

equal basis. This was not only good policy; it was good medicine. Veterans with service-connected disabilities were included in the highest enrollment categories to ensure complete and speedy access to the system. In fact, because of their service-connected disabilities they were even exempted from enrollment requirements. If these high-priority veterans are having difficulty accessing VA health care now, as the Secretary has stated, then the problem lies in the inability of the Administration to fund the VA properly and the incompetence of VA admitting clerks who ignore current eligibility law and the high priority these veterans already have. Both of these problems should be rectified without the institution of new regulations. The \$275 million in emergency supplemental funding that the White House refused to allocate to the VA last month could have gone a long way to ease the burden on the system. The re-characterization of health care access in the proposed regulations is a major step backward toward the chaos that existed in the pre-eligibility reform days.

There is no question that the VA is grossly overburdened. A product of its own success, the system, because of the quality and accessibility of the health care services it provides, has attracted unprecedented numbers of new veteran users. While eligibility reform has been blamed for opening the gates to the system, the real cause of this influx of patients are the new health care markets VA has established by opening 800 outpatient clinics across the country. Among other factors are a private health insurance system that is pricing itself out of reach of most Americans and a Medicare plan that ignores the need for a quality prescription drug benefit for seniors and people with disabilities.

VA is pulling in the reins, attempting to ration care and dissuade veterans from coming into the system. These new regulations are only one attempt. We are certain to see other proposals in the months ahead. But if we go down the road of pitting one group of veterans in the health care queue against other groups of veterans where does it stop? These regulations completely ignore the other key missions of the VA health care system to care for the poor and medically indigent and those veterans with special disabilities such as spinal cord dysfunction, blindness and mental illness. With these regulations in place a hospital administrator could logically ignore these responsibilities as well in contravention of direct statutory requirements.

Finally, we seriously question the VA's opinion that it has sufficient authority under existing statutes to move forward with these interim final rules. The VA's sophisticated argument ignores the plain language of the statute providing the VA limited flexibility in managing the enrollment system established by Congress in 1996.

All in all, we do not see why veterans should be denied an accessible, quality health care product just because it is unattainable or unaffordable elsewhere, and the Administration and the Congress do not want to come up with the dollars to fund it adequately.

Sincerely,

DELATORRO L. MCNEIL,
Executive Director.

Mr. ROCKEFELLER. Finally, Mr. President, we have seen a rush by the Administration to implement these new regulations, without the normal comment period for Congress, veterans, or veterans advocates to make their views known. I believe VA's finding, that it has "good cause" to dispense with a normal notice-and-comment pe-

riod, is without factual merit. If an emergency situation exists, the Administration could have surely provided the \$270 million in additional funds which Congress already appropriated to deal with the unacceptably long waiting times.

We must work together to find a better solution for veterans and these regulations must be rescinded to protect access to care for all veterans.

RESCUE OF MINEWORKERS BY FMC

Mr. THOMAS. Mr President, I know all of us in this Chamber shared in the profound sense of relief and elation which accompanied the heroic rescue of nine mineworkers from the Quecreek Mine near Somerset Pennsylvania earlier this summer. It was truly a remarkable story which combined the very best of the human spirit with the most modern mine safety and rescue technologies and produced nothing short of a miracle.

Somewhat lost in the press accounts after the rescue was the role played by the Mine Safety and Health Administration which sent 70 of its own employees to Somerset to assist in the rescue. One of MSHA's important missions is to prepare mineworkers and local health and safety officials for responding to the sort of near disaster that we witnessed last month. The rescue in Pennsylvania was no accident. It was the result of thousands of man-hours dedicated to salvaging the best from the worst. We all saw firsthand how it works.

I am very proud to be able today to recognize that a group of individuals from my own state has won this year's National and International Mine Rescue Contest. The Mine rescue competitions are designed to test the knowledge of miners who might be called upon to respond to a real mine emergency. The contest requires six-member teams to solve a hypothetical mine emergency problem—such as a fire, explosion or cave in—while judges rate them on their adherence to mine rescue procedures and how quickly they complete specific tasks.

This year a team from Green River Wyoming, representing FMC Corporation, which operates a mine in my state, won this prestigious competition. I would like to recognize the individuals who are part of this number 1 team: Bob Knott, Alan Jones, Rick Owens, Leroy Hutchinson, Glen Weinmaster, Dave Thomas, Melvin Lovato, Robert Pope, Bill Oleson, Bob Robison, Tony Herrera, John Key, Rod Knight, Mike Padilla and David Hutchinson.

We pray that this outstanding team will never have to put into practice what it has trained to do over countless hours. However, it is also encouraging to know that such teams are deployed throughout mining country and stand ready to perform the sorts of heroic feats that we all witnessed a few

weeks ago in Pennsylvania and coal country.

All of us in Wyoming are very proud of the accomplishments of the FMC Mine Rescue Team and salute all of those involved in the mining industry for their dedication to safety.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

TRIBUTE TO BRADY HOWELL

• Mr. CRAIG. Mr. President, the terrorism of September 11 changed America forever, and it profoundly changed Americans, as well. The people we lost left behind legacies, the compilation of the meaningful things they accomplished throughout their lives, actions and words that still touch their friends and families after their deaths. Those legacies inspire all of us with the bravery and courage of the human spirit, and also remind us of the precious frailty of life.

Brady Howell lost his life in the attack on the Pentagon. This letter, written by Brady's brother Carson Howell to commemorate the one year anniversary of that terrible event, articulates the legacy Brady left behind. I would like to enter this letter into the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD so all my colleagues can remember the great example these Americans are to us. In the words of Carson Howell, "The men and women who perished that day are not heroes because of how they died; they are heroes because of how they lived."

Let me read the letter in its entirety:

Today is a sad day for our family. Not just our family, but also families just like the Vauk family, the Conaty family, the Andrews family, and thousands of others. It's a sad day for our American family as we all remember and pay tribute to the thousands of friends, family, and fellow Americans that lost their lives one year ago today. It's a day that many will remember as the day we learned that heroes aren't found only in comic books. No, there are heroes greater than Superman and my brother is one of them.

Brady Kay Howell loved this country. He was an Eagle Scout. He loved children and taught the youth in Sunday School classes while living in New York and later Virginia. He loved his family and actually had plans to return to Idaho that following weekend for a welcome home party for my parents and for my wedding reception. He loved his wife, Liz, to whom he'd been married for only five short years.

Brady was working in naval intelligence as an intern. Shortly before his death, he and I had a telephone conversation. In it he told me that one of his goals in his life was to have top-secret clearance. I'm proud to say that he accomplished that goal.

I could go on and on about how great my brother was. But, if it were he speaking here today, he wouldn't use this opportunity to speak of his accomplishments. I believe that he would talk about service. He would talk about what a great country this is that we live in and how proud he was to serve and protect all of us.

The work that Brady and many others did that died that day was for all of us. Brady prepared briefings for the Chief of Naval Intelligence and other high-ranking officials so