

Wheat harvest is a tradition, a legacy, and our livelihood, and as goes the wheat crop, so goes the Kansas economy. A good wheat harvest is the leading contributor to our State's revenue, about \$1 billion annually.

So Mr. Speaker, as the combines roll northward and the harvest continues, it is good for all of us to take a few moments to recognize the lessons of the wheat field, to remember that there is satisfaction in making the right decisions and putting in the hard work to produce a bumper crop but ultimately mother nature has the final say in whether or not the yield is bountiful. That cautious optimism is the hallmark of every farmer who puts the seed in the ground hoping for a good harvest months later, and there are few things in life more rewarding than working with family side by side to complete the job of the wheat harvest. Wheat harvest is important to the Kansas economy but even more important as a way of life.

Kansans have been saying their prayers throughout the years of drought for rain and snowfall. Those prayers have been answered. Now we pray for abundant crops, good prices, and a safe harvest. Once again the old hymn reminds us: God our Maker doth provide.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. CORRINE BROWN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Ms. CORRINE BROWN of Florida addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

PORT SECURITY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. MILLENDER-MCDONALD) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. MILLENDER-MCDONALD. Mr. Speaker, I rise tonight to talk about port security and the critical importance that increased funding for port security would have for my region of Long Beach and Los Angeles and to the American people.

Mr. Speaker, last night I appeared before the Committee on Rules about an amendment that would provide funding for container security and port security. Regrettably, this amendment was not made in order. If my amendment had been made in order, this germane amendment would designate \$20 million to establish a secure container and safe mobility pilot program. Further, this project would be carried out at the Nation's port with the highest volume of container traffic. This program would work in conjunction with existing city and local infrastructure in developing fast, efficient, effective and secure ways to move containers through the port complex and through surrounding cities and communities throughout the Nation.

We recognize that not all containers that come into our country are inspected. We must provide resources to port security initiatives that help us utilize our existing infrastructure while making sure that our communities that receive these containers are protected. A program like this will set the standard for similar communities around the Nation that provide the infrastructure that move our Nation's goods out of the Nation and keep our economy moving forward.

Long Beach and Los Angeles, our port complex, the largest in the country and the third largest in the world, receive 45 percent of the Nation's containers. These ports are a vital economic link to the rest of the Nation. Eighty percent of the goods that come into the country from the Pacific rim comes into our ports. If these ports in the communities that support this supply chain of goods movement were ever threatened or damaged, our economy would be stalled.

In October of 2002 our Nation witnessed firsthand what happened to our economy when our ports are not moving goods out of the country. The lockout that occurred at the western ports served as a grim reminder of just how interconnected and how dependent we are on one another in moving our Nation's goods. The lockout that occurred at the western ports cost the U.S. economy an estimated \$1 billion a day.

We must provide support and precious resources to our ports to ensure that they are secure. In addition, we must provide security to the communities that are connected and support our ports. We cannot view port security as merely inside the gates. Ports are a part of our communities. The resources that we provide for port security also provide security for our Nation's communities.

Mr. Speaker, I would have offered this amendment, and I offer this statement for the RECORD.

THE RURAL VETERANS ACCESS TO CARE ACT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. OSBORNE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. OSBORNE. Mr. Speaker, I represent a rural area, 64,000 square miles, 68 counties, and it goes without saying it is a long ways between towns. In an area like this, veterans oftentimes have a hard time accessing healthcare. Let me give a real example. Let us say a veteran lives in Ogalala, Nebraska, which is in the western part of the State but is by no means the most remote part of the State, and let us say that individual has to go to Omaha, Nebraska to a VA hospital which is 350 miles away, and he may just be going for a routine blood test, diabetes checkup, blood pressure checkup, or any type of simple checkup of that nature. Oftentimes when he makes an appointment, the appointment will not be fulfilled for 6 months.

