Ms. Mary D. Watts for 26 years of distinguished service to the United States House of Representatives.

Mary began serving the United States House of Representatives in 1979 as a Technical Support Specialist working at House Information Systems. Milestones during her career at the House include conducting the first evaluations for office fax machines in 1980 and Personal Computers in 1984. She was instrumental in establishing training and support for House staff to make use of the new technologies associated with desktop computers.

As the Division Manager for the Customer Services Group, Mary managed the House computer helpdesk staff, Field Service Technicians and System Integrators providing technical support, and consulting services to every Member, Committee and Leadership office of the House.

Managing the day-to-day operations of the Technical Support Branch, Mary is responsible for information technology solutions and support services for 12,000 personal computers and over 4,000 BlackBerry wireless devices in Washington, DC and more than 950 district offices across this country.

Mary's contributions while serving the United States House of Representatives have been significant. Her passionate customer service, organizational knowledge and personnel management skills earned her the reputation among her colleagues and customers as a person with a calm demeanor and respect for everyone.

On behalf of the entire House community, we extend congratulations to Mary for her many years of dedication and outstanding contributions to the U.S. House of Representatives. We wish Mary many wonderful years in fulfilling her retirement dreams.

SMALL COMMUNITY OPTIONS FOR REGULATORY EQUITY ACT

HON. C.L. "BUTCH" OTTER

OF IDAHO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, March 15, 2005

Mr. OTTER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce the Small Community Options for Regulatory Equity Act. Rural communities across my state and elsewhere are being unfairly burdened by Environmental Protection Agency regulations that have questionable benefit.

While we all want to ensure a clean, safe drinking water supply for our communities, we must remember that fiscal restraints sometimes require tradeoffs and accommodations. Many small communities believe that EPA regulations will do more harm than good by wasting limited public health funds complying with standards that do little to advance the interests of public health.

For those of you who may have forgotten the arsenic debate of just a few years ago, let me refresh your memory. The Safe Drinking Water Act was used in the past to clean up pollution caused by previous business practices. Now the EPA is using the act to clean up Mother Nature herself. Arsenic is a naturally occurring component in the soil and water of many Western states, including Idaho. Using questionable science, the EPA has committed to ensuring all domestic water systems meet the arbitrary 10 parts-per-billion standard for arsenic—no matter how small those systems are. This is down from the 50 parts-per-billion standard set in 1975.

When the Safe Drinking Water Act was passed, Congress provided flexibility for EPA to determine whether it is economically or technologically feasible to obtain a certain level of reduced contamination. Essentially, the act states that if it's too expensive, smaller systems simply need to get as close to the standard as they reasonably can. Unfortunately EPA has decided not to use that flexibility. EPA has determined that paying $1,000 per year per user for the smaller water systems to meet the arsenic standard is affordable.

We know that many of our rural communities have low-income residents who make difficult decisions each month. They must choose which bills to pay and which to put off. These folks aren't worried about the cable bill; they're worried about being able to cover their heat, food, power and even prescription drug costs every month. And when faced with those choices, they'll choose to pay their water bill first. But the EPA—in its infinite wisdom—has decided to place a higher priority on marginal reductions in arsenic level than such basic needs as food and shelter.

That is unacceptable, which is why I am introducing legislation today to allow small and rural communities, those under 10,000 in population, to choose whether they want EPA to enforce regulations on naturally occurring contaminants. If the eligible community determines it is too costly to comply with the rule, it can request an exemption from the regulation, which EPA must grant.

No one is talking about removing all the arsenic from the water. We are talking about removing parts per billion, which is removing a very small amount of something that is barely even there. There is no bright line of concentration at the parts-per-billion level beyond which arsenic becomes unsafe. EPA views 9.9 parts-per-billion as safe and 10.1 as unsafe, despite the fact that there is little health difference between such small differences. EPA can't determine how much arsenic ingestion above the federal standard is harmful. While EPA has said that arsenic concentrations above its standard don't necessarily present an unreasonable risk to health, concentrations above 10 parts-per-billion do create a significant financial burden for small communities.

This mandate doesn't consider the unintended consequences and it can't balance competing local priorities. Local communities are in the best position to determine where their scarce resources need to go. EPA is not going to the communities and suggesting ways they can comply or technology they can use. Rather than being a good partner, EPA is once again just an enforcer, and is waiting until 2006 to impose fines on communities that are not in compliance. Such one-size-fits-all government "solutions" do nothing to make the water cleaner. They only provoke bitterness and stifle cooperation.

One small community in Idaho already has had to lay off its only police officer in order to afford studies and other requirements related to complying with the arsenic regulation. Now we are asking people to choose between real public safety and a theoretical health benefit. Further compounding the problem for this rural community, the EPA recently denied its request for a compliance extension, as provided for in the agency's own regulation. Community leaders know they can't comply by 2006 and are trying to do the right thing—but EPA refuses to help them.

We are supposed to have a democratic process here in the United States. In this case, the EPA is overriding the will of local citizens. I believe it's time to put the power back into the hands of those most impacted to determine what truly is best for them.

I remain concerned that this regulation will have very adverse economic impacts on thousands of rural communities across the nation, without addressing legitimate human health concerns. Since there is no economically feasible way for small communities to meet this standard and the standard may result in no health benefits, I support allowing each eligible rural community to decide whether to comply. I encourage you to join me in cosponsoring the Small Community Options for Regulatory Equity Act.

HONORING THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF STATE REPRESENTATIVE EDMUND KUEMPEL

HON. HENRY CUELLAR

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, March 15, 2005

Mr. CUELLAR. Mr. Speaker, I rise to recognize Texas State Representative Edmund Kuempel of my Congressional District for his exceptional career in public service.

Mr. Kuempel was born and raised in Austin, Texas, and received his Bachelor of Arts in Business from Texas Lutheran College in Seguin. He was first elected to the Texas State Legislature in 1983, and is currently the Chairman of the House Administration Committee.

He has received numerous awards for his legislative work, including the Man of the Year Award from the Texas County Agricultural Agents Association, the Career Achievement Award from the Texas Chamber of Commerce, the Leader of Excellence Award from the Free Market Committee, and the Texas Chamber of Commerce Legislative Leadership Award.

Edmund Kuempel continues to serve the people of Wilson, Gonzales, and Guadalupe Counties with his hard work and dedication. He is a credit to the Texas State Legislature, and his dedication to his state and country are admirable.

Mr. Speaker, I am honored to have the opportunity to recognize the many achievements of State Representative Edmund Kuempel.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. DIANE E. WATSON

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, March 15, 2005

Ms. WATSON. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that on rollcall vote No. 67, I would like the record to reflect that I inadvertently voted "nay." I would like the record to reflect that I intended to vote "yea."