

TRIBUTE TO JULIE COMINS

HON. SCOTT MCINNIS

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, October 8, 2003

Mr. MCINNIS. Mr. Speaker, I stand before you to recognize the efforts of a distinguished citizen from my district. Julie Comins is the Executive Director for the Aspen Writers' Foundation and, after six years of dedicated service, she will be stepping down next month to spend more time with her family. The organization has experienced tremendous growth during her tenure, and the entire Aspen literary community is saddened by her departure. Today, I would like to commend Julie on the fine work she has done for the writing community on behalf of the Foundation.

Julie began her time with the Foundation in 1997 when she volunteered to assist with one of the organization's major events, the Aspen Summer Words Conference. She went on to become a part-time administrative assistant for the organization, which was then a small non-profit group. Within a year, Julie's hard work was rewarded with increased responsibility within the organization, eventually being named as Executive Director of the Foundation. Under Julie's watch, the group went from a relatively small society to a nationally renowned literary organization.

Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to stand here today and pay tribute to Julie Comins' accomplishments before this body of Congress and this nation. The Aspen Writers' Foundation is a terrific organization and, thanks to Julie, it has grown to achieve remarkable success. I would like to thank Julie for her years of hard work and dedication and wish her the best in her future endeavors.

HONORING THE LOUIS STOKES
CLEVELAND VETERANS AFFAIRS
MEDICAL CENTER

HON. DENNIS J. KUCINICH

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, October 8, 2003

Mr. KUCINICH. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in honor and recognition of the Louis Stokes Cleveland Veterans Affairs Medical Center and to celebrate the expanded and renovated space for veteran services at the McCafferty Building. For over four years the City of Cleveland and the Louis Stokes Cleveland Veterans Affairs Medical Center have been partners in serving veterans on Cleveland's west side.

The Louis Stokes Cleveland Veterans Affairs Medical Center has had a long and distinguished history of serving the veterans community over the past twenty years. The Veterans Center has participated in the community Homeless Coalition, offers assistance to hunger and homeless shelters in the area, and routinely joins with other local veterans service organizations to provide assistance to needy veterans.

The Veterans Center also offers many services to veterans outside of its central purpose of providing medical care for those who have honorably served our country. The Veterans Center provides individual readjustment counseling, referrals for benefits assistance, group

readjustment counseling, liaison with community agencies, marital and family counseling, substance abuse information and referral, job counseling and placement, and community education. The Veterans Center also provides group counseling for Vietnam Veterans, Homeless Veterans, veterans who have difficulties with substance abuse, and Korean War Veterans.

Mr. Speaker, please join me in recognizing the Louis Stokes Cleveland Veterans Affairs Medical Center on this special occasion and celebrating its dedication to serving the veterans of the Cleveland's west side, and the community of Northeast Ohio.

H.R. 3260—VETERANS' EXTENDED
HEALTH CARE SERVICES AND
BUSINESS ENHANCEMENTS ACT
OF 2003

HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, October 8, 2003

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, today I am introducing H.R. 3260 in bi-partisan collaboration with my colleague, the gentleman from Illinois and Ranking Member of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, LANE EVANS. This bill would augment certain health care business practices and programs of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to achieve greater efficiencies and economies of scale. Other enhancements included in this bill would benefit the Department of Defense (DOD) and VA's nonprofit research corporations. The bill would also extend certain reporting dates and authorities of VA in the provision of health care services to our Nation's veterans. Finally, our bill would authorize the naming of the Prescott, Arizona Veterans Affairs Medical Center for the late Bob Stump, my predecessor as Chairman of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

Mr. Speaker, this bill would authorize a five-year extension to VA's authority to provide non-institutional extended care services and required nursing home care to certain veterans. The mounting importance of providing long-term care alternatives to our aging veterans is supported by the projected increase in veterans who are 85 years of age or older from some 644,000 today to 1.3 million within the next decade.

In 1999, Congress enacted the Veterans Millennium Health Care and Benefits Act (Public Law 106-117), requiring VA to operate and maintain certain long-term care programs in nursing home care. This Act also contained initiatives in geriatric evaluation, domiciliary care, adult day health care, respite, palliative and hospice programs. All of these programs are intended to address the growing needs of aging and disabled veterans by both institutional and non-institutional means. The authorities for these programs in the Veterans Millennium Health Care and Benefits Act will expire on December 31, 2003. This legislation would extend these authorities until December 31, 2008.

H.R. 3260 would also allow veterans who are former prisoners of war to receive outpatient dental care from VA, without requiring them to have been in captivity for at least 90 days, as under current law. This bill also

would eliminate the requirement under current law that ex-POWs must now pay pharmacy co-payments. These are tangible and justified enhancements showing the gratitude of the nation for the sacrifices of former prisoners of war.

Mr. Speaker, this bill would also streamline the process and notification requirements when VA intends to enter into an enhanced-use lease agreement for better use of underutilized VA property. Initially authorized in 1991, this unique asset management authority allows VA to enter into partnerships with private industry to yield the "highest and best" use of VA property for veterans, taxpayers, and the government.

