

has grown from a small first ring town into a burgeoning suburb that is a destination for many folks looking for a safe community to raise a family. Professionally, Paul is a CPA, and he brought those budgeting skills to his work as Town Supervisor, after initially serving a short period of time as Town Comptroller. Paul's work to stabilize town finances, combined with a vision for his town that resulted in developing industrial parks, cultural attractions and recreational areas for residents, means that a lasting legacy of accomplishments will follow the conclusion of his service as Supervisor on December 31.

Since my days representing West Seneca as a member of the New York State Assembly, I have been proud to work with Paul on many projects. I have taken particular pride in working with Paul on one of his own favorite issues—the AmeriCorps program, which for Western New York is headquartered in West Seneca. More than 3,000 young Western New Yorkers have graduated through West Seneca's AmeriCorps, all the while tutoring nearly 25,000 local schoolchildren, clearing 3,500 vacant lots and planting thousands of new trees throughout Western New York. All as a result of Paul Clark's vision.

Paul has a great many accomplishments about which to be proud, but Paul counts as his proudest accomplishments his family—his wife Kathy, and his children Andrew and Kelly.

Madam Speaker, Paul Clark leaves a lasting mark upon the government of the town of West Seneca, and his constituents are better for the service he provided to them. I am pleased to honor his contributions to our community, and I ask that you join me in extending to Paul and his family the House's most heartfelt wishes of good luck and Godspeed.

IN APPRECIATION OF SACRAMENTO AREA FIREFIGHTERS

HON. DORIS O. MATSUI

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, December 13, 2007

Ms. MATSUI. Madam Speaker, I rise today in recognition of the men and women of the Sacramento Metropolitan Fire District and the Sacramento City Fire Department that responded to the southern California fires. The devastating fires burned tens of thousands of acres over the course of the last 2 months. More than 20 local firefighters from Sacramento courageously worked to end these wild fires. I ask all my colleagues to join me in honoring and thanking some of our Nation's finest firefighters.

On October 20, 2007 the first of 15 fires began as a ranch fire in Los Angeles County's Angeles National Forest. The Santa Ana air stream caused wind speeds up to 100 miles per hour, combined with 95-degree temperatures. The combined wind, hot temperature, and severe drought conditions in southern California spread the fire across hundreds of thousands of acres. Over a 7 day period, nine people were killed, and at least 1 million people were evacuated. Thousands of businesses, homes, and structures were destroyed. To date the fire has caused more than \$1 billion dollars in damage across San Diego, Orange, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, Ventura, Riverside and Santa Barbara Counties.

The tireless work of these men and women was invaluable as they saved lives and property throughout the southern California region. The crews are a reflection of the positive contributions and selfless actions of our local firefighters. They responded to fires such as the ferocious Witch Creek Fire in Ramona, where crews grappled with flames more than 70 feet high and were exposed to conditions that included 70 mile per hour wind speeds. The horrific conditions were so dangerous that doors flew off hinges from burning structures. At times, pieces of burning roofs were carried by the winds, which forced firefighters to take cover. Crews worked around the clock for many days with as little as 30 minutes of rest. Their invaluable efforts helped save countless structures and homes that were in the line of fire.

In response to the crisis, Sacramento City Fire Department deployed Battalion Chief Craig Wiedenhoeft, Battalion Chief Niko King, Battalion Chief Jay Glass, Captain James Doucette, Captain Scott Visser, Engineer Sean Dail, Engineer Tom Malim, Firefighter Greg Murdock, Firefighter Dave Stork, and Firefighter Kyle Anderson.

