The 1998–99 season for the Bay View High School debate team was historic. The varsity team won an invitational tournament held at Sheboygan South High School for the first time since 1995. The team also successfully defended its 1997 City Championship First Place Trophy on December 11, 1998. After qualifying at the district debates for participating in the WHSFA State Tournament earlier in January, the Bay View team was matched against others from across the state in what many consider the premier debate tournament of the year.

The team has been coached by Mr. Ray Lane since the 1995–96 season. Mr. Daemien Morscher, a 1993 BVHS graduate, National Merit Scholar, and former member of the debate team, is serving as assistant coach. Other members of the team include Daniel Brandt, Kenneth Dunbeck, Steven Finch, Matt Hickling, Leonard Wilson, Robert Woodliff, and Winston Woods. Ben Silver also participated in some tournaments.

Mr. Speaker, it is an honor to salute the talent and commitment of the Bay View High School debate team on its outstanding season, which I bring before you in commendation.

SOCIAL SECURITY

HON. BERNARD SANDERS

OF VERMONT

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 24, 1999

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. Speaker, I would like to call your attention to an article printed in the March edition of the Labor Party Press.

[From the Labor Party Press, Mar. 1999]

DON'T BLOW AWAY SOCIAL SECURITY

SOCIAL SECURITY BASICS

Under Social Security, workers contribute a certain amount of their pay into the system through their work life. They then earn entitlement to family benefits when they retire, become disabled, or die.

Social Security is funded through payroll taxes (FICA, or Federal Insurance Contribution Act) on both the employee and employer. Currently each pays 6.2 percent on all wages and salaries up to a maximum of $68,400 in income. The payroll taxes we pay today finance the benefits for today's retirees. From the money we contribute, the government writes Social Security checks and mails them to beneficiaries.

Any extra money collected through payroll taxes goes into a Social Security Trust Fund. Until the 1990s, the Social Security Trust Fund was relatively small. However, it has ballooned in size in the past decade—and in fact has helped create the much celebrated ''balanced budget.''

Some 44 million Americans receive benefits from Social Security. Thirty million of these are the elderly and their dependents, 6 million are the disabled and their dependents, and 7 million are the survivors of deceased workers.

About 92 percent of people over 65 receive Social Security benefits. Since 1935, when the labor movement helped force passage of Social Security, the program has dramatically reduced poverty among the elderly and disabled. Unfortunately, though, some people who really need it—like farmworkers—still aren't entitled to Social Security.

WHAT'S GOOD ABOUT SOCIAL SECURITY

Social Security has dramatically cut poverty among the elderly and disabled. While about 12 percent of seniors currently live in poverty, without Social Security, 42 percent would be poor. About two-thirds of the elderly rely on Social Security to provide over half their retirement income. Social Security is especially essential since the U.S. does not require employers to provide pensions.

Social Security is progressive. Those who have been paid high salaries throughout their lives will get a much smaller percentage of their salary replaced by Social Security than those who have worked all their lives in low-wage jobs. An average wage-earner retiring in 1997 will get back about 44 percent of his or her earnings from Social Security. A high wage-earner gets back about 25 percent. And a low wage-earner gets about 80 percent.

Social Security benefits just about everyone. About 92 percent of people over 65 get Social Security. It's a program that working-class, middle-class, and poor people can all get behind.

Social Security is efficient. Because it is run entirely by the federal government, puts all the money into one pool and invests it in one place. Social Security only spends about one percent of benefits on administration.

WHAT OTHER COUNTRIES DO BETTER

All seven major industrialized countries (Japan, Canada, United Kingdom, U.S., Germany, France, and Italy) have systems that are, like ours, pay-as-you-go. Today's workers support today's retirees.

Italy, Germany, and France spend 12–14 percent of their gross domestic product to support retirees. The U.S. spends 6.9 percent. Japan, Canada, and the UK pay slightly less than us.

In the U.S., the average-earning worker can expect to get 42–44 percent of his or her income replaced on retirement. In Germany, France, and Italy the rate is 50 percent.

In the U.S., Germany, and Japan, retirement age is now 65. It's lower in France, Italy, and Canada. In the U.K., it's 65 for men and 60 for women. (The U.S. retirement age is slated to go up to 67 for people born after 1960.)

