

been burned and schools and prayer halls have been destroyed. Missionary Graham Staines and his two sons, ages 8 and 10, were burned to death while they slept in their van by a mob of Hindus who surrounded the jeep and chanted "Victory to Lord Ram."

"We strongly condemn this march and the burning in effigy of the Pope," said Dr. Gurmit Singh Aulakh, President of the Council of Khalistan, the organization leading the Sikh Nation's struggle for independence from India. "The ordeal that the Christians are enduring is reminiscent of what the Sikhs, Muslims, and other religious minorities in India go through," he said. "There is no religious freedom in India," he said. "The VHP openly proclaimed that anybody living in India should be a Hindu or subservient to the Hindus."

March organizer Velingkar said, "Christians are brothers of the same blood." Dr. Aulakh dismissed that statement. "The Hindu fundamentalists say the same things about Sikhs being brothers of Hindus," he said. "If that is the case, then why do they continue to murder Sikhs, Christians, Muslims, and others in large numbers?"

India has murdered over 250,000 Sikhs since 1984, over 200,000 Christians in Nagaland since 1988, more than 65,000 Muslims in Kashmir since 1988, and tens of thousands of Assamese, Manipuris, Tamils, Dalits, and others. It continues to hold tens of thousands of members of these groups as political prisoners without charge or trial, according to a report by Amnesty International. Thousands have been illegally detained for as long as 15 years.

"Clearly there is no place for religious minorities in democratic, secular India," said Dr. Aulakh. "This only makes the case for freedom for all the minority nations of South Asia stronger," he said. "I call on President Clinton and the Pope to bring up the issues of religious freedom and self-determination on their visits to India," he said.

HONORING BARBARA WHEELER  
FOR HER SERVICE TO PUBLIC  
EDUCATION AND PUBLIC  
SCHOOLS IN DOWNERS GROVE,  
ILLINOIS

### HON. JUDY BIGGERT

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, November 2, 1999*

Mrs. BIGGERT. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Barbara Wheeler for her invaluable contributions to the children of DuPage County and the State of Illinois over the past 25 years.

Since 1974, Ms. Wheeler has been a dedicated member of the Community High School District Board of Education, DuPage County. She served in leadership roles as president of the school board for 15 years and vice president for 5 years. Throughout her career, she has made it a priority to ensure that the school board sets attainable goals to raise student achievement and to build a consensus among business, educators, and the community at large.

Ms. Wheeler is an active board member of the National School Boards Association (NSBA), serving as chair of the NSBA Central Region, a member of the Policies and Resolu-

tions Committee, Secretary-Treasurer and President Elect. She served as President of the NSBA in 1998, when she championed a nationwide campaign to make our schools safer.

Besides her extensive work in the educational field, Ms. Wheeler is an energetic and committed community leader. She is a volunteer for the Illinois Department on Aging, George Williams College, the Downers Grove Chamber of Commerce, and the Downers Grove YMCA.

An Illinois native, Ms. Wheeler attended St. Dominic College, Northern Illinois University and the DePaul University College of Law. She is an active member of the Chicago and Illinois State Bar Associations and the American Bar Association. She has served as Assistant State's Attorney, Cook County, Illinois, and is in private law practice with the firm Wheeler, Wheeler and Wheeler in Westmont, Illinois.

I have had the privilege to know Barbara Wheeler for many years, and greatly respect her for the unwavering commitment she has made to excellence in education. While I can confidently say that the citizens of DuPage County wish her much success in her future endeavors, we must recognize that her wisdom and years of experience will be sorely missed by the school board, as well as by parents and students. DuPage County, the State of Illinois, and our nation are better places because Ms. Barbara Wheeler dedicated a portion of her life to the education of our children.

### CONFERENCE REPORT ON H.R. 3064, DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA APPRO- PRIATIONS ACT, 2000

SPEECH OF

### HON. LANE EVANS

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, October 28, 1999*

Mr. EVANS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in opposition to the DC/Labor-HHS Appropriations conference report. There are many reasons to oppose this measure. Among the worst of the provisions contained in this conference report is the irresponsible across-the-board 1-percent cut in discretionary spending fashioned by the House Republican leadership.

It is the worst kind of cynicism to claim that a 1-percent across-the-board cut will correct waste and fraud in government programs. I'm strongly opposed to cutting the funding for veterans' medical care just approved by Congress. The majority whip has issued a press release that claims the cut in Veterans' medical care funding he is recommending would not affect health care for America's veterans. Veterans know better. You can't cut health care funding without cutting health care.

Congressman DELAY sent a press release to the leadership of major veterans service organizations defending the 1.4-percent cut in appropriations he originally supported, which affected veterans, among other discretionary programs. Let me state that three years of straight-line funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has left the agency struggling to meet the increasing costs of medical

care for the growing number of enrolled veterans it treats.

Now the Republican leadership claims a \$190 million cut in veterans' medical care funding would do no harm. They maintain these funds can be squeezed out of the budget and be found in "mismanagement and waste." What the Republican leadership fails to acknowledge is the tremendous changes VA has already made to be more efficient. In the last few years, VA has closed thousands of beds, eliminated thousands of staff positions, and strengthened many of their auditing systems.

House Democrats have strongly supported proposals all year that would have added sums ranging from \$2 to \$3 billion to the President's initial proposal for veterans' medical care. Indeed we have all worked hard to improve funding for veterans. Veterans service organizations have called on Congress to appropriate up to \$3 billion more than the administration's original budget proposal for veterans' health care. Now many veterans services organizations have vehemently denounced the Republican leadership's proposed across-the-board cut. I quote from a letter signed by the executive directors of AMVETS, Disabled American Veterans, Paralyzed Veterans of America, and the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. regarding these cuts: "It seems disingenuous at best for Congress to recognize a problem in funding for veterans health care, provide the dollars with one hand to help solve that problem, and then take dollars away with the other. No one is fooled by this budget sleight-of-hand."

Mr. Speaker, no one is going to be fooled by this belated and disingenuous concern about government inefficiency. I urge my colleagues to vote "no" on this abrogation of responsibility. Vote "no" on this conference report.

It is already evident VA will struggle, even to deal with the unprecedented increase Congress has enacted and the President has signed into law. How will this affect the VA health care system? In many parts of the country, veterans must wait up to six months just to see a primary care doctor. VA has also unraveled mental health and long-term care programs which were once hallmarks of the VA system. There are now even complaints that VA's highly-regarded special emphasis programs for which there is supposedly congressional protection—such as spinal cord injury and blind rehabilitation—are under attack.

VA has done much to streamline its services in recent years. Over five years, VA has reduced its workforce by almost 10 percent, closed hundreds of beds throughout the system, reduced its inpatient census by almost 30 percent and eliminated 37 percent of its inpatient treatments per year. It has integrated or consolidated 50 medical centers. In testimony before the Veterans' Affairs Committee this April, four Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) directors, commenting on the proposed future efficiency-derived savings, concurred that "all the low-hanging fruit has been picked." Savings available to the system in the future, the directors said, will be harder fought and more disruptive.

The Republican leadership has contended that VA could absorb further cuts "without