OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, October 18, 2011

Mr. SHUSTER. Mr. Speaker, as the Co-Chairman of the Congressional Azerbaijan

Caucus, I would like to take this opportunity to honor the Republic of Azerbaijan as it celebrates the 20th anniversary of the restoration of Azerbaijan's independence.

Located in a geopolitically dynamic region between Europe and Asia and sandwiched between Russia and Iran, Azerbaijan is a secular county with a predominantly Muslim population that has also been home for more than a millennia for vibrant Christian and Jewish communities.

Azerbaijan and the United States enjoy a strong partnership founded on shared interests in global and regional security, energy and economic development, democratic reforms, and respect for human rights. President Obama has called Azerbaijan a "young democracy" during his meeting with Azerbaijan President Ilham Aliyev in September 2010, and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stressed during her July 2010 trip to Azerbaijan that "the bonds between the United States and Azerbaijan and deep, important, and durable."

The past 20 years have seen Azerbaijan make great leaps in consolidating its sovereignty and political independence, and they are on the path towards building strong democratic institutions and a diversified economy that will further contribute to the welfare of the people of Azerbaijan. As I frequently remind my colleagues, the United States has more than 230 years of experience developing into the modern democracy we are today. It is critical that the United States provide our support and friendship to our partners in Azerbaijan as they continue to develop.

Azerbaijan has opened Caspian energy resources to development by U.S. companies and has emerged as a key player for global energy security. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline project is the most successful project contributing to the development of the South Caucasus region and has become the main artery delivering Caspian Sea hydrocarbons to the U.S. and our partners in Europe. Notably, in 2009 Azerbaijan provided nearly one quarter of all crude oil supplies to Israel and is considered a leading potential natural gas provider for the U.S.-supported Nabucco pipeline. It is important for the United States to continue to provide support for the development of the Southern Corridor that will further strengthen energy security.

On the security front, immediately after 9/11 Azerbaijan was among the first to offer strong support and assistance to the United States. Azerbaijan participated in operations in Kosovo and Iraq and is actively engaged in Afghanistan, having recently doubled its military presence there. Azerbaijan has extended important over-flight clearances for U.S. and NATO flights to support ISAF and has regularly provided landing and refueling operations at its airports for U.S. and NATO forces. Also, Azerbaijan, as highlighted by Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, plays an important role in the Northern Distribution Network, a supply route to Afghanistan by making available its ground and Caspian naval transportation facilities. Moreover, Azerbaijan provides vital support for U.S. nonproliferation efforts.

Again, as the Co-Chairman of the Congressional Azerbaijan Caucus, it is my distinct pleasure to congratulate the people of Azerbaijan and President Ilham Aliyev on the occasion of this important anniversary. I ask my colleagues to join me in honoring this important milestone in the history of Azerbaijan also

encourage my colleagues who are interested in supporting Azerbaijan to join me as a member of Congressional Azerbaijan Caucus, a bipartisan group of nearly 40 Members of Congress working to help foster the growing partnership between the United States and Azerbaijan and to advance U.S. interests in this pivotal region.

HONORING THE LIFE OF LANCE CORPORAL TRAVIS M. NELSON, USMC

HON. JEFF MILLER

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, October 18, 2011

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the United States Congress, it is with great respect and honor that I rise today to recognize the life of Northwest Florida's beloved Lance Corporal Travis M. Nelson.

Lance Corporal Nelson succumbed to wounds sustained in combat operations in Helmand Province, Afghanistan on August 18, 2011. At the time, he was assigned as a rifleman with 1st Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment, 2d Marine Division, based at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina.

Born in Orlando, Florida on August 5, 1992, Lance Corporal Nelson was a true American patriot. Drawn to military service at an early age, with the support of his family, he joined the Young Marines of Pensacola at 14. He later participated in the Naval Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps program at Pace High School, where he graduated from in 2010. He then enlisted in the United States Marine Corps, and upon completion of basic training in January 2011, Lance Corporal Nelson chose to serve in the infantry. He knew of the challenging role; however, he felt that the job should not be left for someone else. His decision to join the Marine Corps is a true testament to his character's strength and selflessness.

Lance Corporal Nelson was a beloved member of his community, remembered as an athlete, an avid fisherman, and a friend by those who knew him. He is survived by his parents, Scott and Beckie; his sisters, Anna and Jenna; his brother, Daniel; and his fiancée, Madeline Cates.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the United States Congress, I am privileged to honor the life of Lance Corporal Travis Nelson for his selfless service and sacrifice in defense of our nation. My wife Vicki and I offer our prayers for his entire family. He will be truly missed by all.