So he waits for 6 months, and that veteran at that time then gets up at 4 a.m. and leaves for North Platte, Nebraska, which is 50 miles away. After he gets to North Platte, he boards a van to go to Grand Island, Nebraska, where he spends the night and that is another 140 miles, and early the next day he gets on another van, goes to the VA hospital in Omaha, a 3-hour trip. He completes the test that day and then he returns to Grand Island for the night, and the next day he takes the van from Grand Island to North Platte, another 140 miles, and then he gets a ride to Ogalala, another 50 miles. So he has waited 6 months, he has had a 3-day trip to go 660 miles for routine tests. This is ridiculous.

Had the veteran driven his own car or had somebody drive his own car, he still would have had an 11-hour trip and it would have taken at least 2 days, if not 3.

Let me give an urban example. Let us say that someone, a veteran with the same health problem lived in Richmond, Virginia. It would be the same as if that individual from Richmond, Virginia drove to New York City and back for basic medical care. Those same tests that were performed in Omaha, Nebraska at the VA hospital could have been done at the local hospital in a matter of three or four blocks away or maybe a couple of minutes away from that veteran, and sometimes because of their age some of our World War II veterans are having a hard time traveling today, maybe a disability, maybe the weather, a blizzard or a snowstorm, and the veteran simply does not get the healthcare at all. He does not even try because he is not able to make the trip.

So that is why I have introduced H.R. 2973, the Rural Veterans Access to Care Act. H.R. 2973 would allow the VA to contract for care with local medical facilities. The only stipulation is that the veteran must travel at least 60 miles or more for the care. Some people say that only happens in Montana or North Dakota or South Dakota or Nebraska. And it is true. Those States would be hard hit. But there probably are hardly any States in the Union with the exception of maybe Rhode Island or Connecticut or someplace like that where we do not have at least some veterans who are somewhat isolated from VA hospitals and are having to go great lengths to get their medical care. H.R. 2973 would set aside 5 percent of the VA funding to contract with local medical facilities for veterans living in rural areas. By contracting with local clinics in remote areas, number one, medical care would be prompt, it would not be a four to five to six-month wait. Number two, veterans who have difficulty traveling would be served. They would not have to just simply give up on getting medical care. Number three, there will be no additional cost and might even cost

less. And number four, the local hospital or clinic, which is often struggling to survive in a small town, would receive added funds.

So I think this bill makes sense. I would urge my colleagues to support it.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from the District of Columbia (Ms. NORTON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Ms. NORTON addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

MEDICARE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I rise tonight to address the most important issue of Medicare reform. As a former nurse, I have spent much of my career working to ensure that our Nation's healthcare system provides a wide range of affordable services, and we as Members of Congress must be fiscally responsible when it comes to making decisions regarding our budget. Fiscal responsibility entails looking at the whole picture and seeing the effect it may have on all individuals in society. I will continue to work hard to ensure that those who have given to the system will receive their just rewards. This includes continuing to help those who would like to help themselves by providing a means for them to do just that. I will continue to favor programs such as welfare and Medicare that have this objective in mind, and I will oppose any legislation that provides tax cuts which do not benefit all of society.

In the year 2000 at my request the House Committee on Government Reform conducted research on prescription drug costs in the Dallas-Fortworth Metroplex. The results of this study were astounding. Seniors in my congressional district paid 122 percent more for prescription drugs than do members of managed care plans and Federal employees. Last Congress I was very disappointed when the House passed the Medicare Prescription Drug Benefit bill, H.R. 4954. This bill passed closely along party lines, did not entitle seniors to any particular drug benefit plan. Instead, this standard benefit is merely a suggestion for what private plans might offer. Unfortunately, we are poised to repeat history if we pass this Republican Medicare bill. I oppose the Republican Medicare bill because it does not ensure that citizens and people with disabilities get the long overdue Medicare prescription drug benefit that is available and affordable to all.