Sacramento Metro Fire Department also deployed more than 40 firefighters. They included Deputy Chief Geoff Miller, Captain Darren Taylor, Captain Scott D. Cockrum, Captain Scott McKenney, Captain Michael Hazlett, Battalion Chief Richard Andersen, Captain James Vell, Engineer Jack Costello, Captain David B. Durham, Captain George E. Kruger, Jr., Engineer Phillip Allen, Engineer Tracey Valentine, Firefighter Ty J. Bailey, Firefighter Erik R. Rubalcava, Firefighter John Schanzenbach, Firefighter Kyle D. Thomas, Captain Steven C. Campbell, Captain Kiley Keeley, Engineer Jeffrey Harris, Engineer Brian M. Swindler, Firefighter Brad Reynolds, Firefighter Aaron S. Wham, Firefighter Tim J. Eisert, Firefighter Kenneth J. Harrington, Battalion Chief John Wagner, Battalion Chief Barry A. Flores, Captain Michael D. Veilleux, Captain William V. Lobsitz, Captain Christian Pebbles, Captain John P. Murakami, Captain Randolph E. Gross, Engineer Russell Powell, Engineer Charles E. Lynch, Engineer Ryan L. Maerklen, Engineer Maurice D. Johnson, Engineer Mark T. Stewart, Firefighter Phillip J. Hart, Firefighter Kevin R. Henson, Firefighter Chris A. Manos, Firefighter Carl F. Jewell, and Firefighter Mark T. Dunne.

Each of these brave men and women left their families and loved ones in Sacramento to place their own life on the line to save their fellow citizens from the horrific southern California wildfires. For their efforts, we all owe them our deepest appreciation. I am truly honored to represent such fine individuals and fire departments in Congress. Once again, I urge my colleagues to join me in thanking them for their unwavering dedication to our country during this difficult time.

COCA-COLA 100TH ANNIVERSARY

HON. TED POE

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, December 13, 2007

Mr. POE. Madam Speaker, today I am proud to recognize the Beaumont Coca-Cola Bottling Company founded in 1907 in Jeffer-

son County, Texas. C.T. Heisig established and managed the first store located on Park Street. Off to a great start, the company purchased over 470 gallons of Coca-Cola syrup during its first year of operation. Today Coca-Cola is the best selling soft drink in the world and this year over six million cases of Coca-Cola products will be sold.

In 1911 Charles Rainwater purchased the Beaumont franchise, and in 1931 a new plant was completed and the company moved to Mariposa Street, where it remained for 54 years. In 1985 operations were moved to its current location at 11450 Eastex Freeway. The current plant employs 207 individuals and contributes nearly nine million dollars to the local economy. The Beaumont Bottling Company alone delivers to over 5,000 customers in eight counties.

The Beaumont Bottling Company has been a great partner in Jefferson County. Its commitment to giving back to our community and helping local charities is greatly appreciated. As the U.S. Representative of the 2nd Congressional District it is an honor to congratulate the Beaumont Coca-Cola Bottling Company and all the members of the Coca-Cola family on their 100th anniversary. I wish Beaumont Coca-Cola Bottling Company another 100 years of continued success.

And that's just the way it is.

IN RECOGNITION OF EDINBURG NORTH HIGH SCHOOL FOR ACHIEVING SILVER MEDAL STATUS IN U.S. NEWS AND WORLD REPORT HIGH SCHOOL RANKINGS

HON. RUBÉN HINOJOSA

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, December 13, 2007

Mr. HINOJOSA. Madam Speaker, I urge my colleagues to join me in congratulating Edinburg North High School for achieving silver medal status in the 2007 U.S. News and World Report ranking of the best high schools in the Nation. Of the over 18,000 high schools in the country, only 505 were recognized as gold or silver medal winners based upon their performance on state tests and success in providing college level work for all of their students.

Edinburg North High School demonstrates that academic excellence is not restricted to the economically advantaged. More than half of its students participate in the free and reduced price lunch program. Over 95 percent of the students at Edinburg North are Hispanic, and many students are the children of migrant and seasonal farm workers. The Edinburg North students and community may not be economically advantaged, but they are rich in family values, tradition, and potential. It is these characteristics that have served as the foundation for their success.

In 2004, Edinburg North High School was recognized with the College Board Inspiration award for its success in expanding Advanced Placement opportunities for students. Edinburg North High School made access to challenging courses a number one priority. It instituted an "open-door" policy for advanced placement courses, more than doubling the number of students taking at least one advanced placement exam.

