

Colorado Federal Credit Union is a non-profit organization that provides the citizens of Mesa County with essential banking services. Colorado recently celebrated its 50th Anniversary and I am happy to recognize its service to the Mesa Community today.

Colorado first opened its doors in 1953 and was built to serve employees of the Colorado Raw Materials Office. The company then grew to accommodate all federal employees and eventually opened its doors to all Mesa County residents in 2002. Since then, the company has continued to grow and recently opened a new state of the art building.

The Credit Union operates with a unique ownership system: when customers open an account, they pay a fee that makes them a part owner. This allows Colorado to better serve its customers because of its non-profit, customer-owned status. The company stands by its mission statement, which is "to build lifelong member relationships based on quality service, integrity, solid financial management and education." With hard work and dedication, Colorado has become an exemplary member of the Colorado business community.

Mr. Speaker, it gives me great joy to recognize the Colorado Federal Credit Union. Its customer owned philosophy has provided the people of Mesa County with excellent service for many years. Congratulations on 50 years of service.

INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT FOR
H.R. 2518, THE VETERANS AFFAIRS
REORGANIZATION ACT
OF 2003

HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 19, 2003

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, today I am introducing H.R. 2518, the "Veterans Affairs Reorganization Act of 2003". This bill would make organizational changes in several programs for veterans in order to improve the delivery of vital benefits and services to America's former servicemen and women.

The first two sections of this legislation provide for the consolidation and improvement of programs to assist homeless veterans. Specifically, Section 2 of the bill would create a new office in the Department of Veterans Affairs to manage a number of assistance programs for homeless veterans. Section 3 of the bill would transfer the functions of the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program from the Department of Labor to Department of Veterans Affairs and include this program in the responsibilities of the newly created office.

There are at least a quarter-million homeless veterans on the streets of America every night. With the passage of the Homeless Veterans Comprehensive Assistance Act of 2001, Public Law 107-95, Congress established a goal to end chronic homelessness among veterans within 10 years. More than 2 years have passed since the President signed our legislation into law, but in this Committee's oversight activities we find that the Department of Veterans Affairs is making insufficient progress to achieve this ambitious goal.

Today, VA provides a range of services for homeless veterans including outreach, case

management, clinical care, residential treatment and rehabilitation, managed residential placement, care for serious mental illnesses and substance-use disorders and supported housing. However, the delivery of these services has been hindered by a lack of focus and direction within the Department of Veterans Affairs, and frankly, a lack of will to commit the necessary funding to accomplish this mission.

The legislation I am introducing today would create a new Office of Homeless Veterans Assistance Programs within the Department of Veterans Affairs. The Director of this office would be given authority to consolidate and coordinate all homeless assistance services to help homeless veterans get back on their feet with a hand up, not a hand-out. The new Office of Homeless Veterans Assistance would be enhanced by transferring the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program, a program now embedded in the Department of Labor, into VA. This transfer of responsibility for program administration would enable VA to better coordinate health care, financial benefits and employment services for homeless veterans. By moving all programs specifically designed for homeless veterans into VA and consolidating them, we expect to deliver better services in a more timely and cost-efficient manner.

Finally, Section 4 of this legislation would transfer the operational responsibility for the Military Personnel Records facility of the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs. Approximately 80 million military records are on file at NPRC, located in the federal records repository in St. Louis, Missouri. For the last 25 years, each service branch has been producing microfilm of each record and more recently has been keeping records on microfiche. The NPRC has been a source of major frustration for the Veterans Benefits Administration which has a daily need to search these records to help veterans establish claims for disability and other benefits.

While the NPRC has made good faith efforts to be responsive to VA, it continues to fall short of providing VA with timely and reliable records retrieval. As a consequence, VA's claims process has been delayed, and disabled veterans wait months, sometimes years, for service medical records or other information before their records are found. For the week ending June 6, 2003, VA had 3,051 requests pending for more than 30 days and 3,432 requests pending for more than 90 days. This is simply unacceptable.

My legislation would transfer responsibility for managing the NPRC to VA. The National Archives, which currently has final responsibility for maintenance of vital federal records, would be required to execute a Memorandum of Understanding to allow the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to assume the day-to-day management of the NPRC. Once this transfer of management responsibility is completed, VA will be in a better position to control its own fate in processing veterans' disability claims, and in turn, Congress will be able to hold one executive agency accountable for responsiveness to these disabled veterans who have waited far too long for the resolution of their claims.

Mr. Speaker, I believe these changes will improve the delivery of benefits and services to our nation's veterans. I hope that my colleagues on both sides of the aisle will carefully

study this legislation and join with me in this effort.

HONORING TALMAGE V. BURKE
FOR OVER 50 YEARS OF SERVICE
TO THE CITY OF ALHAMBRA

HON. ADAM B. SCHIFF

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 19, 2003

Mr. SCHIFF. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor Mayor Talmage Burke. In the year that marks the City of Alhambra's 100th anniversary, Mayor Talmage Burke is setting a record of his own. On May 27, the 85-year old Talmage Burke took the oath of office as the Mayor of Alhambra for the 15th time. This achievement affords him the longest record of publicly elected service of any official in the State of California and certainly one of the longest records of public servitude in the Nation.

Talmage Burke was born in November 1917 and graduated from Alhambra High School in 1935. He went on to USC, graduating with a Bachelor of Arts degree. He continued his studies at USC Law School, graduating with Juris Doctor and Masters of Laws degrees. Prior to being elected to the Alhambra City Council in 1952, he served as the city's first prosecutor and deputy city attorney.

The Burke family has served the City of Alhambra for over 70 of its nearly 100 years. Talmage Burke, a life-long resident of Alhambra, lives with his wife, of 45 years Lisa, in the same house that his father, Montivel A. Burke, built in 1927.

One of the most outstanding and well-known civic accomplishments of Talmage Burke was his involvement in the lowering of the railroad tracks in Alhambra during the mid-1970s. Along with the improved system of tracks, the nearby Alhambra Municipal Golf Course gained an addition of nine holes from the excavated soil from the lowered tracks.

As a member of the Rotary Club, he has a record of perfect attendance for the past 52 years! He has served as President of the San Gabriel Valley Bar Association and is the Founding Director of the Legal Aid and Public Defender Program of the San Gabriel Valley. He was also a Trustee of the University of Redlands for 18 years.

Talmage Burke and his wife have two children: a son, Montivel A. Burke II, an attorney, and a daughter, Karen M. Brown, R.N. The Burkes also have six grandchildren.

It is with great pleasure that I ask all Members to join me in congratulating the Honorable Talmage V. Burke for his truly remarkable and lifelong dedication to the City of Alhambra.

TRIBUTE TO THE HOTCHKISS ELKS
LADIES AUXILIARY

HON. SCOTT McINNIS

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 19, 2003

Mr. McINNIS. Mr. Speaker, I am honored to stand before this body of Congress and this nation today to pay tribute to the Hotchkiss