

Mr. President, I will do all I can to ensure that the women in my state and all over the country have access to the opportunities and resources they need to start new business ventures. However it is also imperative that we invest in the business development resources that will help women sustain and grow these new businesses. This small investment yields big returns in the form of job creation, revenues, and overall growth of the nation's economy.●

#### MEDICARE BENEFICIARY ACCESS TO QUALITY NURSING HOME CARE ACT OF 1999

● Mr. ABRAHAM. Mr. President, on the 13th of October, I was proud to cosponsor S. 1500, the Medicare Beneficiary Access to Quality Nursing Home Care Act of 1999. When Congress worked with the President to craft and pass the Balanced Budget Act of 1997, it included a number of desperately needed cost-saving measures to ensure that Medicare did not go bankrupt. At the time, Medicare was projected to be bankrupt by 2001 with annual costs rising at three times the rate of inflation.

However, the Health Care Financing Administration, which oversees the administration of Medicare, has far exceeded the scope of the Balanced Budget Act of 1997, and gone beyond the intent of Congress in scaling back health care provider reimbursements. Driven by a philosophy that the Federal Government knows best how to handle your health care decisions, this administration has uniformly adopted policies that limit Medicare beneficiary choice, obstruct critically needed market-based reforms, and relentlessly pursued a strategy of reducing payments to providers as the prime method to reduce outlays.

Sometimes such a "Washington-knows-best" strategy just doesn't work. The fact of the matter is, health care providers will bear costs that cannot be overlooked or undervalued simply because HCFA wishes to declare it so. This has been especially prevalent in the area of Skilled Nursing Facility care. The recently implemented Prospective Payment System (PPS) fails to account for the full range of services required by most Medicare beneficiaries provided care in these facilities.

Specifically, the PPS implemented by HCFA has a payment schedule called Resource Utilization Groups (RUGs) that are intended to account for the needs of individual beneficiaries. However, these RUGs have failed to account for the full range of needs of these beneficiaries, especially for the medically complex patient. While private market insurance is significantly better at recognizing the needs of the medically complex patient, the failure of this administration to allow for any type of market-based reform to move forward has forced us to rely upon the implementation of the

PPS by HCFA, which, as I discussed before, seems to have a predisposition towards underpaying for necessary services.

The result, Mr. President, is that beneficiaries are increasingly denied access to lower-cost Skilled Nursing Facilities and are forced to continue care in higher-cost hospitals where they also may not be able to get the most appropriate level of rehabilitative care. S. 1500, introduced by Senator HATCH, attempts to address the overreaching of HCFA directly and swiftly. First, it would provide for payment "add-ons" for the provision of additional treatment in the care of the medically complex patient. Second, it restores one percentage point of the reductions to the annual inflation adjuster mandated by BBA-97. Although the inflation adjustment reduction was directly written in the BBA-97 language, it's revision provides Congress the most direct and simplest way to counteract the excesses of HCFA.

Mr. President, I am heartened that HCFA has recognized the flaws in the current PPS system and is undertaking a review of this system. However, that review will not be completed until next year. Our Skilled Nursing Facilities need these restorations now in order to continue to provide our Medicare beneficiaries continued and uninterrupted care. That is why I fully support this legislation, am cosponsoring it, and call on my colleagues to do the same as soon as possible.●

#### THIRD ANNUAL CAUCUS FOR POTOMAC HERITAGE NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL

● Mr. ROBB. Mr. President, I rise to recognize the Third Annual Caucus for the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail, to be held on October 22, 1999.

Designated by Congress in 1983, the Potomac Heritage Trail is unlike any other trail in the National Trails System. The corridor which follows "Our Nation's River" includes both the boyhood home and Mt. Vernon estate of our first President, George Washington, significant greenways and parks, and nearby centers of commerce which are vital to the economic vitality of Virginia and the capital region.

I congratulate the National Park Service, the Potomac Heritage Partnership, the Northern Virginia Planning District Commission and other advocates of this National Scenic Trail in persevering in their efforts to increase opportunities for enhancing commerce, conservation and cultural initiatives along the Potomac River. I wish them continued success in the years to come.●

#### IN RECOGNITION OF DOUGLAS C. STRAIN

● Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I am pleased today to recognize the 55th anniversary of Electro Scientific Industries, Incorporated, ESI, and to honor

the accomplishments of Mr. Douglas C. Strain, ESI's founder and first president and chairman of ESI's board.

Established in Portland in 1944, ESI was among the first high-technology companies in Oregon. Since that time, ESI has grown into a global leader in the manufacturer of precision laser trimmers and memory repair equipment, as well as a worldwide supplier of electronic production equipment. From humble beginnings, ESI has become a \$200 million company, employing more than 900 individuals in Oregon and around the world, and helping to establish Oregon as one of this country's high-tech capitals.

Accomplishments such as these are often born of tough challenges. Having overcome a devastating fire in the 1950's, ESI had to rebuild itself from the ground up, and has had to re-invent itself on a number of occasions since that time. The company has proven itself adept at adapting to the fast-pace that characterizes the high-technology sector. From test and calibration equipment, electron microscopy, and analog computing to laser trimming, memory repair and vision, handling, packaging, and drilling technologies, ESI products have always been at the leading edge of technology developments.

I especially pay tribute to a remarkable Oregonian, Electro Scientific's founder, Mr. Douglas C. Strain. On October 24, Doug will celebrate both his 80th birthday and his retirement from ESI's board of directors. Mr. Strain's vision and perseverance have brought the company successfully to the end of this century, and I believe that ESI will continue on with equal success well into the next century. I congratulate Doug on his accomplishments and wish him the very best as he undertakes new challenges in his life.●

#### IN PRAISE OF METS OUTFIELDER BENNY AGBAYANI

● Mr. AKAKA. Mr. President, the boys of summer rarely disappoint us, and last night's final game of the National League playoffs once again confirmed that baseball is truly America's pastime. The series captivated television audiences as the Mets and Braves went head to head in extra innings in their last two games: Sunday's game was the longest in playoff history—lasting more than five hours, and last night's game was not decided until the bottom of the 11th—just past midnight.

I want to single out Hawaii's own, Benny Agbayani, the star New York outfielder, who proudly wears number 50 for the 50th state. Benny had an illustrious playoff season and proved he is an invaluable addition to the Mets starting lineup. After playing in Triple A since 1993, the Hawaii outfielder was called up by the Mets in early May to replace the injured Bobby Bonilla. He secured his slot by batting .400 and hitting 10 home runs by mid-June. The former St. Louis School and Hawaii