

one of the most awful events in modern history. Many are not aware that Ottoman officials expelled millions of Armenians from the homelands they had inhabited for over 2,500 years. They are not aware that Ottoman officials attempted to exterminate the Armenian race and the precedent set for the genocides that followed. It is distressing that horrors of this magnitude have largely been forgotten.

Even more disturbing are the governments, institutions, scholars, and individuals who deny the enormity of these crimes against humanity. It is inconceivable that individuals and governments continue to ignore the substantial evidence—including numerous survivor accounts, photodocumentaries, and official documents in the archives of the United States, Britain, France, Austria, and the Vatican—that prove these atrocities took place. It is also frustrating that some rationalize these crimes or refuse to recognize this premeditated ethnic cleansing as genocide.

The international community must deal honestly with this senseless genocide. World leaders must rise above indifference and the political considerations that they have covered behind. They must unequivocally acknowledge the murders of one and a half million Armenians that began in 1915 for what it is—genocide. They must use their position to reveal the truth and bring attention to this tragedy that has been overlooked and brushed aside for too long.

We all want to forget these horrific tragedies in our history and bury them in the past. However, understanding the immeasurable wrongs the Armenian people endured—and the mass scale on which they occurred—is vital to grasping the impact these events continue to have on the stability of the region. It is only through the painful process of acknowledging and discussing these horrific events that we can prevent similar iniquity in the future.

We owe full recognition and acceptance of these crimes to the one and half million victims of the Armenian Genocide. Anything less is an insult to their memory.

PAYING TRIBUTE TO LUCY
RICKMAN

HON. SCOTT MCINNIS

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, April 28, 2004

Mr. MCINNIS. Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate and thank Lucy Rickman, an extraordinary woman from my district. Lucy will soon be retiring as the director of The Haven, an assisted living center in Hayden, Colorado, where she has worked since its inception in 1992. She has dedicated an extraordinary amount of time, effort, and care into the project, and it is my privilege to recognize her career here today.

Seeing the need for an assisted living center in Hayden, Lucy became heavily involved in The Havens planning and design. After thirty-four years of teaching English and Social Studies to seventh and eighth graders, Lucy became director of The Haven in 2000. Lucy saw to it that the facility grew and become a success, and worked to obtain grants for the center totaling \$115,000. A firm believer in grassroots community involvement, she has

implemented events such as senior visit lunch Fridays, holiday light tours, and socials in the town park.

Mr. Speaker, Lucy has been a vital part of The Haven's formation and operation since its beginning, and it is my pleasure to recognize her today before this body of Congress and this nation. Her hard work and dedication are largely responsible for The Haven's existence and success. Thanks for your service Lucy, and I wish you all the best in your future endeavors.

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
NURSE RECRUITMENT
AND RETENTION ACT

HON. ROB SIMMONS

OF CONNECTICUT

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, April 28, 2004

Mr. SIMMONS. Mr. Speaker, today I am introducing legislation that would authorize several new and innovative initiatives to attract and retain nursing personnel in the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

Since 1996, the number of patients treated annually by VA has risen by 70 percent. During this same period of growing demand for VA health care services, the number of nursing program graduates nationwide began to fall, along with the number of registered nurses employed in nursing. The latest U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration report projects that the shortage of nurses this year will reach about 138,322 nationally, and will rise to about 808,416 in 2020.

Today, about 7.6 million veterans are enrolled in VA health care and in 2010 it is estimated that this number will grow to approximately 8.4 million. VA cannot meet the future health care burden for caregivers without an adequate supply of nurses in its 1,300 facilities. VA's nurse vacancy and turnover rates have greatly increased since 1998. Unless we create incentives and opportunities for experienced caregivers to choose VA as a professional career, our nation's veterans will suffer.

First, my legislation would authorize a new initiative to improve VA's program for recruiting nurses through the use of outside recruitment, advertising, and communication agencies, and the use of interactive and online technologies. The federal government's recruitment process is not responsive to the market conditions for recruitment of nursing personnel. In order to address the human capital challenges in the VA, the Department needs better tools and strategies to plan, attract, assess, hire and manage its recruitment process for nurses. This pilot program would test whether such tools can fit VA's needs.

The VA health care system has over 200,000 employees, ranking it among the top 25 largest employers as defined in the Hoover's Handbook of American Business. The VA health care system has more employees than, for example, Blue Cross and Blue Shield, the Kaiser Foundation Health Plan and Manor Care, Inc., and is the largest employer of registered nurses in this country. In the private sector, human resources professionals have developed and are successfully using internet-based recruitment tools, but VA's use of such tools is extremely limited. Forrester Research, an independent technology re-

search company that provides advice about technology's impact on business, recently reported that 100% of Fortune 500 companies are now using online recruiting. It is in the best interest of VA to capitalize on this best practice of private industry. I believe that streamlining the recruitment process to offer nursing employment opportunities in an appealing and contemporary format will attract talented nurses to fill Department vacancies.

The bill would enhance VA's ability to provide nurses flexible work schedules by authorizing three different options for alternative tours of duty to accommodate the personal needs of nurses to have more control over their schedules. Nurses are the front line providers of care and their continued dedication and support makes patients' lives better and doctors' jobs easier. According to an American Organization of Nurse Executives survey, a major cause of dissatisfaction in the nursing workforce is inflexible work schedules. Offering more family friendly schedules is critical to keeping experienced nurses employed in the VA.

My bill would also clarify that the Department's policy for nurse recruitment should focus on the registered nurse's clinical competencies and direct patient care performance. If a nurse has presented or accomplished the required elements for VA employment, the lack of a specific educational degree should not be a factor in VA's hiring decision. Recent testimony before the National Commission on VA Nursing, established in Public Law 107-135, called attention to a concern that VA's policies under its nurse qualification standards discourage some nurses with associate degrees in nursing from seeking employment in VA because they are not judged for their experience and expertise, but are disqualified because they do not possess a baccalaureate degree in nursing.

The American Association of Community Colleges reports that 62 percent of employed staff nurses, including 45 percent in nurse clinician positions, 42 percent in clinical nurse specialist positions, 52 percent in head nurse positions and 65 percent in nurse supervisor positions received their nursing educational preparation through associate degree or diploma nursing programs.

Regardless of educational preparation, all nursing graduates must pass rigorous licensing examinations administered by state governments. Once licensed, they perform the identical scope of nursing practice under state law. A recent review of test data by the National Council of State Boards of Nursing indicates that the pass rates of nurses trained with associate and baccalaureate degrees are virtually identical. However, notwithstanding their years of bedside nursing or clinical proficiency, VA will not hire nurses above the entry Nurse Level I position unless they have baccalaureate degrees. VA is losing the opportunity to bring experienced, qualified nurses into its system because of this policy.

Finally, the bill would make technical corrections and incorporate blind rehabilitation specialists in the list of certain positions that the VA is permitted to hire through use of the direct appointment authority provided in title 38, United States Code. The use of this so-called "hybrid Title 38" authority enhances VA's ability to hire clinical staff in a timely fashion to maintain the necessary level of highly-trained staff.