

We should also consider the hidden environmental issue of this election, that of judicial appointments. The third branch of government, the judiciary, has at times played a key role in protecting the environment by requiring the enforcement of environmental laws, preventing overreaching by public and private parties. Governor Bush has voiced enthusiasm for judges in the mold of Scalia and Thomas. Judicial appointments along these lines could not only hamstring an administration for years but could cripple environmental enforcement for a generation.

There are some who suggest there is no difference between the Republicans and the Democrats in this election. When it comes to the environment, the reality is stark. The Democrats have a positive record of support and accomplishment, of sympathy and passion for the environment. The Republican ticket offers indifferent voting record, cursory performance in office, and advocacy of dangerous, even reckless, environmental policies.

Our air, the water, the landscape, our precious natural resources do not have the time to survive benign neglect, malicious indifference, let alone active assault.

There is a huge difference, perhaps more than any other issue, that of the environment. The stakes for the environment could not be higher, and the public should give it the attention that it deserves.

---

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS HEALTH CARE PERSONNEL ACT OF 2000

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 19, 1999, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. STEARNS) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. STEARNS. Mr. Speaker, in all deference to my colleague from Oregon, the zero rating that he cited for Secretary Cheney in his voting while in Congress was from a group that is really very socialistic and makes its decisions based upon emotion and not upon science. Governor Bush is dedicated to making decisions on the basis of science and economics and not just emotions when it comes to our environment.

So I ask my colleague to review the record of Governor Bush and look carefully at the votes of Secretary Cheney with that in mind.

Mr. Speaker, I came down here this afternoon to speak about a bill, H.R. 5109, which is a bipartisan bill. It is called the Veterans' Affairs Health Care Personnel Act of 2000.

I chair the Subcommittee on Health and Veterans' Affairs, and we passed this bill. Tomorrow we are going to have a full markup. I want to bring this bill to the attention of my colleagues because I think all of them will want to cosponsor this.

About 10 years ago, the professional nursing corps at the Department of

Veterans Affairs' was in a crisis. VA was losing critical, even irreplaceable, assets from its clinical base. The Nation's hospitals in general were suffering acute shortages of trained nurses, and indeed the VA itself was viewed as a major recruitment source by these hospitals. Because of the nature of the payroll system for Federal employees, it is sort of a ponderous civil service system. VA was powerless to react in a highly competitive, volatile arena. The quality of care was in danger.

In the 101st Congress, we went ahead and tried to correct that, but we did not quite complete the job. So we had a hearing in the subcommittee earlier this year on the status of VA's work with special focus on the pay situation of VA nurses.

Mr. Speaker, what we found was very disappointing. In fact, we learned that many VA nurses had not received any increases in pay since our 1990 legislation 10 years ago. While those initial pay increases were in many cases substantial, in the course of time, other VA employee groups had caught up because of the annual comparability raises available to every Federal employee. So the nurses of the VA found themselves in a situation that they were not competitive, they were at a disadvantage, and some were leaving to go to the private sector. And this is again creating a crisis.

We in the Veterans' Affairs cannot afford to lose these specialized individuals. Therefore, in addition to the guaranteed national pay raises for nurses that was put in our bill, the subcommittee has crafted necessary adjustments to the locality survey mechanism, which is a special formula that is set up to take care of nurses and their pay increases to ensure that data are available when needed and to specify that certain steps be taken when they were necessary that lead to these appropriate salary increases for their nurses.

Mr. Speaker, this bill also addresses recommendations of the VA's Quadrennial Pay Report concerning VA dentists. Now, this is another area where we are losing specialized people. We want to bring their pay up to contemporary balance with compensation of hospital-based dentists in the private sector, or we are going to lose all the dentists in the VA system. This is the first change in 10 years in VA dentists special pay.

Our bill also addresses a very important area dealing with Vietnam veterans. At the instigation of the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS), who is the ranking minority member of the full committee, he brought up the idea of reauthorizing the landmark 1988 study of posttraumatic stress disorder in Vietnam veterans. Our bill would reauthorize this study. I look forward to working with the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS) on passage of this bill.

The bill also requires the VA to record military service history when

VA veterans come in to talk to physicians about their health care history. This will aid any veteran who subsequently files a claim of disability, especially given our newfound acquisition of knowledge with the Gulf War Syndrome, and that military combat causes stress, exposures may be associated with pesticides and other things, and all this might lead to disease later in life.

So I want to commend the Vietnam Veterans of America for bringing this proposal to me. It is a valuable contribution to this bill.

Finally, I want to talk about another very innovative idea that is crafted in this bill with the help of the gentleman from Florida (Mr. WELDON). His proposal will set up a pilot program involving not more than four VA clinic service areas. Within these areas, enrolled veterans in need of uncomplicated hospital admissions would be referred to community hospitals rather than being sent to VA Hospitals.

So if there are far distances from these hospitals, they will be able to go to a local hospital. We found out that this saves 15 percent in cost savings.

So, Mr. Speaker, I urge all of my colleagues to support my bill, and I look forward to its passage on the House floor.

Our bill is bipartisan and major provisions of it are already endorsed by several organizations, including Vietnam Veterans of America, the Nursing Organization of Veterans Affairs and the American Dental Association, and the largest federal union, the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), among others.

---

IN RECOGNITION OF DR. DIANA S. NATALICIO, PRESIDENT OF UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 19, 1999, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. REYES) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. REYES. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Dr. Diana S. Natalicio, an outstanding individual and role model in both the Hispanic and academic community.

Dr. Natalicio is currently president of the University of Texas at El Paso, otherwise known as UTEP, a position that she has held since 1988. She received her bachelor's degree in Spanish from St. Louis University; her master's degree in Portuguese; and a doctorate in linguistics was awarded by the University of Texas at Austin.

In 1961, she was a Fulbright Scholar in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; and in 1964, she was a visiting scholar in Lisbon, Portugal. After serving as a research associate at the Center for Communication Research at the University of Texas at Austin, Dr. Natalicio joined the faculty of UTEP in 1971 as a part-time assistant professor. She quickly rose to the rank of associate professor and then professor.

In addition to her teaching responsibilities in the Department of Linguistics and Modern Languages, she has