VETERANS OPPORTUNITY TO WORK ACT OF 2011

SPEECH OF

HON. SHEILA JACKSON LEE

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, October 11, 2011

Ms. JACKSON LEE of Texas. Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 2433, "the Veterans Opportunity to Work Act 2011." This legislation would provide honorably discharged, unemployed veterans who are between the ages of 35 to 60 with who are currently not eligible for certain veterans benefits

will be provided with retraining assistance for a limited period of time.

The Veterans Opportunity to Work Act provides services for the courageous men and women who served in the Armed Forces. It is in a spirit of deep gratitude and appreciation that I fight to provide for our veterans with the tools they need to find employment after serving our country. It is the responsibility of all Members of Congress and the Administration to fulfill our moral obligation to those who have fought to protect our freedom and democracy.

In the State of Texas, we have nearly 1.7 million veterans, and 18th District is home to 32,000 of them. Of the 200,000 veterans of military service who live and work in Houston; more than 13,000 are veterans from Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, and Operation Iraqi Freedom. Additionally, there are almost 34,000 soldiers from Texas currently deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan. I am supporting this legislation to ensure that our men and women in uniform are taken care of when they return from combat.

According to the Department of Labor as of June 2011 there are over 1 million unemployed veterans; over 632,000 are between the ages of 35 and 54. As Iraq and Afghanistan veterans come home, and as Vietnam, Cold War, and Persian Gulf War veterans can't find or lost their jobs, this results in a real loss of talented leaders and workers. Currently, there are 236,000 Vietnam Era veterans; 258,000 Cold War Era veterans; 182,000 Persian Gulf War veterans, and 192,000 Iraq and Afghanistan Era Veterans who are unemployed. These men and women have faced the enemy and lived to tell the tale, the least we can do is give them an opportunity to retain and enhance their skills in order to attain civilian employment.

This legislation addresses a need to find ways to provide training and employment assistance for the men and women who have fought for our country. Post 9/11 veterans who are now leaving the military may go to school on the 9/11 GI Bill; however veterans of previous conflicts are not afforded the same opportunity. To address the needs of these veterans this bill will provide for a limited time an

educational benefit to unemployed veterans between the ages of 35 to 60 at community colleges and technical training schools.

After dedicating their lives to serving our country it is important to assist veterans at all stages of their transition back to civilian life. A major part of transiting into civilian life is to ensure that skills that were attained while in service are translatable to civilian employment. Veterans face a variety of obstacles to employment namely the language used to describe particular skill sets in the military does not correspond with the terminology used by civilian employers. This disconnect has created problems for veterans who are seeking certain types of employment and or licenses. The veterans are not able to translate their skills into terms that would demonstrate to civilian employers that they already possess the certain key skills.

In order to address this obstacle to employment, The Veterans Opportunity to Work Act (VOW) makes the Transition Assistance Program mandatory. The Department of Labor must thereby create a system by which licensure and certifications are translatable to those available at the state level. This is done in an effort to address the barriers between the skills and training received in the military and requirements for civilian licenses and other credentials'.

In addition, under H.R. 2433 the Department of Labor must work with states to implement new performance measures to evaluate the priority of services provided to eligible veterans and mandates that Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Specialists and Local Veterans Employment Representatives sole duty will be to assist eligible veterans in finding suitable employment.

Throughout my tenure in Congress, I have remained committed to meeting both the needs of veterans of previous wars, and to those who are now serving. Veterans have kept their promise to serve our nation; they have willingly risked their lives to protect the country we all love. We must now ensure that we keep our promises to our veterans.

I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting H.R. 2433, the Veterans Opportunity to Work Act.

RECOGNIZING ESCONTRIAS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL'S BLUE RIBBON AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION

HON. SILVESTRE REYES

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, October 18, 2011

Mr. REYES. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in recognition of the achievements of Escontrias Elementary School. Escontrias was recently honored with the 2011 National Blue Ribbon award from the United States Department of Education for excellence in education.

The National Blue Ribbon School award honors both public and private elementary, middle and high schools where students achieve at high levels and also schools where the achievement gap is narrowing. Since 1982, approximately 6,500 American schools have received this coveted award.

I want to personally congratulate the teachers, administrators, and staff of Escontrias Elementary. This year only 304 schools nationwide received the award, and they will be honored at a ceremony in Washington, D.C. The Blue Ribbon validates the efforts of these schools to create a positive and effective learning environment.

Escontrias principal Marivel Macias noted that the award "has solidified the notion that all things are possible". This national award exemplifies the dedication, persistence, and commitment that the Escontrias faculty, staff and community has for their students, and by closing the achievement gap, they will acquire the tools necessary to compete at a global academic level and become future world leaders.

In times of economic uncertainty, we cannot lose sight of the paramount importance of our children's education, and I am honored to represent Escontrias Elementary School.