

TRIBUTE TO THE FIREFIGHTERS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Alabama [Mr. BEVILL] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. BEVILL. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute during National Fire Prevention Week to all the firefighters who do such an outstanding job protecting their communities. They are dedicated professionals working a dangerous job which requires them to put their own lives on the line while saving others. They are true heroes and we certainly appreciate and respect all of them.

I especially want to recognize the volunteer firefighters who work to protect the rural areas where they live. They face unique challenges and risks in protecting large areas. Frequently, they must deal with a lack of equipment, inadequate water supply and not enough well-trained volunteer firefighters.

As you know, a majority of rural fire departments say that improving the water supply is one of their highest priorities. Studies show that residents living in communities with populations of 5,000 or less are almost twice as likely to die in a house fire than residents in communities of 5,000 or more. Compared to city dwellers, rural homeowners suffer more than twice the property loss from fire each year. It is a major challenge for small communities to provide fire protection for area residents, farms and forests and lack of adequate water supply is one of the main reasons.

As we recognize National Fire Prevention Week, we should look for ways at the local, State and Federal level to strengthen the capabilities of our rural volunteer fire departments.

All levels of government must cooperate to help provide essential rural fire protection.

And, as citizens, we must work together to try to reduce the number of fires our firefighters must deal with. As you know, common sense and personal responsibility can go a long way toward the prevention of fires.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under previous order of the House, the gentleman from Texas, (Mr. SAM JOHNSON,) is recognized for 5 minutes.

[Mr. SAM JOHNSON of Texas addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.]

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Connecticut [Mr. SHAYS] is recognized for 5 minutes.

[Mr. SHAYS addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.]

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Connecticut [Mr. FRANKS] is recognized for 5 minutes.

[Mr. FRANKS addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.]

SAVING MEDICARE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of May 12, 1995, the gentlewoman from California [Mrs. SEASTRAND] is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mrs. SEASTRAND. Mr. Speaker, there is good news today. We heard one of the earlier gentlemen tell us that the Committee on Ways and Means voted out our Medicare Preservation Act bill. We are on our way to strengthening and protecting and preserving Medicare.

Besides that good news, one of my colleagues, Mr. SAM JOHNSON, celebrated his 65th birthday today. I know the members of the Committee on Ways and Means congratulated him, and he has come of age now. He is old enough to join millions of other Americans who are on Medicare. I just know that he has not been scared off by many of the criticisms, the things we read about in the headlines and newspaper and we see on television, about attempts that are planned, that the Medicare Preservation Act is heartless and uncaring and so on. The Committee on Ways and Means presented a check for \$4,800 to Mr. JOHNSON. I know he will not be cashing it tomorrow. The point is to let not only he know, but other senior citizens in America today who are also celebrating their birthday with Mr. JOHNSON today, that Medicare is going to be there for them.

That is how much we are going to spend this year alone in Medicare, \$4,800. The good news is in our plan we are going to increase that over the next 7 years to \$6,700. Only can you be in Washington, DC, and so often hear about how we are cutting Medicare, when this is actually an increase.

So what I say to my colleague, Mr. JOHNSON, is happy birthday, and I know that, as I said, we are on our way to preserving and protecting Medicare.

I am going to enter into a conversation with my friend, the gentleman from Minnesota [Mr. GUTKNECHT]. The gentleman also, as I am, is one of those reform-minded freshmen. We came to this House with such hopes and dreams, and we are just plugging away, are we not?

But it is interesting. I was here a few months, and on my desk I found a report in April from the Social Security and Medicare Board of Trustees. I read it, and it said, "If you, Congress," now that is me, I cannot pass the buck, that is me, "if you do not do something about this, we are going to see Medicare go broke."

It is going bankrupt now. I would just like to tell people that I am 54 years old, so I have an interest in this program continuing. My mom is 83. She is probably not going to appreciate my saying that to everyone in the

world today, but she is soon to be 84, come this December. She is a Medicare recipient, and she has those concerns, like many of her friends and many of my friends who are at that age and are concerned about costs of health care and such.

So I remember hearing from my mom when she heard the news on television and reading the headlines, "What are you going to do about this?" So I have been talking to her.

The point I wanted to make about being one of those freshmen, my point is to come here and not be part of the problem that we seem to have had for so many years. Obviously many voters also consider there was gridlock in this House. They wanted to see something done. "Do it, do it now." So I have been doing my best, as well as my colleague, to see to it that we do have some solutions to the problems.

I think my concern over the last several months, whether I go to my town hall meetings or my senior conferences, or as I visited health care facilities, nursing homes convalescent homes, from one end of my district, which incidentally, includes the central coast of California, from Santa Barbara to Paso Robles in the north, it is a very large area, and people are concerned that we are going to do something about it.

So I am hoping as we continue this conversation, we saw the first step taken today to move this legislation through the Committee on Ways and Means, and I hope we can all come together to solve the problem, to preserve and protect it, and put aside all of the rhetoric that we hear, and to assure my 83-year-old mom and her friends and all those people I saw in those health care facilities that are utilizing Medicare right now, that we are going to be there for them and to take the rhetoric out of the situation.

So I would like to ask the gentleman from Minnesota [Mr. GUTKNECHT] if that is what he is hearing from his people? I think we see people, wondering if we are going to do it, "are they really going to reform Medicare?" Some of the other situations, are we going to balance that budget in 7 years, are we going to reform welfare, are we going to give tax relief to our middle-income families?

That is what I am hearing. And they are looking to us, and I am anxious to get on with the situation of passing the legislation and having the discussion with the American people.

Mr. GUTKNECHT. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman from California. I would just like to say first and foremost, not only are we both freshmen, but I think we both have parents, and parents are both on the Medicare system. They are concerned. And I am concerned as a good son. I want to make certain that my parents get the health care that they need.

But I think also, I come at this also not only as a freshman and as someone who has parents who are on the Medicare system, but I come at this also as