

Mancuso won high honors at the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, New York, graduating in 1990. He also earned an associate's degree in culinary arts, and in April of 2003, he received the prestigious Certified Executive Chef certification from The American Culinary Federation.

His career has taken him to prominent restaurants throughout the United States, giving him a strong background in the diversity of dining styles in this country. According to Mancuso, "California is a culinary mecca and as the Executive Chef at The Sardine Factory, I will have the opportunity to strengthen American cuisine by working with individual agriculture growers. The resources are here—coastal seafood, fresh vegetables, and prime poultry."

His outstanding talents have won him numerous national and international culinary awards, including 13 gold medals in national and international competitions. He is a member of Les Toques Blanches, an honor society of chefs in the United States. In 1996 he was on the Culinary Olympic Team USA, representing 25,000 chefs from the American Culinary Federation.

In addition, Mancuso is a regular participant in fundraising for charity events in the local community and has mentored many students in the culinary field. Mr. Speaker, I wish to honor Chef Robert Mancuso for his many accomplishments, for his dedication to his art, and to express my sincere gratitude for his service to the community.

RECOGNIZING THE ACHIEVEMENTS
OF THE 341ST DISTRICT COURT
JUDGE ELMA T. SALINAS ENDER

HON. HENRY CUELLAR

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 16, 2005

Mr. CUELLAR. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor the important achievements of Judge Elma T. Salinas Ender in Laredo, Texas of my Congressional District.

Appointed as Judge of the 341st District Court by Governor Mark White, Judge Elma T. Salinas Ender became the first Mexican-American woman appointed and elected to a district court bench in state and U.S. history. Her knowledge and commitment that she has brought to the bench has made her an inspiration too many.

Professional activities include: member of the Governor's Juvenile Standards Task Force; the Funding/Judiciary branch of Government in Texas; State Bar of Texas; and has served on the Texas Bar Association council for "Women in Law." Judge Salinas Ender is involved in numerous civic and community activities, i.e. Laredo 1010 Youth Task Force; Communities in Schools; and Leadership Laredo.

She holds a Juris Doctor degree from St. Mary's University School of Law in San Antonio, Texas. Judge Salinas Ender is a fine example to women in our community, demonstrating what hard work and dedication can accomplish.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to have this opportunity to recognize the contributions of Judge Elma T. Salinas Ender.

INTRODUCING THE REGIONAL ECONOMIC AND INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT ACT

HON. JAMES L. OBERSTAR

OF MINNESOTA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 16, 2005

Mr. OBERSTAR. Mr. Speaker, today Congresswoman NORTON and I have introduced the "Regional Economic and Infrastructure Development Act". A detailed summary of the bill's provisions is attached.

The bill organizes four regional commissions under a common framework, thereby providing a more uniform method for distributing economic development funds throughout the regions most in need of such assistance. It reauthorizes the Delta Regional Authority and the Northern Great Plains Regional Authority and creates two new regional commissions: the Southeast Crescent Regional Commission and the Southwest Border Regional Commission. Both of these latter commissions have been proposed in legislation introduced in the previous Congress and are designed to address problems of systemic poverty and chronic underdevelopment in those regions. Every county or parish that is currently included in a commission through enacted or proposed legislation is similarly included in that same commission under this bill. While the bill follows the successful organizational model of the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), it does not include the ARC or the Denali Commission (a wholly intrastate commission) in its framework.

Regional commissions provide vital assistance to the development of the Nation's most chronically poor and distressed regions. They are true federal-state partnerships, bringing together federal, state, and local governments to expand the economic and development opportunities of a chronically distressed region. These regions typically experience rates of poverty and unemployment that are more than 150 percent of the national average. Further, some of these areas lack the transportation and basic public infrastructure necessary to support business development, and importantly, create jobs in the region.

The regional commissions are designed to assist areas in overcoming chronic economic distress by focusing on the distressed region as a whole. By recognizing that systemic economic distress follows geographic and natural resource realities, rather than arbitrary state or political subdivision borders, the commissions are able to concentrate their efforts over the entire region—regardless of state lines. One way that federally designated regional commissions work within the region to overcome the effects of chronic underdevelopment is through investment in infrastructure, including transportation, telecommunications, and other basic public infrastructure. The commissions also assist the region in obtaining job skills training, entrepreneurship, technology, and business development. Through these efforts, commissions work to improve the economic development of these systemically distressed regions.

Regional commissions also supplement the state share of other federal programs to ensure that areas that do not even have the economic means of meeting a required state or local funding share are not denied the oppor-

tunity to participate in these programs. Regional commissions assist in local development planning by helping provide local development districts with the resources and expertise necessary to formulate and follow a comprehensive, strategic regional development plan. Often it is the local development planning that is the key for the successful implementation of economic and infrastructure development programs.

The Regional and Economic Infrastructure Development Act is modeled after the statute authorizing the ARC. The ARC has demonstrated that regional commissions are successful in fighting chronic underdevelopment and poverty. Since the ARC's creation in 1965, employment in the thirteen-state region has grown by nearly 66 percent. In contrast, in the decade preceding its creation, employment in the region had declined by 1.5 percent. Further, the poverty rate of the region has been cut by more than one half—from 31.1 percent in 1960 to 13.6 percent in 2000.

As the Nation continues to suffer through a weakened economy, the need for these commissions becomes even more important. In February 2005, the national unemployment rate reached 5.4 percent. Further, since January 2001, the number of people unemployed increased from 6 million to 8 million—an increase of 2 million people, or 33 percent. Moreover, workers who have lost their jobs are having more trouble finding new jobs. The average length of unemployment is now almost 20 weeks, and more than one in five unemployed workers have been out of work for more than six months.

As the economy continues to struggle, it is these historically depressed regions—the regions that have already been struggling—that suffer a disproportionate share of the burden. Now, perhaps more than ever, there is a greater need for these regional commissions. This bill recognizes the importance of the regional commissions to these chronically distressed areas. The bill strengthens the commissions by establishing a uniform organizational structure, under which an affirmative vote of a commission requires a majority of state members plus the affirmative vote of the federal cochairperson. With this voting structure, the bill ensures that the federal and state roles in a commission are equal and interdependent, thereby promoting a true federal-state partnership.

In addition, the bill establishes a coordinating council for the regional commissions consisting of representatives from all the commissions, including the Appalachian Regional Commission and the Denali Commission. The coordinating council is directed to meet biannually to discuss issues facing regions that suffer chronic distress and successful strategies for promoting regional development. While the council will assist the commissions in promoting regional development, it has no decision-making authority over any of the commissions.

Finally, the bill authorizes sufficient funds for each commission so that a commission will have the means available to fulfill its mission of promoting economic and infrastructure development. The bill authorizes \$30 million for each commission in fiscal year 2006 (the amount currently authorized for the Delta and Northern Great Plains Regional Authorities) and increases that authorization by \$5 million for each successive year through fiscal year 2010.