

his stories promoting justice and racial harmony in the community. He organized a campaign to rebuild the historic Rocky Fork New Bethel A.M.E. church in Godfrey after it was burned by arsonists. Ande has also volunteered at the Salvation Army to help the poor with food and clothing and helped the late Frances Jackson to start the Alton Food Crisis Center which feeds hundreds of people each month.

Ande is a veteran of the Korean War and has spent a lifetime as an advocate for the rights of men and women who served in the armed forces.

Mr. Speaker, I ask my colleagues to join me in honoring the 41 years of service of Ande Yakstis and to wish both he and family the very best for an enjoyable retirement.

INTRODUCTION OF THE SAFE
NURSING AND PATIENT CARE ACT

HON. FORTNEY PETE STARK

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, November 6, 2001

Mr. STARK. Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce the Safe Nursing and Patient Care Act of 2001 which I am introducing with a group of colleagues today.

There are some 500,000 trained nurses in this country who are not working in their profession. Of course, their reasons for leaving nursing are many. But consistently cited are concerns about the quality of care that nurses' feel able to provide in many health care settings today and increasing requirements to work mandatory overtime.

Listen to these words of a nurse in the state of Washington:

I have been a nurse for six years and most of the time I have worked in the hospital environment. It is difficult to tell you how terrible it is to "work scared" all the time. A mistake that I might make could easily cost someone their life and ruin mine. Every night at work we routinely "face the clock." All of us do without lunch and breaks and work overtime, often without pay, to ensure continuity of care for our patients. Yet, we are constantly asked to do more. It has become the norm for us to have patient assignments two and a half times greater than the staffing guidelines established by the hospital itself. I cannot continue to participate in this unsafe and irresponsible practice. So I am leaving, not because I don't love being a nurse, but because hospitals are not safe places: not for patients and not for nurses.

If we want to ensure quality patient care and a strong nurse work force today and in the future, we must make stories like this nurse's much less frequent. One way to do that is to enact legislation prohibiting hospitals and other health care providers from forcing nurses to work hours beyond what that professional nurse believes to be safe for patient care. That is the purpose of the Safe Nursing and Patient Care Act.

The current practice of mandatory overtime is jeopardizing the quality of care patients receive. It is also contributing to the growing nurse shortage. Current projections are that the nurse workforce in 2020 will have fallen 20 percent below the level necessary to meet demand.

A recent report by the General Accounting Office, *Nursing Workforce: Emerging Nurse*

Shortage Due to Multiple Factors, concludes as follows:

[T]he current high levels of job dissatisfaction among nurses may also play a critical role in determining the extent of current and future nurse shortages. Efforts undertaken to improve the workplace environment may both reduce the likelihood of nurses leaving the field and encourage more young people to enter the nursing profession . . .

We have existing government standards that limit the hours that pilots, flight attendants, truck drivers, railroad engineers, and other professions can safely work before consumer safety could be impinged. However, no similar limitation currently exists for our nation's nurses who are caring for us at often the most vulnerable times in our lives.

The Safe Nursing and Patient Care Act would set strict limits on the ability of health facilities to require mandatory overtime from nurses. While nurses would be allowed to continue to volunteer for overtime if and when they feel they can continue to provide safe, quality care, mandatory overtime would only be allowed when an official state of emergency was declared by the Federal, State or local government. These limits would be part of Medicare's provider agreements. They would not apply to nursing homes as there are alternative staffing and quality measures moving forward for those facilities.

To assure compliance, the bill provides HHS with the authority to investigate complaints from nurses about violations. It also grants HHS the power to issue civil monetary penalties of up to \$10,000 for violations of the act and to increase those fines for patterns of violations.

Providers would be required to post notices explaining these new rights and to post nurse schedules in prominent workplace locations. Nurses would also obtain antidiscrimination protections against employers who continued to force work hours for nurses beyond what a nurse believes is safe for quality care. Providers found to have violated the law would be posted on Medicare's website.

This legislation is not the final solution. I believe that standards must be developed to define timeframes for safe nursing care within the wide variety of health settings (whether such overtime is mandatory or voluntary). That is why the legislation also requires the Agency on Healthcare Research and Quality to report back to Congress with recommendations for developing overall standards to protect patient safety in nursing care.

I know that our Nation's hospital trade associations will claim that my solution misses the mark because it is precisely the lack of nurses in the profession today that is necessitating their need to require mandatory overtime. Let me respond directly. Mandatory overtime is dangerous for patients plain and simple. It is also a driving force for nurses leaving the profession. These twin realities make mandatory overtime a dangerous short-term gamble at best. We should join together to end the practice.

This bill takes the first step to address the problem by strictly limiting the ability of providers to force nurses to work beyond their professional opinion of what is safer for fear of losing their jobs. This is a very real problem facing the nursing profession and that is why my bill is endorsed by the American Nurses Association, AFSCME, AFT, SEIU, AFGE,

UAW, and the AFL-CIO—organizations that speak for America's nearly 3 million nurses.

I urge my colleagues to join with me in support of the Safe Nursing and Patient Care Act. Again, my bill is not the only solution. I also support efforts to increase the number of people entering the nursing profession and have cosponsored legislation to achieve that goal. But, we must also take steps to improve nursing now so that today's nurses will remain in the profession to care for those of us who need such care before new nurses can be trained and be there as mentors for the nurses of tomorrow.

Mandatory nurse overtime is a very real quality of care issue for our health system and I look forward to working with my colleagues to enact the Safe Nursing and Patient Care Act which will start us down the right path toward protecting patients and encouraging people to remain in—and enter—the nursing profession.

WORDS OF VERNON JORDAN

HON. ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON

OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, November 6, 2001

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Speaker, I rise to draw to the attention of the House the words of a distinguished American, Vernon Jordan. In this House, he is well known through the major roles that chart his extraordinary life: civil rights worker, civil rights leader, leading lawyer, international investment banker. Mr. Jordan's life will be understood through his own words in his autobiography entitled *Vernon Can Read*, just released and excerpted in the October 29th issue of *Newsweek*.

However, Mr. Speaker, in light of what September 11 brought down on our country, what I want to submit for the RECORD today is a remarkable, recent speech by Mr. Jordan to the First Congregational United Church of Christ located in his hometown, Atlanta, Georgia.

I can only imagine how the hometown congregation must have received these inspiring and thoughtful words from Vernon, whom they saw off to DePauw University as a boy and have seen him return as one of the nation's wise men. I have no doubt that Mr. Jordan is also so regarded by this House and ask that excerpts from his remarks be made a part of today's RECORD.

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH IN ATLANTA

Thank you, for inviting me here today and for this opportunity to join you for your homecoming service.

For what I am and what I have achieved, I owe that experience and to the people who guided me while I have run this race . . . through all of life's trials and tribulations, joys and triumphs.

I had planned to talk about those people today . . . about my parents who steered me on a straight and narrow path . . . about my teachers at Walker Street, E.A. Ware and David T. Howard High Schools, the counselors at the Butler Street YMCA . . . and about the role of the black church, and its historic mission as a beacon of hope and opportunity for black people.

But like all Americans, my thoughts this past fortnight have been elsewhere.

My thoughts have been with those many thousands of innocent victims of horror . . . with their families and friends . . . and with our wounded nation.