The enhanced-use lease program was created by Congress to allow VA activities to generate revenue, maximize value, minimize costs, and maintain competitiveness by developing health care and long-term care facilities, parking, energy plants, transitional and independent senior housing, assisted living, research and development facilities, child and adult day care and office space (government and commercial) projects in partnerships with private and public entities. Since its inception, the enhanced-use lease program has generated cost savings, private investment, new long-term sources of revenues as well as jobs and expanded tax revenues.

Mr. Speaker, this program represents cost effective, good government. This bill would extend the benefits of the enhanced-use lease program to the Veterans Benefits and National Cemetery Administrations as well as the health care system. Current law limits the program to real estate assets of the Veterans Health Administration. This bill would allow the proceeds to be retained by the Veterans Health Administration, the Veterans Benefits Administration or the National Cemetery Administration, whichever administration initiated and developed the enhanced-use lease project.

This bill would allow the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to extend authority to the Secretary of Defense, beginning in fiscal year 2004, to purchase medical equipment, services and supplies through VA's revolving supply fund. This simple provision would serve to further expand federal purchasing power and enhance economies of scale.

Mr. Speaker, at the request of the Department, this bill would change statutory reporting dates on several reports VA is required to make to Congress. The bill would also provide certain Federal liability coverage to a very specific and small group of employees who work in the nonprofit research corporations authorized in title 38. Congress established these nonprofit corporations to manage non-appropriated research activities, primarily those funded through grants from the National Institutes of Health, philanthropic grants and a variety of clinical and pharmaceutical trials. Congress expanded the role of VA nonprofit corporations in 1999 to include a variety of educational endeavors for VA clinical care staff. Employees of these nonprofit corporations would have liability coverage equivalent to their VA counterparts. The bill would also authorize a five-year extension of the basic authority for these nonprofits through December 31, 2008.

The final provision of this bill is to honor our departed former Chairman, the Honorable Bob Stump. In June of this year, we were saddened by the loss of our former colleague who

served with distinction in Congress for 26 years.

From his enlistment in the Navy during World War II at the age of 16, to his extraordinary leadership as Chairman of the Veterans' Affairs and Armed Services Committees in the House of Representatives, Bob Stump was a true American hero. Chairman Stump used his influence to promote responsible legislation to assist and honor our Nation's veterans, past, present and future.

Under Bob Stump's leadership, Congress increased funding for veterans' health care; expanded access to long term care for aging veterans, including nonhospital alternative care; reformed eligibility standards for access to VA health care; extended the national cemetery system, including Arlington National Cemetery; increased assistance to disabled veterans and their survivors; and strengthened the Montgomery GI Bill that has helped millions of veterans fulfill their educational and career goals.

As his successor as Chairman of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, I particularly know and appreciate all that he did for our Nation's veterans, service members and their families. A modest man who preferred to shun the spotlight, Bob Stump's lifetime of service to America and our Nation's veterans left this country a better place. I am honored to include in this legislation a provision to name the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Prescott, Arizona as the "Bob Stump Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center." This memorial is a fitting tribute in his beloved home state of Arizona, and will ensure that his legacy will continue to shine brightly for generations to come.

Mr. Speaker, the Veterans' Extended Health Care Services and Business Enhancements Act of 2003 is an important measure. I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 3260 and to work with me and my colleagues on the Committee to advance this legislation this year.

TRIBUTE TO BEVERLY COUNTS

HON. SCOTT MCINNIS

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, October 8, 2003

Mr. MCINNIS. Mr. Speaker, I rise before you to pay tribute to an outstanding citizen from my district. Beverly Counts of Craig, Colorado, has been working with needy families in the community for thirty years as a social service worker in Moffat County. I would like to thank Beverly for her hard work and dedication to the Craig community and recognize her efforts before this body of Congress here today.

Beverly began her career with the Moffat County Department of Social Services in 1973 as a case aide. Upon completion of her Bachelor's degree, and later her Master's degree, she rose steadily up the ranks in the Department to her current position as a supervisor. Today her work focuses on child welfare, as she oversees caseworkers in the field.

Beverly's accomplishments were recently acknowledged by her social services co-workers at a party in her honor. I join with them here today in honoring Beverly's years of selfless service. Everyday her work helps families become better prepared to effectively manage their lives in spite of hardships and insur-

mountable odds. Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege to pay tribute to Beverly before this body of Congress, and I thank her for all of her hard work. I wish her the best in the years to come.

STATEMENT OF SYLVIA G. IRIONDO

HON. LINCOLN DIAZ-BALART

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, October 8, 2003

Mr. DIAZ-BALART of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to direct the attention of Congress to a statement made by a great Cuban pro-democracy leader, Sylvia G. Iriondo, at the September 24th meeting "Americans for a Democratic Cuba" in the Rayburn House Office Building here in the U.S. Capitol.

