

2006 guarantees that the terms and conditions of Puerto Rico's future be developed jointly and democratically by the people of Puerto Rico and the Congress and not by the whims of an elite few.

In supporting this legislation, Congress would finally sanction a real opportunity for the people of Puerto Rico to exercise their right of self-determination with a process that would allow for a direct vote from the people. The first plebiscite, which would be held during the 110th Congress, but no later than December 31, 2007, would allow the people of Puerto Rico to elect whether to remain a U.S. territory, or to pursue a path toward a constitutionally viable permanent non-territorial status. It would not be until a second plebiscite during the 111th Congress that specific non-territorial status options would be defined, should the voters decide they want to opt for a permanent, non-territorial status.

Congress has a date with history. As a territory, Puerto Rico is subject to Congressional authority under the Constitution's Territorial Clause. After 89 years as U.S. citizens, we deserve the opportunity to provide the people of Puerto Rico with a process where, through their direct vote, they can choose the status of their choice. Congress must assume its constitutional responsibility and act now; otherwise the efforts of the Presidential Task Force on Puerto Rico's Status, established by President Clinton and President Bush, would have been in vain.

I wish to thank my many colleagues, on both sides of the aisle, who have agreed to become original co-sponsors of this bill, validating the recommendations made by the President's Task Force on Puerto Rico's Status to commence a democratic process under which the people of Puerto Rico will be able to exercise their inherent right to self-determination. The four million U.S. citizens of Puerto Rico deserve no less.

TRIBUTE TO RUSSELL GWATNEY

HON. HAROLD E. FORD, JR.

OF TENNESSEE

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 2, 2006

Mr. FORD. Mr. Speaker, it is with honor I rise today to recognize the great achievement of Russell Gwatney, a noted and respected business leader in the great state of Tennessee and the nation at-large. Russell Gwatney, president for Gwatney Chevrolet, Chevrolet-Isuzu was recently named a finalist for the 2006 Time Magazine Quality Dealer Award.

The Time Magazine Quality Dealer Award is the automobile industry's most prestigious and highly coveted award for car dealers. The award recipients are among the nation's most successful auto dealers. Criteria for the award include recipients' demonstration of a long-standing commitment to effective community service. As a finalist, Mr. Gwatney is one of 66 automobile dealers from more than 19,500 nominees nationwide nominated for the annual award—now in its 37th year.

An Arkansas native, Mr. Gwatney grew up in the car business. His father became a Chevrolet dealer when Russell Gwatney was just 6 years old. Mr. Gwatney started selling cars in 1973 after an illness caused him to

leave the University of Arkansas during his junior year. After completing undergraduate studies in 1976, Mr. Gwatney returned to the dealership in sales management, where he later became general manager in 1979 and co-dealer in 1984.

In addition to his business successes, Mr. Gwatney and his dealership have supported a wide range of organizations and philanthropic efforts in the community. As well, he has served as chairman for the St. Louis Federal Reserve Bank and also member to the executive committee of the Memphis Regional Chamber of Commerce.

Mr. Gwatney was nominated for the annual Time Magazine Quality Dealer Award by Robert V. Weaver, president of Tennessee Automotive Association. Mr. Gwatney lives in Germantown, Tennessee with his wife Elizabeth. They have three children, including their two sons John and David who have joined the family business.

Mr. Speaker, I ask you and my colleagues in the U.S. House of Representatives to join me in recognizing and commending Russell Gwatney and for this great achievement.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. MAJOR R. OWENS

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 2, 2006

Mr. OWENS. Mr. Speaker, I was absent on Tuesday, February 28, 2006, due to unavoidable circumstances in my Congressional District. Had I been present, I would have voted: "yea" to H.R. 1096—Act Commemorating the LITE, or Lifetime Innovations of Thomas Edison; "yea" to H. Res. 668—Celebrating the 40th anniversary of Texas Western's 1966 NCAA Basketball Championship and recognizing the groundbreaking impact of the title game victory on diversity in sports and civil rights in America and "yea" to H.R. 1259, to authorize the President to award a gold medal on behalf of the Congress, collectively, to the Tuskegee Airmen in recognition of their unique military record, which inspired revolutionary reform in the Armed Forces.

IN RECOGNITION OF DR. WILLIAM L. LESTER

HON. MIKE ROGERS

OF ALABAMA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 2, 2006

Mr. ROGERS of Alabama. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to remember and pay tribute to Dr. William L. Lester, the longtime Provost at Tuskegee University in Tuskegee, Alabama, who passed away on February 6, 2006.

Dr. Lester was dedicated to academics. He first arrived in Tuskegee University in 1968 to work as a mathematics instructor, and later left in 1970 to pursue his doctorate at Southern Methodist University. He returned to Tuskegee in 1974 to head the Mathematics Department, and later served as Assistant Provost in the Academic Affairs office. He became Tuskegee's Provost in 1984.

