

October 14, 1999

"Company of the Year" by Forbes magazine. I applaud the employees of Pfizer in Groton and around the world on the company's 150th anniversary for the many contributions they have made to improving the health and well-being of millions in this country and across the globe.

RECOGNITION OF THOMAS G.
LABONTE

HON. ROBERT A. WEYGAND

OF RHODE ISLAND

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, October 14, 1999

Mr. WEYGAND. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor the 1999 National Distinguished Principal from the State of Rhode Island, Thomas Labonte. Thom is in Washington this week to join his peers and accept this prestigious honor. I am particularly pleased to honor Thom today, as I have had the opportunity to know him and his family since we grew up in the same city and our paths have crossed numerous times throughout our lives. He worked at the local pharmacy my family frequented, his brother went to high school with me, he was my son's principal in East Providence and his son started as an intern in my State house office and now serves on my staff in Washington.

Thom began as a classroom teacher in East Providence in 1970 and was appointed principal of Kent Heights Elementary School in 1986. During his time at Kent Heights, he oversaw the expansion of this neighborhood school to a school which educates over 320 students today. My son was one of Thom's students before Thom left Kent Heights to become the principal at the Watters and Meadowscrest Elementary Schools and begin his service in Pawtucket in 1990.

When he first arrived at Elizabeth Baldwin Elementary School in Pawtucket, he served as the sole administrator in a school with nearly 800 students, 90 percent of whom were eligible for free or reduced lunch. Considering that working with high risk students is one of his passions, it is no surprise that Thom thrived in this setting. During his time in Pawtucket, he also developed and began the first teacher mentoring program, which provides new teachers with a seasoned and experienced mentor as they begin their careers. This mentoring program has been lauded statewide as a model.

When he arrived in South Kingstown, he continued his refreshing and creative educational leadership. While principal of Wakefield Elementary School, he was appointed to serve concurrently as the director of the Hazard School where he oversaw the rehabilitation and redevelopment of the town's kindergarten center. He continues to provide a stable and thriving learning environment to the students, teachers, parents in the Wakefield School community.

As Thom has said, "I model the behaviors I want others to emulate, because I truly respect each child, parent, and teacher, and want the school to have a caring atmosphere which supports others." I have visited Wakefield Elementary School and can attest that his simple philosophy has created a learning environment where all kids can learn.

EXTENSIONS OF REMARKS

His son once remarked to me that although many children have been blessed with Thom's talents during their time in elementary school, he has been most fortunate to be blessed with his father's talents for his entire life. On behalf of the many children who have been fortunate to have Mr. Labonte as their principal, I offer my congratulations to him and his wife Jane, to whom Thom gives much deserved credit.

TAIWAN'S NATIONAL DAY

HON. RUBEN HINOJOSA

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, October 14, 1999

Mr. HINOJOSA. Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate President Lee Teng-hui and the 21 million Chinese in Taiwan on the occasion of their National Day. At the same time, I wish to convey to President Lee and his people my deep concern about the recent quake that hit their nation. I know rebuilding after the quake is a long painful process, but the good news is that I am confident of President Lee's leadership and his people's industry and perseverance. Taiwan will soon be on its feet again. Good luck, Taiwan.

COMMENDING THE YOUTH ENTERPRISE IN AGRICULTURE (YEA) PROGRAM

HON. MARION BERRY

OF ARKANSAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, October 14, 1999

Mr. BERRY. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to talk about the Youth Enterprise in Agriculture (YEA) program, that has worked so hard to teach young people in Arkansas about the importance of agriculture. Farming has been in my family for generations and I believe that it is one of the most noble professions on earth. I am proud that the YEA program works to teach young people about farming and encourages them to get involved in agricultural careers.

The YEA program was established at the Arkansas Land and Farm Development Corporation in 1991. It was designed as an agricultural career and leadership development program for high school youth to help preserve the small family farm by enhancing youth interest toward farming as a business enterprise and agriculture-related careers. Through work experience, classroom education, leadership development training and career goal-setting, participants are encouraged to continue their education and pursue agriculture-related careers.

YEA provides students, ages 16-19 from Arkansas, Illinois and Mississippi with career and leadership development activities. In the 2-year active training phase, students are offered paid internships with Arkansas family farmers who provide training, work experiences and exposure to agriculture as a lifestyle and business. The YEA program has played an important role in boosting the number of students that are exploring careers in agriculture-related fields.

