

As a friend and mentor to me and others, Willard Munger will be missed, but he will never be forgotten. His accomplishments are far too great. His life reminds all of us of the simple truth that anything is possible when one truly stands up for one's beliefs. Thank you, Mr. Environment, for making the world a better place for generations to come.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. MARK UDALL

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 22, 1999

Mr. UDALL of Colorado. Mr. Speaker, during rollcall 323, I was engaged in a meeting with a colleague regarding legislation affecting Colorado, and did not hear the bells in time to be recorded. Had I been able to respond in time, I would have voted "aye."

IRELAND'S INTERESTS WELL REPRESENTED IN THE UNITED STATES

HON. JAMES T. WALSH

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 22, 1999

Mr. WALSH. Mr. Speaker, peace may well come soon to Northern Ireland. As intense as the remaining obstacles may be, the closeness of an agreement which leads to an elected Assembly makes us hopeful. But as we fervently pray and work for peace with our counterparts in Belfast, London and Dublin, we must also attend to other American-Ireland business which makes our bonds so strong.

During this time, over the last four years to be exact, those of us in the United States who have been staunch supporters of the peace talks and closer ties between Ireland and the United States recognize well the name of Patrick Hennessy. Mr. Hennessy has served his country as Counsellor at the Irish Embassy in Washington and now has been reassigned, according to the practice of the Irish Foreign Service Department, to Dublin.

Pat Hennessy has done an exemplary job. He is an outstanding and reliable resource. As Chairman of the Friends of Ireland and as Co-chair with Representative BEN GILMAN of New York of the U.S.-Irish Interparliamentary Group, I have come to value Pat's many abilities.

Indeed, the Irish Government's official presence in our country is well represented by the high-caliber professionalism of Pat Hennessy.

His good humor, his intelligence and his love of Ireland—as well as his evident respect for our shared values and aspirations—make him the "diplomat's diplomat."

I will miss Pat's insight and assistance. I am comforted that, being a young man, he will remain in public service and I look forward to a time when we find ourselves working together again.

EXTENSIONS OF REMARKS

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. SHERWOOD L. BOEHLERT

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 22, 1999

Mr. BOEHLERT. Mr. Speaker, due to the wedding of my daughter Leslie, I was not here on Friday, June 25 and subsequently missed rollcall vote No. 256. Had I been present, I would have voted "aye."

On Monday, July 12, a delayed flight from Syracuse to Washington forced me to miss rollcall vote 277, 278 and 279. Had I been present I would have voted "aye" to each of those votes.

TRIBUTE TO IRENE GERSTLE

HON. HEATHER WILSON

OF NEW MEXICO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 22, 1999

Mrs. WILSON. Mr. Speaker, I wish to bring to your attention the outstanding work of Ms. Irene Gerstle, a teacher at Albuquerque High School in my home of Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Recently, Ms. Gerstle received a 1999 Toyota Investment in Mathematics Excellence grant award. Many children in our community and throughout America are falling behind in mathematics skills. Ms. Gerstle sees this problem and looks for solutions. She helps her students to excel in math by teaching them in creative ways. I applaud her commitment to improve mathematics education through the development and implementation of innovative classroom projects. Her hard work and creativity supports students at Albuquerque High gain valuable skills they will need and use in the twenty-first century.

Irene Gerstle is among the many dedicated teachers we have throughout the First Congressional District of New Mexico and the United States. Please join me in thanking Ms. Gerstle for her contributions to our students and our future.

INTRODUCTION OF H.R. 2586, THE VETERANS BURIAL PLOT ALLOWANCE IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 1999

HON. CORRINE BROWN

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 22, 1999

Ms. BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, today I am introducing H.R. 2586, the Veterans Burial Plot Allowance Improvement Act of 1999. My bill would increase the amount of the veterans' plot allowance burial benefit from \$150 to \$300—the first increase of the plot allowance since that benefit was initially authorized over 25 years ago. The proposed increase to \$300 more accurately reflects the current cost of interment and better provides for the original intention of the benefit.

Additionally, my bill would correct an inequity now imposed on peacetime veterans

while providing a further incentive to states and their political subdivisions to expand needed burial space for veterans. Under my bill, all veterans who are eligible for burial in a national cemetery would be eligible for a plot allowance payable to a state or a political subdivision of a state when the veteran is buried (without charge for the cost of a plot or interment) in a cemetery or a section of a cemetery owned by the state or political subdivision and that area is used solely for the interment of persons eligible for burial in a national cemetery.

I am proud of America's long-held, solemn commitment to provide a final resting-place of honor for those who have defended her in uniform. I am disappointed, however, that today nearly one-third of United States veterans do not have the option of being buried in a national or state veterans cemetery located within 75 miles of their home—a distance the Department of Veterans Affairs says makes a veterans cemetery "reasonably available". And, I am chagrined that ninety percent of the veterans who are eligible to be buried in a national or state veterans cemetery decline to be buried there. A great many simply feel that those cemeteries are too far away to be a reasonable option for their families.

Unless Congress takes corrective action soon, the problem of scarce burial space for veterans will become more severe over the next decade. VA projects a 42 percent increase in veteran burials from 1995 to 2010, with the annual veteran death rate reaching 620,000 by the year 2008. I was extremely disappointed that—although VA needs five-to-seven years to plan and build a national cemetery—its proposed fiscal year 2000 budget failed to request any funding for even the planning of a single new national cemetery.

On June 29th, the House passed H.R. 2280 that would require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish four new national cemeteries and contract for an independent assessment of the number of additional national cemeteries that will be required for the interment of qualified individuals who die after 2005.

Mr. Speaker, as helpful as H.R. 2280 promises to be in fulfilling America's commitment to her veterans, national cemeteries were never intended to be the complete solution. The number of veterans under-served by reasonably available veterans cemeteries is—and will continue to be—far too great and widely distributed to be satisfied entirely by national cemeteries administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs. The answer, Mr. Speaker, is to expand the national cemetery supplemental system comprised of veterans cemeteries operated by states and their political subdivisions.

In 1978, Congress established the State Cemetery Grants Program for VA to assist states in providing gravesites for veterans in areas where the national cemetery system could not satisfy their burial needs. Grants are used by states to establish, expand, or improve veterans cemeteries they own and operate. Legislation enacted last November authorized VA to provide up to 100 percent of the development cost for an approved project. For new cemeteries, VA now also can provide the operating equipment. States must furnish the