

(AFSCME). She was at the forefront in leading AFSCME in Houston and Texas for two decades before her retirement.

Liz has also used her boundless energy over the years to become a stalwart in the Democratic Party. She has been a true activist, serving as a Precinct Judge, floor leader, block walker, an avid campaigner, and a successful recruiter. She has been a loyal and valuable member of the Democratic Party at the local, state, and national level for the last forty years.

Mr. Speaker, I congratulate Elizabeth Kimmel-Hieken for more than four decades of service to Texas and Harris County. Her contributions to the labor movement and politics will always be present, and her legacy shall endure.

INTRODUCTION OF THE SOUTHERN HIGH PLAINS GROUNDWATER RESOURCE CONSERVATION ACT

HON. TOM UDALL

OF NEW MEXICO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 22, 2000

Mr. UDALL of New Mexico. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce legislation which will bring focus to an issue that concerns the long-term economic viability of communities in much of America's heartland: the southern High Plains stretching from the middle of Kansas, the Texas panhandle, Oklahoma, and the eastern portion of Colorado, and the eastern counties of my home state of New Mexico.

Much of the area that I just described is farming country and much of its economy is linked to the Ogallala aquifer. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resource Conservation Service recently determined that there are over six million acres of irrigated farmland overlying the southern Ogallala. These farms use between six and nine million acre-feet of water annually. The problem however, is that the aquifer is being depleted very quickly. In just seventeen years we have seen large areas of the southern aquifer experience a 10- to 20-foot drop in their water table. These decreased levels will negatively affect aquifers used for irrigation, and for municipal water on the southern High Plains.

The problems facing the groundwater resources on the southern High Plains is a multi-state issue with significant economic and social consequences for America. Ignoring the problem and continuing uses to go unabated invites tremendous economic dislocation for a large portion of our country.

To address this issue I am introducing the Southern High Plains Groundwater Resource Conservation Act. This bill recognizes that accurate scientific information about groundwater resources is necessary to make good decisions.

It calls upon the U.S. Geological Survey to develop mapping, modeling, and monitoring strategies for the Southern Ogallala, to provide a report to Congress and relevant states with maps and information, and to renew and update that report every year.

It also acknowledges that a sound water conservation plan must be developed on a multiyear goal. Conservation measures must be implemented over a large area in order to observe a long-term groundwater trend. This

bill would authorize the Secretary of Agriculture to provide planning assistance on a cost-share basis to states, tribes, counties, conservation districts, and other local government units to create water conservation plans designed to benefit their groundwater resource over at least 20 years.

Lastly, this bill will provide two primary forms of assistance for groundwater conservation on farms. They are a cost-share assistance program to upgrade the water use efficiency of farming equipment, and the creation of an Irrigated Land Reserve.

The cost-share program is based on the up-front costs frequently prohibitive for modern irrigation methods. It is estimated that an initial \$20,000 in Federal investment in equipment on a cost-share basis would save between 325 to nearly 490 acre-feet of water over a ten year period.

The Irrigated Land Reserve is designed to convert 10% or approximately 600,000 acres of irrigated farmland to dryland agriculture. Because dryland farming is less productive than irrigation, this bill would provide for a rental rate to farmers to ease the economic impact of changing over. When fully implemented this program can potentially save between 600,000 and 900,000 acre-feet of water per year at a cost of \$33 to \$50 per acre-foot.

There is a pressing need to conserve this valuable aquifer, we must acknowledge that this is a precious commodity that is worth saving. It's good for the southern High Plains and it's good for our Nation.

HOMER HICKAM: WEST VIRGINIA'S ROCKET BOY

HON. NICK J. RAHALL II

OF WEST VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 22, 2000

Mr. RAHALL. Mr. Speaker, a few years ago a blockbuster best-seller book, originally called "The Rocket Boys" was published, and shortly thereafter a movie was made based on the book, titled "October Surprise." It was a sell-out at bookstores and theaters across the Nation.

This story, written by former NASA engineer from McDowell County, West Virginia, was about a boy, his friends, and his weary but supportive parents, who was so taken by what he read about NASA's early rocket experiments commissioned by the United States Government, that he spent his childhood experimenting with homemade rockets.

His name was Homer Hickam, now a retired NASA engineer, who wrote "Rocket Boys."

On June 21, 2000 I received an official commitment from NASA detailing a long-term loan of a model of a U.S. Space Shuttle for exhibit in Coalwood, West Virginia, Homer Hickam's hometown.

I worked closely with NASA officials in this successful effort to obtain a display in recognition of the accomplishments and vision of Homer Hickam and the "Rocket Boys" from Coalwood.

The display of this U.S. Space Shuttle is a tribute to Homer Hickam, his remarkable talent, and his teenaged tenacity in making his dreams come true—not only to shoot his own rockets into space as a boy, but to take his talents and his dream to NASA itself as a grown man.

Homer Hickam is an inspiration to our youth—not only in West Virginia but the Nation—that their dreams can come true, and that they should reach for the stars.

The U.S. Space Shuttle model will come from the Marshall Space Flight Center in Alabama, and will be in place in time for the celebration of the Second Annual Rocket Boys Day Festival on June 24, 2000.

I believe, and the NASA Space officials agree, that this model is most appropriate to commemorate Mr. Hickam's work in propulsion, spacecraft design, and payload and crew training at the Marshall Center.

After the festival ends, the 13-foot scale model will be on long-term display across from the Country Corner Store on Route 16, in the heart of Coalwood, West Virginia, across the street from Homer Hickam's homeplace.

For those of you who read the book or saw the movie, you will understand the significance of placing this display across from Homer Hickam's old homeplace—the homeplace about which Mr. Hickam wrote, got a brand new furnace one day when Homer tossed a handful of unknown chemicals into the old furnace to see if they had enough explosive quality to thrust his next rocket high into the skies over McDowell County. They did, his mother got the new furnace she had always wanted, and the rest as they say is history.

RECOGNIZING BOB WILLIS

HON. JO ANN EMERSON

OF MISSOURI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 22, 2000

Mrs. EMERSON. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in recognition of a dear friend and public servant who is stepping down after nearly thirty years with the U.S. Forest Service. Bob Willis has spent his life dedicated to the protection and conservation of several of our country's national forests.

Bob Willis began his career with the Forest Service in 1971 in the beautiful White River National Forest in Glenwood Springs, Colorado and in Monte Vista, Colorado in the magnificent Rio Grande National Forest. From there, Bill moved on to the Tongass National Forest in Alaska. Bob went on to "Big Sky" Country in 1976, with service in the Bitterroot and Lolo National Forests in Montana, and finally found a resting place in Rolla, Missouri in 1980 serving the Mark Twain National Forest.

Bob is the longest serving Staff Officer that Mark Twain has ever had, serving 19 years. Bob is married to Kris Swanson, also a Staff Officer on the Mark Twain National Forest. He has two daughters, Erin Willis, 22, Robin Wilson, 24, and a son-in-law, Tommy Wilson. In addition, Bob has two step-sons, Thomas England, 16, and Daniel England, 13. When he is not caring for the Mark Twain, he and his daughters show, breed, and raise Tennessee Walking Horses. Bob's responsibilities with the Mark Twain included managing the technical services within the forest, including computer systems, telecommunications, minerals and geology, special uses, land acquisitions, and real estate management.

In his retirement, Bob will remain committed to the outdoors with his favorite hobbies such as raising and caring for his horses, landscaping his new home, and playing tennis. He