

Counseling Act of 2004.” This legislation would permanently extend VA’s authority to offer services to women and men who experienced sexual harassment, abuse or assault while serving on active duty in the armed services.

Congress originally authorized VA to offer sexual trauma counseling in November 1992 in the wake of the Tailhook Scandal where U.S. naval aviators were found to have sexually abused 14 women officers and 12 civilians at a 1991 convention in Las Vegas. In the wake of another scandal at the Aberdeen Proving Ground in 1998, legislation resulting in the extension and expansion of authority for the sexual trauma counseling program was enacted. I want to commend my colleague on the VA Committee, Luis Gutierrez, for his hard work in support of this legislation.

As the number of women serving in the military continues to grow, the need for this program is sadly more evident. According to a VA report, more than half (55%) of all women in VA’s patient population said they had experienced sexual harassment while in the military, and almost one-quarter claimed to have been sexually assaulted. Although the military is moving to address some of the long-standing problems it has had in managing sexism of all kinds in its increasingly integrated armed services workforce, we cannot expect the military’s culture to change overnight.

VA’s sexual trauma counseling programs are designed to create a secure and sensitive environment in which women who served in the military can deal with the emotional burden of being a victim of sexual abuse. Studies have shown that almost a third of all rape victims have active cases of post-traumatic stress disorder. Typically individuals who seek care may need other types of VA services including appropriate treatment for the psychological effects of trauma, in addition to medication and treatment for the substance use disorders that sometimes arise from victims’ attempts to “self-medicate” symptoms such as stress, impaired concentration and nightmares.

Since the program was authorized, VA has embraced the challenge of developing unique resources to serve women and men who suffered such abuses during their military service. The program does not limit its services to veterans and is authorized to provide services to members of the National Guard and Reserve and others who were on active duty, such as trainees, who may never attain veteran status.

To date, thousands of veterans have received VA sexual trauma services and a General Accounting Office study shows a general satisfaction with the programs provided. All VA medical centers, in addition to some vet centers, have resources available to veterans and reservists. It is through effective intervention and counseling that individuals may overcome some of the problems associated with sexual trauma and return to normal, productive lives.

In 2002, the Committee on Veterans Affairs examined the status of VA’s health programs for women. One witness, Linda Spoonster-Schwartz, the former Chairperson of the VA’s Advisory Committee on Women Veterans and now the Commissioner of Veterans Affairs in Connecticut had this to say:

Surely by now, this Committee is aware that the need for this treatment program will persist as long as incidents of sexual assault and trauma continue to occur in the ranks of our military. For all practical pur-

poses, this problem is not going away. Indeed, there is no question that there is sufficient utilization of VA resources committed to treat veterans who were victimized while in the service of their country. Women of all ages and periods of service continue to seek assistance from VA for the physical and emotional aftermath of these traumatic events. The burning question to this Committee is why hasn’t this become a permanent program of the VA?

The time is right to give this proven program the permanent authority it deserves. I urge this Congress to pass this bill so sexual trauma counseling services will be available to current and future generations of veterans.

RECOGNIZING THE FAIRFAX COUNTY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE 2004 VALOR AWARD RECIPIENTS FROM THE FAIRFAX COUNTY FIRE AND RESCUE DEPARTMENT

HON. TOM DAVIS

OF VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, February 26, 2004

Mr. TOM DAVIS of Virginia. Mr. Speaker, Mr. MORAN, Mr. WOLF and I rise today to recognize an extraordinary group of men and women in Northern Virginia. Each year, the Fairfax County Chamber of Commerce recognizes individuals who courageously have demonstrated selfless dedication to public safety. The hard work, dedication, and perseverance of the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department have earned several of its members the highest honor that Fairfax County bestows upon its public safety officials—The Valor Award.

There are several types of Valor Awards awarded to a public safety officer: The Life-saving Award, the Certificate of Valor, or the Gold, Silver, or Bronze Medal of Valor. During the 26th Annual Awards Ceremony, 53 men and women from the Office of the Sheriff, Fire and Rescue Department, and the Police Department received one of the aforementioned honors for their bravery and heroism.

It is with great honor that we enter into the RECORD the names of the recipients of the 2004 Valor Awards in the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department. Receiving the Life-saving Award: Technician Brent M. Schnupp; the Certificate of Valor: Master Technician John L. Capps, Master Technician Even J. Lewis, EMS Captain Gary D. Pemberton; the Silver Medal of Honor: Firefighter Michael V. Allen, Lieutenant Edward D. Bowman, Haz-Mat Technician Thomas L. Flint, Captain Samuel L. Gray, Firefighter Richard D. Riley, Master Technician Timothy A. Sparrow, Lieutenant Daniel T. Young; the Bronze Medal of Honor: Master Technician Anthony E. Doran, Firefighter Clayton Thompson III.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, we would like to take this opportunity to thank all men and women who serve the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department. The events of September 11th serve as a reminder of the sacrifices our emergency service workers make for us each day. These individuals’ continuous efforts on behalf of Fairfax County citizens are paramount to preserving security, law, and order throughout our community. Their selfless acts of heroism truly merit our highest praise. We ask our colleagues to join us in applauding this group of remarkable citizens.

TRIBUTE TO FATHER AUGUSTINE SZEKULA

HON. ADAM B. SCHIFF

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, February 26, 2004

Mr. SCHIFF. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to proudly honor Father Augustine Szekula. Father Szekula is being honored on the joyous occasion of 60 productive years of distinguished service and leadership in Armenian, religious, cultural and literary endeavors.

Father Szekula is a man for all seasons—devoted parish priest, distinguished educator, prolific author and editor. He is highly respected by the Armenian communities throughout the world, especially in the United States, Lebanon and Austria, where his dedicated service and visionary leadership has impacted a score of students and priests.

Father Augustine Szekula was born on September 19, 1921 in a city called Gyergyoszentmiklos, Transylvania, which currently is Gheorgheni in Romania. His ancestors emigrated in 1913 from the city of Ani, part of the historic Armenia. In 1931, Father Szekula attended the Mekhitarist Seminary of Vienna and was granted membership into the congregation in 1938. In 1946, he received his masters degree from the State University of Vienna. From 1946 through 1993, among his other duties, he served as director of the Mekhitarist “Madenataran,” the museum, and the Chancery and editor of “Hantes” Armenian Review. Father Szekula went on to become Vice-Superintendent of the Mekhitarist Seminary in Vienna, Austria, principal of the Mekhitarist school in Hasmie, Lebanon and parish priest of the Armenian church in Budapest, Hungary.

Today, he is the Principal of the Mekhitarist Fathers’ School and continues to serve the Armenian community with his leadership and wisdom. Please join me in extending congratulations to Father Szekula on his 60 years of exemplary community service.

TRIBUTE TO AUNT EUNICE MERRELL

HON. ROBERT E. (BUD) CRAMER, JR.

OF ALABAMA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, February 26, 2004

Mr. CRAMER. Mr. Speaker, it is with a heavy heart that I rise today to honor the memory of Eunice Merrell, known affectionately as Aunt Eunice to everyone that knew her. Aunt Eunice passed away last week at the age of 84.

Aunt Eunice was the proprietor and host at Eunice’s Country Kitchen. There you could find friendly faces and good down-home cooking. In addition to the best biscuits in North Alabama, Aunt Eunice never met a stranger. She loved every one of her customers and especially her community. Her restaurant was in business for over 50 years.

Mr. Speaker, there was no place like Eunice’s Country Kitchen. It was a part of local legend. At Eunice’s, people from all walks of life at all stages of life, were welcomed.

I considered Aunt Eunice a close friend and trusted advisor. She was the type of person