This focus on rigorous courses has opened the doors to higher education for students of Edinburg North, many of whom are the first in their families to attend college. As a result, Edinburg North graduates have been courted by some of the most selective institutions in the nation, such as the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Dartmouth College, Columbia University, and Rice University.

The silver medal awarded by U.S. News and World report shows that Edinburg North High School's tradition of excellence is continuing. I would like to congratulate the entire community for this achievement and would like to specially acknowledge the leadership of Principal Ramiro Guerra, Superintendent Gilberto Garza, Jr., and President of the Board of Trustees Carmen Gonzalez. Excellent schools are only possible when there is excellent leadership.

Please join me in applauding the achievements of Edinburg North High School. I urge them to keep up the good work.

MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES AT THE DEPARTMENT OF VET- ERANS AFFAIRS

HON. DONALD A. MANZULLO

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, December 13, 2007

Mr. MANZULLO. Madam Speaker, I rise to raise awareness about a mental health concern that is afflicting our brave veterans. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is an illness that can have devastating consequences if not treated. For too long, those suffering from PTSD have been unfairly stigmatized. On December 12, 2007, Mike and Kim Bowman traveled from their home in northern Illinois to testify about the immeasurable tragedy their family has suffered as a result of the suicide of their son Specialist Tim Bowman.

Specialist Tim Bowman was 23 years old when he lost his battle with PTSD only eight months after returning from active duty in Iraq. The Department of Veterans Affairs needs to do more to ensure that all members of the armed services receive the care and attention they deserve. Mike and Kim's story is one that is all too often repeated around the country. As Mike Bowman said in his testimony, "we must all remove the stigma that goes with a soldier admitting that he or she has [PTSD]."

I enclose for the RECORD the testimonies of Mike Bowman and author Ilona Meagher. I encourage all Members to read their statements and judge for themselves the level of the mental health challenges that exists. It is time that this country recognizes what is going with PTSD and takes appropriate action now. No one should suffer a day longer.

TESTIMONY OF MIKE BOWMAN

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, my wife and I are honored to be speaking before you today representing just one of the families that lost a veteran to suicide in 2005.

As my family was preparing for our 2005 Thanksgiving meal, our son Timothy was lying on the floor of my shop office, slowly bleeding to death from a self-inflicted gunshot wound. His war was now over, his demons were gone. Tim was laid to rest in a combination military, firefighter funeral that was a tribute to the man he was.

Tim was the life of a party, happy go lucky young man that joined the National Guard in 2003 to earn money for college and get a little structure in his life. On March 19th of 2005 when Specialist Bowman got off the bus with the other National Guard soldiers of Foxtrot 202 that were returning from Iraq he was a different man. He had a glaze in his eyes and a 1000 yard stare, always looking for an insurgent.

Family members of F202 were given a 10 minute briefing on PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) 2 months before the soldiers returned and the soldiers were given even less. The commander of F202 had asked the Illinois Guard command to change their demobilization practices to be more like the regular army, only to have his questions rebuffed. He knew that our boys had been shot up, blown up by IED's (Improvised Explosive Device), extinguished fires on soldiers so their parents would have something to bury, and extinguished a fire on their own to save lives. They were hardened combat veterans now, but were being treated like they had been at an extended training mission.

You see our National Guardsman from F202 were not out filling sand bags. They departed in October of 2003 for 6 months of training at Ft's Hood and Polk. On Tim's 22nd birthday, March 4, 2004, Foxtrot left for Iraq where they were stationed at Camp Victory. Their tour took them directly into combat including 4 months on "the most dangerous road in the world", the highway from the airport to the green zone in Baghdad. Tim was a top gunner in a humvee. Tim as well as many other soldiers in F202 earned their Purple Hearts on that stretch of road known as Route Irish. We are STILL waiting for Tim's Purple Heart from various military paperwork shuffles.

