

disabilities, immigrants, other disadvantaged people, and the general public to help themselves, so that they may become self-sufficient.

MEO has more than fulfilled this mission. In 2003, for example, MEO was one of only four agencies out of 1,000 community action agencies nationwide to receive an Agency of Excellence Award from the National Community Action Partnership. This prestigious award, for MEO's superior administrative operations and program excellence, is a true testament to its advocacy and its outstanding services tailored to the specific and often unique needs of Maui County.

Among those many services, MEO provides the largest specialized transportation program in Maui County, with vehicles carrying the elderly, low-income, persons with disabilities, youth, Head Start children, and the public, 7 days a week and up to 18 hours a day. MEO's award-winning Head Start program provides services to 384 children through 14 centers county-wide. The MEO YouthBank, including an AmeriCorps program, provides opportunities for youths ages 14 to 26 to work, learn and prepare for their future.

The MEO community services staff works tirelessly in challenging situations, providing emergency assistance, job placement, training and other support services. The MEO Development Corporation provides loans and training to start small businesses, create jobs, and boost the community's economy. MEO's Anlace Hispano provides services to the Hispanic-speaking and immigrant population, and the Being Empowered and Safe Together reintegration program serves individuals making the difficult transition from prison back into the community.

Moreover, MEO has never hesitated to go above and beyond its core mission in times of dire community need. In the aftermath of 9/11, for example, MEO, in partnership with the County of Maui, distributed \$1.5 million to residents affected economically when Maui's tourism industry slumped. Just a few weeks ago, MEO volunteered its services to assist employees dislocated through the destruction by fire of Kahului Mall.

Of course, the secret of MEO's success has always been its wonderful, dedicated and caring staff, led by some truly extraordinary executive directors throughout the last 4 decades. My former State House of Representatives Speaker and colleague, Joe Souki, well laid the groundwork for the modern era and was followed for the last 2 decades by the irrepressible Gladys Baisa, who will soon retire. Maui County will truly miss your leadership, Gladys; but you and MEO chose well in your successor, Sandy Bas.

So you can see, Mr. Speaker, that Maui Economic Opportunity, Inc., has truly created a better community for everyone and richly deserves these happy birthday greetings before it

moves on into a bright and equally rewarding future. Mahalo, and aloha.

#### PAYING TRIBUTE TO THE VETERANS OF THE PERSIAN GULF

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. RYAN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, today I rise to pay tribute to the veterans of the Persian Gulf who are from the Mahoning Valley in Ohio. Our valley has long been blessed to have local sons and daughters willing to volunteer to serve in our country's military, and our most recent veterans of the Persian Gulf are cut from the same cloth. When they were called on to serve overseas in the Middle East, leaving their families and friends for extended periods of time to fight in a foreign land, they answered the call. They answered the call, even though they faced great physical risk, even death; and I thank them for their service, for their patriotism, and for their sacrifice.

We as a country owe them a tremendous debt and are forever grateful. We need to ensure that they are provided the equipment and support they need in the field to complete their jobs effectively, that their families are taken care of when they are away, that they have jobs to come home to when they return, and that they receive the benefits that they have earned as veterans.

We have no higher legislative priority, I know myself and speaking for the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. STRICKLAND), than fully funding the veterans benefits that they have been promised.

Yesterday, I voted for the supplemental funding bill for the war in Iraq and Afghanistan. I believe that we need to finish the job we started in the Middle East and bring stability to that region and then to immediately bring our troops home.

God bless the men and women who have served during the war on terror, and God bless the men and women who are still serving on the other side of the world. These veterans have protected this country for years, since its inception; and the highest honor that we could bestow upon them is to make sure that we take care of them.

Mr. Speaker, we have the freedoms we enjoy today because of the sacrifices that our soldiers have made throughout history, and I am proud today to honor the men and women of the Mahoning Valley who have served this country in the Persian Gulf and have served so nobly.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to my good friend, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. STRICKLAND).

Mr. STRICKLAND. Mr. Speaker, I wanted to thank my friend, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. RYAN), for sharing these moments with me as we stand here in the Chamber of the people's House, the House of Representatives, to honor those from our region.

Ohio is a patriotic State, and the great Mahoning Valley is certainly a

patriotic region of Ohio. Over the years, literally thousands of young men and women have left the great Mahoning Valley and have served in this country's Armed Forces. They are serving today, so many of them, in harm's way, unselfishly giving up of their time and their talents, while their loving families wait at home, hoping and praying that they will be safe.

Both the gentleman and I have visited Walter Reed Hospital. We have talked with Americans who have lost their legs, many have been blinded, so many have sustained brain injuries. I have been to the Bethesda Naval Hospital and seen young people walking down the hallways with their families walking with them, young people who have been terribly disfigured.

We are paying a great price for the war that is currently under way; and the least we can do, the very least we can do as a Nation is to make sure that when these honored people come home that they are treated with justice and fairness, that they are able to receive the health care that they have been promised and that they deserve.

As we stand here in the safety of this great Chamber, we should never forget that many of our friends and the families and loved ones from the great Mahoning Valley are in harm's way. So we honor them, and we honor their families, because they have joined in the sacrifice as well.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time, I thank the gentleman.

We also want to recognize all our friends in Youngstown at this time, where at the Italian-American War Veterans Post 3 the veterans and community leaders on April 14 will hold a tribute honoring the Mahoning Valley area sons and daughters at war.

We would like to thank Herman Adams, Ray Ornelas, and Dom Medina for all their help in putting this together and organizing it, helping us to honor those troops.

□ 1730

#### KEEP SECURITY IN SOCIAL SECURITY

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. PRICE of Georgia). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. CUELLAR) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. CUELLAR. Mr. Speaker, in the ongoing debate on Social Security, I think it is essential that we take the time to put a face on the people served by and protected by Social Security.

All of the numbers and charts help us make the outline of the arguments, but it is the letters that I receive from my constituents that show the real face of Social Security. I would like to take the time to show one of those letters, one of the 400-plus letters I have received.

A gentleman named Hector MacDonald from Laredo, Texas. It says,