that SSA will process fee payments to attorneys in a timely fashion.

The legislation we are introducing today simply seeks to put that reasonable expectation into law. H.R. xxxx would prohibit the Social Security Administration from charging an attorney the 6.3 percent assessment unless the attorney, or her fee for payment within 30 days of the award of past-due benefits to his or her client. Without this common-sense legislation, SSA would be permitted to charge the 6.3 percent assessment without regard to how long the agency takes to process attorneys’ fee payments.

As necessary as this legislation may be, it is not all that is required of this and future Congresses. We in Congress must also remain vigilant and ensure that the new administrative assessment imposed by the Work Incentives Improvement Act does not deter attorneys from representing disability claimants. Given the complexities of the disability determination process, if claimants are unable to secure professional legal representation, the results could be disastrous.

Claimants without professional legal representation appear to be far less likely to receive the benefits to which they are entitled. For example, in 1998, 57.6 percent of claimants represented by an attorney, but only 35.7 percent of those without one, were awarded benefits at the hearing level.

As mandated by the Work Incentives Improvement Act, the General Accounting Office will examine the impact of this new administrative assessment upon claimants’ access to legal representation. If the GAO finds that the assessment does impair claimants’ access, I fully expect that, consistent with the conference agreement on the Work Incentives Improvement Act, Congress will revisit this issue once more.

In closing, I look forward to working with Chairman Shaw on this piece of legislation in the same bipartisan manner that characterized our successful efforts last fall on the Work Incentives Improvement Act and again this spring on the repeal of the Social Security retirement earnings test. With this sort of collaboration, I am certain that we can pass this bill as well, thereby creating incentives for SSA to improve its procedures for making payments to attorneys and ensuring that disability claimants have qualified and reliable attorneys to whom they can turn for assistance.

MAKE-A-WISH FOUNDATION 20TH ANNIVERSARY

HON. ANITA HINOJOSA
OF TEXAS
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Friday, June 9, 2000

Mr. HINOJOSA. Mr. Speaker, today I pay tribute to a South Texas educator, Anita Hinojosa, who will retire in July after 31 years in vocational and adult education. Anita helped make Corpus Christi a better place by virtue of her lifetime commitment to education.

After working as a home economics teacher after graduating from Texas A&I University at Kingsville, and as a consultant, Anita became the Vocational Education Coordinator while also working as an adjunct Professor of Vocational Education at Corpus Christi State University.

In 1990, she became the Career and Technology Education Director for the Corpus Christi Independent School District, the position she will soon leave to enjoy retirement. During the course of her work here, she has supervised some of the most important programs available at CCISD, those programs that work with those who need special training because of their age or special circumstances.

Anita currently oversees the following programs: Adult Basic Education; Alternative High School Center; Summer Training and Education Program (STEP); Pregnancy, Education, and Parenting; Guidance and Counseling; Instructional Technology; and several at-risk programs.

I ask my colleagues to join me today in commending a special patriot, one who spent a lifetime in pursuit of education and teaching, Anita Hinojosa.