

agencies, hospitals and nursing homes, especially those that serve rural areas.

We are here to again bring to the attention of the House, and the American people, the absolute urgent need to take action before the end of this session of Congress—to restore Medicare funding and make other administrative adjustments to cutbacks imposed under the BBA of 1997.

The BBA-97, as it is called, proposed to cut \$115 billion from Medicare by either terminating or massively reducing Medicare reimbursement to providers of health and medical care for senior citizens and the disabled.

The effect has been that with only one-third of the mandated Medicare cuts having been implemented so far, the total cut is not \$115 billion—it already totals more than \$206 billion.

Imagine what will occur if the other two-thirds of proposed Medicare cuts are implemented in the coming year.

In West Virginia, the hardest hit segment of our health care delivery system has been among home health agencies. We have seen the closure of 18 of our home health agencies, and drastic reductions in staff and services at those still operating.

Our hospitals—especially the rural hospitals—are suffering the same kind of financial crush—with many of them having already drastically reduced staff, and dozens that have had to curtail services for outpatient care.

I just received word yesterday that the Appalachian Regional Hospital at Man, West Virginia, may be forced to close by the end of October—due in part to the loss of Medicare reimbursement. Another local hospital nearby which is in financial difficulty also, may eventually close. These are the only two hospitals serving a large rural county in my district. It is obvious that the closure of one hospital is bad enough—closure of two would create critical access problems for my constituents in need of emergency room care, inpatient care, and outpatient clinic services.

The same kind of burden has been placed upon nursing homes where the sickest, poorest and most vulnerable Medicare beneficiaries are cared for—and due to infirmities caused by age and disease—from heart problems to diabetes to stroke—they are the most costly of patients.

We have reached this impasse tonight because, in my view, Congress balanced our Nation's budget on the backs of its elderly, disabled, homebound citizens whose only help comes from Medicare.

It is my understanding—and if true I applaud him—that our colleague and friend, Representative BILL THOMAS, Chair of the Ways and Means Health Subcommittee, will have introduced today—a plan to restore some of the BBA cuts to Medicare.

The first words that occurred to me when I heard about the Thomas plan was: It's about time.

But I genuinely applaud his effort because it is important to have our Health Subcommittee Chairman on record as having acknowledged the adverse impact of the Medicare cuts imposed on providers of this country's health care for our most needy, most vulnerable senior citizens.

It wasn't that long ago that we were constantly admonished not to pay any attention to our home health agencies about the Medicare cuts—even as they closed over 2,000 of them nationwide—18 of them in my State.

We were told that the cuts were not too deep, and that the impact was not so adverse as to require congressional action to restore them.

And so again I greet Chairman THOMAS' plan for restoring some of the BBA-97 Medicare cuts with genuine hope and lingering uncertainty, because we have not seen the details.

I am also gratified to hear—after preaching on the subject for two long years—that the Administration is looking into ways that Medicare reimbursement cuts can be restored through administrative action.

My colleagues here on the floor tonight will recall with me that we suggested this administrative action in a half-dozen letters to the Administration beginning over two years ago. But we were told that the BBA-97 was so tightly written that only legislative relief could help restore the Medicare cuts. We were told that the Administration had no "wiggle room" to act on its own.

Once the details of the Thomas plan are available to us for our study—we will know for sure whether he has sent the Fire Brigade to our rescue, or if we are being handed a pitcher of spit to try and extinguish the fires of neglect brought to our health care delivery system through the excessive Medicare cuts contained in the BBA of 1997.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I say only what many of us have been saying all along—that we must work together to get this burgeoning loss of health services under control.

Chairman THOMAS has taken a first step in leading Congress to act before the end of this year.

This is an important day—and I have every hope and expectation that Congress will move quickly and effectively to address the needs of our home health agencies, our hospitals, our nursing homes—providers who deserve our thanks and our support for this restoration of Medicare cuts imposed by BBA-97.

TRIBUTE TO DR. HECTOR O.
NEVAREZ

HON. SOLOMON P. ORTIZ

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, October 14, 1999

Mr. ORTIZ. Mr. Speaker, I rise to commend Mr. Hector Nevarez who recently retired from the Federal Government after 30 years of distinguished service. I would like to commend him for his patriotism in serving our nation.

Our men and women in uniform and their families owe him a special debt of gratitude for his hard work in improving their quality of life over the course of his career. As the director of the Department of Defense Domestic Dependent Elementary and Secondary Schools, and as superintendent for Department of Defense overseas schools in Panama and Cuba, he raised the quality of these school systems to sterling heights. In doing so, he earned the respect and confidence of all those he served.

I know that his recent efforts as the director of support and deputy executive director of congressionally mandated Commission for Servicemembers and Veterans Transition Assistance contributed significantly to the enactment of legislation this year that greatly improves the benefits for servicemembers and veterans.

He did very important work as the Federal Advisory Committee Act official for the President's panel on the disposition of Vieques. This sensitive position required the utmost in personal and professional integrity which he embodied throughout.

In these executive level positions, Mr. Nevarez displayed impeccable character and leadership worthy of the Senior Executive Service rank he holds. He epitomizes the value of including everyone in the government of our country and the values of fair play that are a tradition in our culture.

I ask my colleagues to join me in wishing him the best as he moves into another phase of his life, and I am sure that he will be as successful as he has been in Government.

TAIWAN'S NATIONAL DAY

HON. JOHN COOKSEY

OF LOUISIANA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, October 14, 1999

Mr. COOKSEY. Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate President Lee Teng-hui of the Republic of China on the occasion of Taiwan's National Day. In the past decade, Taiwan has achieved remarkable economic and political growth. Taiwan enjoys one of the highest standards of living in Asia, and its people enjoy all the political freedoms of a full democracy.

I am pleased to learn that the Taiwan Government has been doing its best to assist all those that have been affected by the September 21 earthquake. Because of Taiwan's progressive leadership I feel certain the recovery from the earthquake will be swift.

My thoughts and prayers are with the good people in Taiwan during this difficult period in their lives.

IN RECOGNITION OF ANTHONY
RUSSO

HON. BOB FRANKS

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, October 14, 1999

Mr. FRANKS of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize an individual who exemplifies the essence of public service.

Anthony Russo has made significant contributions as a leader in Union, New Jersey for many years. After receiving his law degree from Rutgers University and becoming a member of the Union County Bar Association, Mr. Russo was admitted to practice before the United States Supreme Court. He served as a Union Township Committee member for 27 years, Mayor for nine terms, and New Jersey Senator from 1978 to 1981. Mr. Russo is the current Union County Adjuster—a position he has held since 1972.

Mr. Russo is a pillar of society who has illustrated genuine dedication to cancer-fighting organizations and with Union Township's youth. He was an original organizer of the Boys Club of Union, now known as the Boys and Girls Club of Union, and served in several leadership positions within the group for many years. In addition, Mr. Russo has volunteered his fund raising efforts on behalf of cancer research for the Union County Chapter of The