There are two essential changes that are needed for the Republican Medicare bill to become palatable. First, the bill must be amended to include a uniform, defined prescription drug benefit that

is universally available through Medicare. Second, the bill must reject proposals to privatize the program. These two changes are critical. The Republican Medicare bill must provide a guaranteed drug benefit managed by Medicare. Beneficiaries in traditional Medicare cannot be disadvantaged should private plans be allowed to compete to provide Medicare benefits. Our proposed Democratic amendment would have added a stable, defined drug benefit in Medicare.

It is time that we acknowledge that there is an America that is waiting for relief. It is also time for us to acknowledge that the people deserve a little attention rather than the corporations and pharmaceutical companies getting all of the breaks.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Connecticut (Mr. SIMMONS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. SIMMONS addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

MICHIGAN AFFIRMATIVE ACTION CASES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. KING) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. KING of Iowa. Mr. Speaker, I would like to address the House and the United States of America with regard to the decision rendered by the Supreme Court that came down I believe it was yesterday in the case of Grutter v. Bollinger and Gratz v. Bollinger, University of Michigan undergraduate school and the University of Michigan School of Law. I went over to the Supreme Court. I believe that case was heard on April 19, and I was the only member of my conference to be there in that Supreme Court hearing room that day.

This Constitution means something to me. I have dealt with affirmative action. I am a contractor by trade. I have done so for 28 years. I have hired people of all different kinds of backgrounds and talents and ethnicities, and I have also done Federal contracts where I have run into a situation where there will be a certain situation quota or a goal assigned to me, and sometimes that is not available and we have had to drop contracts because we were not able to meet that requirement. So I paid real attention to this, and I think it is important that everyone have equal opportunity. That is what Martin Luther King asked for. That is what our Constitution calls for, and that is what we should provide by the laws that we promote here in this Congress and by the Supreme Court that meets over across the way.

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I thought I went over there to hear a constitutional argument. In my na-

ivete I expected that would be the bulk of the discussion that took place that day in that little over-2 hours of discussion. In fact, I heard very little constitutional argument. About two-thirds to three-quarters of the comments and questions that were directed by the Justices had to do with the result, not the constitutionality, not the language, the definition, or the intent of Congress; simply the result of a decision that they might make.

And an interesting thing: as I tried to find my way into the Supreme Court room, it was packed out front, and it looked like they let out the D.C. schools for the day to go demonstrate at the U.S. Supreme Court. They were carrying signs that said: "Support equality, defend affirmative action."

Well, Mr. Speaker, I did not take a logic class, but those two things do not connect for me, and I do not think they connect for most Americans. We are either going to have equality or we are not going to have equality; but a preferential treatment program, by definition, is contrary to equality. And that is what affirmative action is, and that is what the case was there to be heard for.

So I went to the oral arguments in those cases, and I am profoundly disappointed that the Supreme Court did not outlaw racial preferences in their decision in the Grutter and the Gratz cases, and in the lack of focus on constitutional arguments.

As I left there, and I talked to attorneys about this, me not being one, and I told them that I was astonished that the Justices in the Supreme Court did not focus their arguments on the Constitution. They told me they were focusing their questions and their comments on Justice O'Connor, because well, all right, that is another issue then, and she has written the majority opinion. Apparently, they were focusing on her for the right reason. Apparently, she was not evaluating the Constitution, or we would have had an entirely different majority decision, certainly by the one that wrote the majority.

But I did hear one reference to the Constitution. I actually heard more than one, but the one that stands out in my mind was Justice Scalia's reference, when he asked the University of Michigan attorney, he said, If this court rules against you and it results in one minority in the School of Law, 100 percent minorities are no minorities, what possible constitutional difference can that make? And my colleagues can check the record, Mr. Speaker. I do not think they will see that there is a logical answer to that. So we ended up with the decision that we got.

Now, the Court got it right when they struck down the point system by the University of Michigan's undergraduate programs. University admissions should be color blind. A student's race should never matter more than a 4.0, a perfect SAT score, or a flawless essay.