Dr. Lester was truly a model citizen, both for the university community and his family. His

tireless work on behalf of Tuskegee helped make the institution the world-renowned university it is today. He will be sorely missed. His memory lives on through his wife, Virda, and their children.

I am privileged to have the opportunity to honor the late Dr. William L. Lester today, and appreciate the House's attention to the life and legacy of this important Alabamian.

TRIBUTE TO DEREK PARRA, CHAMPION SPEEDSKATER FOLLOWING THE CONCLUSION OF HIS PARTICIPATION IN THE WINTER OLYMPICS AND IN ADVANCE OF HIS RETIREMENT

HON. JOE BACA

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 2, 2006

Mr. BACA. Mr. Speaker, Americans have watched with great pride as our athletes have taken part in the 2006 Winter Olympics in Torino. The greatness of the Olympics comes from the spirit of friendly international competition, and we are inspired by our athletes as they strive for excellence and represent our country with honor. During the Games, not only have we seen amazing athletic accomplishments—but also we have learned about the lives of the athletes away from the arena, as they dedicated themselves to their training and preparation, made sacrifices, overcame challenges, celebrated victories, and sometimes suffered through defeat.

Among the many stars of America's Olympic team, one shines particularly bright to the people of my District and to me personally: speedskater Derek Parra.

Derek grew up on the west side of San Bernardino, California with his father Gilbert and his brother. He attended Roosevelt Elementary and Eisenhower High School in Rialto. In fact my son, Joe Baca, Jr., went to school with him, and I attended church with Derek's father, Gilbert Parra, at St. Catherine's in Rialto.

Southern California's Inland Empire is wonderful place for children to grow up and to get involved in sports, but with the sunny climate, it is hardly a winter sports haven. So not surprisingly, Derek grew up roller skating not ice skating. He first learned to skate at the Stardust Roller Rink in Highland, where he was an inline skater. Derek first set foot on ice when he was 17 years old and was 26 when he switched from inline skating to ice skating in 1996 to pursue his Olympic dreams.

Derek was determined, focused and relentless in this pursuit. Even among his fellow athletes in a demanding sport, he was respected for the work ethic that made him an Olympic hero.

Four years ago, I rose to honor Derek after his amazing performance at the 2002 Games in Salt Lake City. At those Games, he won a gold medal in the 1,500-meter race and a silver medal in the 5,000-meter race, breaking the previous world records for both distances.

Derek Parra was the first Mexican American to ever participate in the Winter Olympics, let alone win a medal. Derek also carried proudly the flag of the United States in the opening ceremonies at Salt Lake.

Since those exciting days four years ago, a lot has changed in Derek's life. He made great

sacrifices in his personal life to continue his Olympic dreams. He moved away from loved ones in Florida to continue his training in Utah. While some athletes are able to concentrate solely on their sport, Derek has continued to work part-time in order to pay the bills. And he has experienced the breakup of his marriage. Additionally, Derek is now 35, which is young for most of us but old for a champion skater.

Yet, through all the challenges both on and off the ice, Derek earned a spot on the 2006 Olympic team and the opportunity to again represent the United States. He skated in two events: the team pursuit competition and the 1,500-meter race, in which he had set a world record on his way to gold 4 years ago. This time, however, he did not match his success in the 2002 Games—no medals, no world records.

Instead, Derek skated for the joy of competition and the thrill of representing his country on the world stage one more time. He skated for his daughter, Mia Elizabeth, who turned 4 years old in December, with the hope that she will remember watching him race against the world's best. He skated because he loves to skate and because he is proud to be an American athlete.

Having accomplished his goals, Derek is ready to retire next month, following a competition in the Netherlands. Quietly, a world away from his glorious achievements of 2002, he will hang up his skates and end his competitive career.

But Derek Parra will not be forgotten. His story will continue to inspire young people, those who dream of Olympic gold and more generally those who have big ambitions despite long odds against them. He has broken down barriers in his striving for greatness—and he has done it all with determination and dignity.

Thank you, Derek, for allowing us to share in your dreams for so long. With great appreciation and admiration I repeat what I said 4 years ago: San Bernardino is proud of you. Mexican Americans are proud of you. All Americans are proud of you. You are our hero. God bless you.

ROCKY MOUNTAIN FOREST INSECTS RESPONSE ENHANCEMENT AND SUPPORT ACT (ROCKY MOUNTAIN FIRES ACT)

HON. MARK UDALL

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 2, 2006

Mr. UDALL of Colorado. Mr. Speaker, with my Colorado colleague, Representative JOHN SALAZAR, I today am introducing a bill to help protect Rocky Mountain communities from the increased risks of severe wildfire caused by large-scale infestations of bark beetles and other insects in our forests.

Entitled the Rocky Mountain Forest Insects Response Enhancement and Support—or Rocky Mountain FIRES—Act, the bill will provide the Forest Service and Interior Department with more tools and resources to respond to this serious problem.