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Through the program, many young people have become strong advocates for agriculture and its diversity and have a broad understanding and mind-set for becoming successful agri-business people and entrepreneurs. These youth represent the next generation of rural leaders and agriculture professionals.

Though only in its ninth year of operation, YEA has been a remarkable success, and has played an important part in the agricultural arena and rural community development and I wish this program more continued success in the future.

IN RECOGNITION OF THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF KENNETH GUNSAUS

HON. SAM GEJDENSON

OF CONNECTICUT

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, October 14, 1999

Mr. GEJDENSON. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Kenneth Gunsalus upon his 75 years of service with the Boy Scouts of America. Mr. Gunsalus is a distinguished resident of Putnam, Connecticut, and an extraordinary example for us all.

Mr. Gunsalus has been a Boy Scout since first joining Troop 1 in Putnam, Connecticut in 1925. He attained the rank of Eagle Scout in 1933. During his 40 years as a Scoutmaster, Mr. Gunsalus mentored over 1800 scouts. Even after his "retirement" as a Scoutmaster, Mr. Gunsalus has continued to advise young scouts as a Scout committeeman. Thanks to Mr. Gunsalus, hundreds of young men have had the opportunity to benefit from his wisdom and guidance for over seven decades.

Mr. Gunsalus is more than just a dedicated volunteer. He is also a veteran with 4½ years in the Pacific theater in World War II. In his professional life, he worked for Connecticut Light and Power for 43 years.

Mr. Speaker, I join residents from Putnam in congratulating Mr. Kenneth Gunsalus on his decades of service to his community and country. His dedication is a tribute to his family, his society, and serves as a shining example to volunteers across America.

TAIWAN'S NATIONAL DAY

HON. SILVESTRE REYES

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, October 14, 1999

Mr. REYES. Mr. Speaker, in celebration of Taiwan's National Day, I wish to express support for President Lee Teng-hui, Vice President Lien Chan and Premier Vincent Siew as they take the difficult steps to rebuild their nation in the aftermath of last month's devastating earthquake. As someone who has visited the Republic of China on several occasions since becoming a member of the United States Congress, I have gained a tremendous appreciation for Taiwan and its 21 million citizens.

Taiwan has developed into a world manufacturing and commercial center. Furthermore, their geographic presence in the Pacific is vital

to our national security interests. As a consequence, the bonds between our nations are extensive and deep. Hence our nation listened with great concern and sadness as we heard of the devastating earthquake on September 21st. The cost of this natural disaster is unimaginable, with millions of dollars in damage and over two thousand fatalities.

As this tragedy unfolded, our country immediately responded to assist in Taiwan's recovery. The United States government has mobilized search and rescue teams and emergency personnel to assist Taiwan in recovering and rehabilitation efforts. With this assistance, along with additional rescue teams from around the world, some of the pain of this crisis has been alleviated.

Certainly the road to recovery will neither be quick nor easy, however, I am confident that the resilience and strength of the Taiwanese people will allow them to overcome the challenges of reconstruction.

During Taiwan's National Day, I wish to offer my condolences to the Taiwanese government and all Taiwanese citizens. The United States stands ready to assist them during this difficult time.

COMMEMORATING NATIONAL
BIBLE WEEK, NOVEMBER 21-28, 1999

HON. LAMAR S. SMITH

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, October 14, 1999

Mr. SMITH of Texas. Mr. Speaker, it is my honor to serve as a Congressional Co-Chairman for this year's celebration of National Bible Week. During this week of Thanksgiving and prayer, it is fitting that we take time to recognize the importance and significance of the Holy Bible and encourage all walks of life to embrace the Bible in their daily lives. I also want to thank Mr. William E. Simon for serving as National Chairperson for the 1999 National Bible Week.

I commend the endeavors of the National Bible Association for setting aside this week to celebrate our common faith and to encourage others to read the Bible. It is in the Bible that we realize the wisdom of the Lord, and the true meaning of charity, love, and forgiveness. We must do more, through government and private action, to strengthen our families, care for our aging parents, and show hospitality to our neighbors. I am confident that in the Bible we, as a people and a world community, can find the answers to solving many of the problems we face in today's society.

I encourage all people, young and old, man and woman, rich and poor, sick and healthy to open up your lives to the teachings of the Holy Bible.

