HONORING THE LIFE OF MR. JERRY RAYMOND

HON. DEBBIE STABENOW

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, September 7, 2000

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the lifetime achievements of Mr. Jerry Raymond who passed away in January, 2000 and offer my sincere condolences to his family.

Jerry Raymond was a remarkable man whose many contributions to Wayne County, the labor movement and the City of Livonia will be long remembered. He was a 49 year resident of Livonia and served on the City Council from 1966 to 1980. Always cognizant of the needs of others, his favorite saying was ''People come first.'' He advocated for housing for seniors before it was the popular thing to do. His sensitivity to others is undoubtedly why he was re-elected to office so many times.

There are many other fascinating things that are important to know about this special man. He quit high school after his mother died and his father lost his job. As he moved around the country looking for a job, he started getting involved in strikes and joined the cause of working men and women. He became a union activist and his leadership in the labor movement brought him national recognition. Despite his many achievements, Jerry felt something was missing as he watched other family members pursue a higher education. Although he did not have a high school diploma, he enrolled in law school. He graduated Cum Laude and was honored by being elected President of his class. He opened a law practice called Jerry Raymond and Associates in Livonia and practiced law until shortly before his death.

Jerry was a special friend, role-model and mentor to many including myself. He was very involved in his community and in democratic politics. He is missed by everyone whose life he touched, but his spirit lives on in our memories and in the legacy he left behind.

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VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION IS AN ANSWER TO LABOR SHORTAGES

HON. BARNEY FRANK

OF MASSACHUSETTS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, September 7, 2000

Mr. FRANK of Massachusetts. Mr. Speaker, one of the outstanding public servants with whom I have worked, and from whom I have learned a great deal, is Elmer C. Bartels, the Commissioner of the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission. Elmer Bartels has an extraordinary record of effective advocacy on behalf of people with disabilities, and has done a great deal to educate the rest of us as to the terrible error we have made in failing to help them work to their full potential. Recently Elmer Bartels wrote an excellent article on this subject, drawing on his own expertise in the field, and because it is so relevant to the public policy considerations we will be dealing with as we reconvene, I submit Elmer Bartels' article on the importance of workers with disabilities in the American economy.

EMPLOYERS WITH LABOR SHORTAGES SHOULD LOOK TO VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

(By Elmer C. Bartels)

It is a fact that today more individuals with disabilities are in the workplace earning real wages than ever before. Certainly the booming economy has a lot to do with it, but there is much more to the story than just that.

The unsung hero in the struggle to enhance employment opportunities for people with disabilities is the Federal/State Public Vocational Rehabilitation Program, authorized and funded under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

For nearly 80 years, and against great odds and prejudices, the State Public Vocational Rehabilitation Program has helped people with disabilities prepare to enter the workplace. Every state has a vocational rehabilitation agency whose sole purpose is to assist people with disabilities obtain the skills, training and confidence necessary to enable them to take their rightful place in the economy.

However, until the passage of Sec. 504 of the Rehabilitation Act in 1975 and later the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, opportunities in the workplace were limited and often resulted in placement in sheltered workshops.

MAINSTREAM OPPORTUNITIES

However, with advances in technology and the shortage of qualified workers, new mainstream work opportunities are becoming more available for persons with disabilities.

When the Work Incentives Improvement Act (WIIA) was signed into law on Dec. 17, another impediment was removed in addressing the nation's efforts to encourage people with severe disabilities to go to work.

Nationally, there are, according to the General Accounting Office, about 2.5 million people with disabilities receiving Social Security benefits under both Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) who could possibly benefit from WIIA. (This population represents about 27 percent of the total number of individuals who are eligible to access the Public Vocational Rehabilitation Program.)

WIIA's assurance of the continued availability of health insurance, under both Medicaid and Medicare, for SSI and SSDI recipients, will remove a formidable barrier to their employment. Public vocational rehabilitation counselors assess the skills and interests of people with disabilities, help them develop individualized plans for employment, and purchase or arrange for the services or training they need to become qualified for jobs.

225,000 PEOPLE HELPED

This program can provide any reasonable and necessary services to help individuals with disabilities get ready for real work. Last year, the Public Vocational Rehabilitation Program helped 225,000 people with disabilities across America enter the work force.

In Massachusetts, the Public Vocational Rehabilitation Program, through the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission, helped 4,800 individuals with disabilities go to work in 1999. Federal funding for vocational rehabilitation was $2.4 billion in 1999. The states matched those federal funds with $600 million of their own, resulting in a $3 billion national Public Vocational Rehabilitation Program. The distribution formula of federal funds to the states is based upon the population and per capita income of each state.

The $3 billion spent nationally on vocational rehabilitation services produces $2.6 billion in employee earnings and $850 million in state and federal revenues during a single year of employment alone. This is an incredible return-on-investment in light of the fact that those earnings continue for years without the expenditure of additional vocational rehabilitation dollars.

A 5-TO-1 RETURN ON THE DOLLAR

The Social Security Administration reports that each dollar spent for the vocational rehabilitation of SSA recipients results in $5 in savings to the Trust Fund and treasury. The 225,000 individuals with disabilities employed last year will continue to earn real wages and pay state and federal taxes far in excess of the investment made in their employment future by the Public Vocational Rehabilitation Program.

Despite the extraordinary success of the Public Vocational Rehabilitation Program, half of the states restrict the number of people with disabilities served due to a lack of funds. It is estimated that an additional $600 million in federal monies, plus the state match of $120 million, would eliminate waiting lists in every state and help another 54,000 people with disabilities go to work.

Additional public vocational rehabilitation services and the guarantee of medical coverage under the WIIA would significantly reduce the unacceptably high rate of unemployment among people with disabilities.

According to statistics compiled by the GAO, it is estimated that between 15 million and 20 million Americans have health-related work limitations. Each year the Public Vocational Rehabilitation Program serves 1.2 million people with disabilities who want to work.

HIGH UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

A recent Harris survey indicates that 71 percent of working-age Americans with disabilities are unemployed and of that number, 72 percent want to work.

However, 42 percent of working-age Americans with disabilities believe that they are too disabled to work. The highly qualified, professional vocational rehabilitation counselors of the Public Vocational Rehabilitation Program work with individuals with significant disabilities to help them recognize that it is possible for even the most significantly disabled individuals to increase their economic and personal independence through work.

The passage of WIIA and the guarantee of continued health insurance coverage for Social Security recipients makes work a realistic goal for many more people with significant disabilities.

A recently completed seven-year study by the Research Triangle Institute, confirmed once again the success of the Public Vocational Rehabilitation Program by showing that it is highly effective in placing people with disabilities into productive jobs. No other federal or state program has received this type of scrutiny and measured up to such a high level of successful outcomes.

INDEPENDENT LIVES

It proved once again that the federal/state effort to improve the lives of persons with disabilities by allowing them to live independent and productive lives is on the right track.

In particular, the study shows that:

- Graduates of Public VR worked an average of 35 hours per week and earned an average of $7.35 per hour;
- 37.5 percent of the graduates earned more than $7 per hour;
- 78.4 percent of graduates work in professional, managerial, technical, clerical, sales or service jobs;
- 85 percent of graduates were working in the same or other job one year after graduation;
- 67.6 percent of graduates were satisfied or very satisfied with their jobs;