When CBS News broke the story about Veterans suicides, the VA took the approach of criticizing the way that the numbers were created instead of embracing it and using it to help increase mental health care within their system. Regardless of how perfectly accurate the numbers are, they obviously show a trend that desperately needs attention. CBS did what NO government agency would do; they tabulated the veteran suicide numbers to shed light on this hidden epidemic and make the American people aware of this situation. The VA should have taken those numbers to Capitol Hill asking for more people, funding, and anything else they need to combat this epidemic. They should embrace this study as it reveals the scope of a huge problem, rather than complaining about its accuracy. If all that is going to be done with the study is argue about how the numbers were compiled, then an average of 120 soldiers will die every week by their own hand until the VA recognizes this fact, and does something about it.

The VA mental health system is broken in function, and understaffed in operation. There are many cases of soldiers coming to the VA for help and being turned away or misdiagnosed for PTSD and then losing their battle with their demons. Those soldiers, as well as our son Timothy, can never be brought back. No one can change that fact. But you can change the system so this trend can be slowed down dramatically or even stopped.

Our son was just one of thousands of veterans that this country has lost to suicide. I see every day the pain and grief that our family and extended family goes through in trying to deal with this loss. Every one of those at risk veterans also has a family that will suffer if that soldier finds the only way to take the battlefield pain away is by taking his or her own life. Their ravished and broken spirits are then passed on to their

families as they try to justify what has happened. I now suffer from the same mental illnesses that claimed my son's life, PTSD, from the images and sounds of finding him and hearing his life fade away, and depression from a loss that I would not wish on anyone.

If the veteran suicide rate is not classified as an epidemic that needs immediate and drastic attention, then the American fighting soldier needs someone in Washington who thinks it is. I challenge you to do for the American soldier, what that soldier did for each of you and for his country. Take care of them and help preserve their American dream as they did yours. To quote President Calvin Coolidge, "The nation which forgets its defenders will be itself forgotten."

I challenge you to make the VA an organization to be proud of instead of the last place that a veteran wants to go. It is the obligation of each and every one of you and all Americans, to channel the energies, resources, and the intelligence and wisdom of this nation's Best and Brightest to create the most effective, efficient and meaningful healthcare system for our men and women who have served. You must find a way to remove the stigma that goes with a soldier admitting that he or she has a mental problem. We have the technology to create the most highly advanced military system, but when these Veterans come home, they find an understaffed, underfunded, and under-equipped VA mental health system that has so many challenges to get through it, that many just give up trying. The result is the current suicide epidemic among our nation's defenders, one of which was Specialist Timothy Noble Bowman, our 23 year old son, soldier, and hero.

Our veterans should and must not be left behind in the ravished, horrific battlefields of their broken spirits and minds. Our veterans deserve better!! Mr. Chairman, this concludes my testimony. Thank you.

TESTIMONY OF ILONA MEAGHER

Chairman Filner, Ranking Member Buyer, and other distinguished members of the Committee, I thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

To open, I'd like to briefly share my thoughts on why it is that I believe I'm here. I am not only someone who's spent the past two years researching and writing about post-traumatic stress in our returning troops, I'm also a veteran's daughter. My father was born in Hungary, served two years in antitank artillery as a Hungarian Army conscript, fought against the Soviet Union on the streets of Budapest during the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, and later fled to America where, in 1958, he again became a soldier, this time wearing a United States Army uniform, and serving as a combat engineer stationed in Germany.

My father's unique experience of having served on both sides—East and West—in such differing armies during the Cold War, gave him a unique perspective on military life.

And so, growing up, my sisters and I often heard my father say, "You can always tell how a government feels about its people by looking at how it treats its soldiers."

Looking at our returning soldiers and their widely-reported struggles with the military and VA health care systems they rely on, of being stigmatized from seeking care or of being placed on lengthy VA waiting lists when they need immediate help—some even committing suicide before their appointment dates arrive—have raised this citizen's alarm bells.

We have had a "see no evil, hear no evil" approach to examining post-deployment psychological reintegration issues such as suicide. After all we have learned from the