EXTENSIONS OF REMARKS

RESTORE BBA-97 MEDICARE FUNDING CUTS TO HOME HEALTH, HOSPITALS AND NURSING HOMES

HON. NICK J. RAHALL II

OF WEST VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, October 14, 1999

Mr. RAHALL. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak on the urgent matter of making restoration of Medicare funding to our home health agencies, hospitals and nursing homes, especially those that serve rural areas.

We are here to again bring to the attention of the House, and the American people, the absolute urgent need to take action before the end of this session of Congress—to restore Medicare funding and make other administrative adjustments to cutbacks imposed under the BBA of 1997.

The BBA-97, as it is called, proposed to cut \$115 billion from Medicare by either terminating or massively reducing Medicare reimbursement to providers of health and medical care for senior citizens and the disabled.

The effect has been that with only one-third of the mandated Medicare cuts having been implemented so far, the total cut is not \$115 billion—it already totals more than \$206 billion.

Imagine what will occur if the other two-thirds of proposed Medicare cuts are implemented in the coming year.

In West Virginia, the hardest hit segment of our health care delivery system has been among home health agencies. We have seen the closure of 18 of our home health agencies, and drastic reductions in staff and services at those still operating.

Our hospitals—especially the rural hospitals—are suffering the same kind of financial crush—with many of them having already drastically reduced staff, and dozens that have had to curtail services for outpatient care.

I just received word yesterday that the Appalachian Regional Hospital at Man, West Virginia, may be forced to close by the end of October—due in part to the loss of Medicare reimbursement. Another local hospital nearby which is in financial difficulty also, may eventually close. These are the only two hospitals serving a large rural county in my district. It is obvious that the closure of one hospital is bad enough—closure of two would create critical access problems for my constituents in need of emergency room care, inpatient care, and outpatient clinic services.

The same kind of burden has been placed upon nursing homes where the sickest, poorest and most vulnerable Medicare beneficiaries are cared for—and due to infirmities caused by age and disease—from heart problems to diabetes to stroke—they are the most costly of patients.

We have reached this impasse tonight because, in my view, Congress balanced our Nation's budget on the backs of its elderly, disabled, homebound citizens whose only help comes from Medicare.

It is my understanding—and if true I applaud him—that our colleague and friend, Representative BILL THOMAS, Chair of the Ways and Means Health Subcommittee, will have introduced today—a plan to restore some of the BBA cuts to Medicare.

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The first words that occurred to me when I heard about the Thomas plan was: It's about time.

But I genuinely applaud his effort because it is important to have our Health Subcommittee Chairman on record as having acknowledged the adverse impact of the Medicare cuts imposed on providers of this country's health care for our most needy, most vulnerable senior citizens.

It wasn't that long ago that we were constantly admonished not to pay any attention to our home health agencies about the Medicare cuts—even as they closed over 2,000 of them nationwide—18 of them in my State.

We were told that the cuts were not too deep, and that the impact was not so adverse as to require congressional action to restore them.

And so again I greet Chairman THOMAS' plan for restoring some of the BBA-97 Medicare cuts with genuine hope and lingering uncertainty, because we have not seen the details.

I am also gratified to hear—after preaching on the subject for two long years—that the Administration is looking into ways that Medicare reimbursement cuts can be restored through administrative action.

My colleagues here on the floor tonight will recall with me that we suggested this administrative action in a half-dozen letters to the Administration beginning over two years ago. But we were told that the BBA-97 was so tightly written that only legislative relief could help restore the Medicare cuts. We were told that the Administration had no "wiggle room" to act on its own.

Once the details of the Thomas plan are available to us for our study—we will know for sure whether he has sent the Fire Brigade to our rescue, or if we are being handed a pitcher of spit to try and extinguish the fires of neglect brought to our health care delivery system through the excessive Medicare cuts contained in the BBA of 1997.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I say only what many of us have been saying all along—that we must work together to get this burgeoning loss of health services under control.

Chairman THOMAS has taken a first step in leading Congress to act before the end of this year.

This is an important day—and I have every hope and expectation that Congress will move quickly and effectively to address the needs of our home health agencies, our hospitals, our nursing homes—providers who deserve our thanks and our support for this restoration of Medicare cuts imposed by BBA-97.

TRIBUTE TO DR. HECTOR O.
NEVAREZ

HON. SOLOMON P. ORTIZ

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, October 14, 1999

Mr. ORTIZ. Mr. Speaker, I rise to commend Mr. Hector Nevarez who recently retired from the Federal Government after 30 years of distinguished service. I would like to commend him for his patriotism in serving our nation.