In Colorado and other Rocky Mountain states, the risk of severe wildfires is very real. Partly, this is because of drought. But there are other contributing factors. One is that for

many years, the federal government's policy emphasized fire suppression, even though fire is an inescapable part of the ecology of western forests like those in Colorado. Today, in many parts of the forests there is an accumulation of underbrush and thick stands of small diameter trees that is greater than would be the case if there had been more, smaller fires over the years. They provide the extra fuel that can turn a small fire into an intense inferno. The problem has been made worse by our growing population and increasing development in the places where communities meet the forests—the so-called “urban interface.” And when you add the effects of widespread infestations of insects, you have a recipe for even worse to come.

I have put a priority on reducing the wildfire risks to our communities since I was elected to Congress. In 2000, with my colleague, Representative HEFLEY, I introduced legislation to facilitate reducing the buildup of fuel in the parts of Colorado that the Forest Service, working with state and local partners, identified at greatest risk of fire—the so-called “red zones.”

Concepts from that legislation were included in the National Fire Plan developed by the Clinton Administration and were also incorporated into the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003. As a Member of the Resources Committee, I had worked to develop the version of that legislation that the committee approved in 2002, and while I could not support the different version initially passed by the House in 2003, I voted for the revised version developed in conference with the Senate later that year—the version that President Bush signed into law.

Since 2003 welcome progress has been made—in Colorado, at least—in developing community wildfire protection plans and focusing fuel-reduction projects in the priority “red zone” areas, two important aspects of the new law.

But at the same time nature has continued to add to the buildup of fuel in the form of both new growth and dead and dying mature trees.

This has resulted from a variety of reasons, including the fact that dense stands of even-aged trees (one result of decades of fire suppression and reduced logging) are stressed by the competition for nutrients. This stress, which has been intensified by the effects of the drought that has plagued the west for nearly a decade, makes these stands less able to resist insects.

Many species of bark beetles, such as the mountain pine beetle, are native to our forests. These insects fly to a tree—typically one that may be weakened by age, disease or lack of water and nutrients—where they burrow through the bark. If the tree is healthy, it can defend itself through the production of sap to repel and expel the invading insect. If the insect is successful, it lays its eggs in the woody material below the bark. Once the eggs hatch, they feed on the tree's fiber and disrupt the flow of water and nutrients from the tree's roots to its needles and branches. In addition, the insects bring in fungi and other invaders that further damage the tree. If enough insects are able to penetrate the tree and lay eggs, the tree dies. The offspring then mature and leave the tree flying to the next tree and the cycle begins anew.

These insects and the cycles they engender are a natural component of forest ecosystems.

They help to balance tree densities and set the stage for fires and thereby the generation of new tree growth. When forests are healthy and there are adequate supplies of water, the effects of insects are relatively low-scale and isolated. But under the right conditions—such as during drought conditions or when there are dense stands of even aged trees—the insects can cause large-scale tree mortality, turning whole mountainsides and valleys rust red.

That is what has been happening in many mountainous areas in Colorado. For example, in the Fraser and upper Colorado River Valleys north of the Winter Park Ski area, the insect epidemic has decimated wide swaths of forests. Most alarmingly, areas around populated communities in these valleys from Winter Park all the way up to the west side of Rocky Mountain National Park are living with acres of dead trees, turned rust red by the insects and creating intense concern of a catastrophic wildfire that could race through these landscapes and communities.

To learn more, last year I convened a meeting in Winter Park, in Grand County, that was attended by more than 200 people, including local elected officials, homeowners, timber industry representatives, Forest Service officials, ski area employees, and other Coloradans. They offered observations on the extent of this problem and proffered suggestions on ways to better respond to it.

Based on that meeting and other conversations, draft legislation was developed that Representative SALAZAR and I circulated widely so we could obtain further comments and suggestions. The bill we are introducing today reflects much of what we heard from Coloradans and others interested in this subject.

Our goal is not to eradicate insects in our forests—nor should it be, because insects are a natural part of forest ecosystems. Instead, our intention is to make it possible for there to be more rapid responses to the insect epidemic in those areas where such responses are needed in order to protect communities from increased wildfire dangers.

The bill would add a new section to the Healthy Forests Act to specifically address insect epidemics like those now visible in the Fraser and upper Colorado River Valleys. It would apply to the entire Rocky Mountain west. It would authorize the Forest Service to identify as “insect emergency areas” Federal lands that have already been slated for fuel-reduction work in community wildfire protection plans and that have so many insect-killed trees that there is an urgent need for work to reduce the fire-related risks to human life and property or municipal water supplies. The Forest Service could make such a determination on its own initiative or in response to a request from any State agency or any political subdivision (such as a county, city, or other local government) of a State. If the Forest Service receives such a request, it must make a decision in response within 90 days. A designation must be made by a Regional Forester or higher-ranking official of the Forest Service.

In these emergency areas, the Forest Service or Interior Department would be authorized to remove dead or dying trees on an expedited basis, including use of a “categorical exclusion” from normal review under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).