Mrs. Iriondo is an inspiration to all freedom loving people because of her work as the President of Mothers and Women Against Repression (MAR). Originally founded in 1994, MAR gives a voice to the thousands of oppressed pro-democracy activists who live under Castro's totalitarian regime.

Mrs. Iriondo was also one of the brave souls in the sky on the fateful day of February 24, 1996 when the Castro dictatorship's fighter jets shot down two civilian aircraft, murdering three U.S. citizens and a resident of the United States, members of the Brothers to the Rescue organization.

Through her charity, experience and steadfast commitment to democratic ideals, Mrs. Iriondo has earned the right to be heard by the United States Congress and I hope my colleagues take the time to read her testimony.

Mr. Speaker, I would personally like to thank Mrs. Iriondo and the extraordinary women that are part of MAR for the great work they do to draw attention to the plight of the prisoners of conscience who suffer in Castro's gulag and for the exemplary leadership Mrs. Iriondo provides as the President of Mothers and Women Against Repression. I thank her for her efforts and I trust that one day very soon she and I will witness a free Cuba. I ask that her remarks be included in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD at this time.

STATEMENT MADE BY SYLVIA G. IRIONDO, AMERICANS FOR A DEMOCRATIC CUBA—RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BLDG., WASHINGTON, D.C., SEPTEMBER 24, 2003

Good afternoon. I am most grateful for this opportunity to highlight the most recent wave of repression unleashed by Castro's regime that culminated in the arbitrary arrests, summary trials and long prison sentences of up to 28 years for more than 75 pro-democracy leaders, independent journalists and human rights' activists, as well as in the summary executions of three young Cuban men who attempted to flee the island in search of freedom.

This brutality did not go unnoticed. For the first time in more than four decades of systematic human rights violations in Cuba, other voices from around the world—aside from our voices—were vigorously raised in condemnation of these deplorable actions.

The international community could not believe that these peaceful activists were incarcerated and sentenced to more than 1,400 collective years in prison for speaking their minds; using faxes, cameras and typewriters; distributing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to the Cuban people and for

openly meeting with foreign dignitaries and other activists.

The horrendous conditions under which these political prisoners serve their sentences in Castro's jails are well-documented: isolated cells infested by rats, contaminated water, rancid food, poor hygiene, no adequate sanitary facilities, absence of ventilation, and minimal medical assistance to many political prisoners.

This is nothing new. It has been happening 90 miles from U.S. shores for the last 44 years. The list of crimes and abuses is extensive and a continuation of a policy established since 1959 by a regime intent on remaining in power—at all costs—through repression.

Among those arrested and sentenced in the most recent wave of repression, there is a Cuban woman: Martha Beatriz Roque Cabello.

This 58-year old woman is an independent economist who helped establish the Independent Cuban Economists' Institute and who heads the Assembly to Promote Civil Society in Cuba, a coalition of more than 350 organizations representing a wide political spectrum that calls for the fundamental freedoms and rights of the Cuban people. Martha Beatriz was again arrested on March 20, 2003—(she had previously served a three and one half years' sentence for being the co-author of a document entitled "The Homeland Belongs to Us All").

At the time of her most recent arrest, Martha Beatriz was participating in a peaceful hunger strike calling for the liberation of Dr. Oscar Elías Biscet and all Cuban political prisoners. Martha Beatriz was sentenced to 20 years in prison after a "mock" trial and confined to the "Manto Negro" prison in the province of Havana.

In July, she was transferred to the Carlos J. Finlay Military Hospital in the capital of Cuba, with chest pains, high-blood pressure, numbness and disorientation, among other things. As of this date, she remains confined to this hospital/prison, where she does not receive the necessary independent medical attention that she urgently requires. We fear for her life, as we fear for the lives of many other Cuban political prisoners who are being denied medical attention. (It is a common practice for the Castro regime to withhold medical attention to political prisoners as a form of torture).

We have initiated an international campaign for the immediate liberation of Martha Beatriz and all Cuban political prisoners, and created a website under www.marthabeatriz.info.

In one of the last statements made by Martha Beatriz Roque Cabello prior to her recent incarceration she stated, "we exhort all governments of the civilized world not to prolong the agony of the Cuban people; not to finance the tyranny; not to support them; that they condemn the tourist apartheid; that they condemn the exploitation of the laborers, the prostitution of our youth, the traffic of stolen properties, the plundering of the Cuban nation. The solidarity that is required today with those in Cuba and in exile who advocate for freedom is very important to all".

Lifting the sanctions and restrictions now will provide a much-needed lifeline to finance Castro's regime that would help prolong its stay in power at the expense of the Cuban people.

On behalf of Martha Beatriz and the organization I represent, Mothers and Women Against Repression, I would like to thank those members of Congress who recently voted in solidarity with the democratic aspirations of the Cuban people by voting against the Flake amendment in the Treasury Postal Appropriations bill.