All the industrialized countries have programs to cover the healthcare costs of retirees, but American retirees have to pay more out of their pockets than seniors in the other six countries. Today, U.S. seniors pay a third of their medical costs themselves.

WHAT WE SHOULD DO ABOUT SOCIAL SECURITY

The Social Security system is quite sound, and with only minor modifications, it should stay that way. We don't have to institute privatization, raise the retirement age, cut benefits, reformulate the cost-of-living index, or increase the payroll tax on workers to ''save'' Social Security.

One modest and relatively painless change to Social Security would wipe out a big chunk of the shortfall that some are projecting: Eliminate the payroll-tax earning cap. Currently, the Social Security payroll tax is not paid on wages in excess of $68,400. Since the ranks of the very rich, have been growing, this has resulted in something of a drain on Social Security. In the early 1980s, 90 percent of all wages fell under the threshold. Now it's 87 percent, and it's expected to drop to 85 percent. Why not make it 100 percent?

Says economist Dean Baker: ''If you eliminate the cap altogether, it would wipe out about three-quarters of the projected Social Security shortfall. The amount that will be paid out in Social Security benefits won't be that much more than before, because it's a progressive pay-out structure. Someone who earned a million or two in their lifetime might only get an annual Social Security payment of $50,000, say.''

Another proposal the Labor Party has suggested: raise the payroll tax on employers—but not workers. Workers have seen a net drain on their incomes for the past couple of decades, and this would be one way to begin to tip the balance in the other direction.

INTRODUCTION OF LEGISLATION TO INCREASE PENALTIES FOR FALSE REPORTING AND INACCURATE ROYALTY PAYMENTS ON FEDERAL OIL AND GAS LEASES

HON. GEORGE MILLER

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 24, 1999

Mr. GEORGE MILLER of California. Mr. Speaker, American taxpayers are being systematically cheated out of hundreds of millions of dollars by oil companies that do not pay the correct amount of royalties on the oil and gas they produce from public lands.

We can see evidence of this fraudulent behavior in several Congressional investigations, the Department of Justice litigation and a Clinton Administration Interagency Task Force report. Additionally, the Justice Department intervened in 8 of 19 qui tam cases filed by private individuals alleging hundreds of millions of dollars underpaid to the federal government. One company (Mobil) has settled with the federal government for $45 million. In addition, States (including Alaska, California, Alabama, Louisiana and Texas) have brought similar lawsuits that have been settled for almost $3 billion. The Interior Department is collecting more than $275 million on underpayments.

To correct the underlying problem, the Department of the Interior has tried—unsuccessfully—for the past three years to revise its rules to make it more difficult for oil producers to avoid paying accurate royalties. The proposed regulations would clarify long standing legal requirements requiring the industry's responsibility to pay the cost of marketing the public's oil and gas. But some oil producers have been systematically deducting those costs from the amounts they owe taxpayers. Under the new rules, these producers would be required to pay the correct amount—based on real-market sales—to the American people who own the oil and gas.

Instead of supporting this necessary corrective action, however, Congress has enacted legislative riders preventing the implementation of the new rules at a cost of more than $60 million a year, most of which would go to fund public education. The Senate is poised to extend this travesty on the Emergency Supplemental Appropriations bill, and the House is expected to go along in Conference Committee. Taxpayers should be distressed that Congress would rather side with industry rather than assure fair market value on the public's natural resources.

This larceny has gone on too long. It is time for the Congress to consider legislation that will assure prompt and accurate payment of royalties instead of providing cover to that portion of the industry that wants to shortchange taxpayers on their resources we all own.

That is why I am introducing legislation today that will impose a penalty of treble damages on any producer who chronically undervalues royalty payments. If industry will not pay the correct amount voluntarily and fights efforts to issue legitimate rules to safeguard the public, then industry must know that abusers, when caught, will be punished.

For those in the industry who abide by the rules and pay the correct amount, this legislation has no effect. But on those who deceive and delay, this legislation will mean serious punishment.

This bill will require under payors to pay three times the amount they should have paid plus a $25,000 civil penalty for each violation. In addition, lessees found guilty of chronic repeated failure to pay correctly would be subject to an additional civil penalty three times the amount owed for a single violation. Finally, the bill would require the federal government to share such sums collected under the penalty provisions with the State in which the violation occurred, as happens with royalty payments overall.

This bill will not affect responsible companies in the oil and gas sector. Nevertheless, we must draw a bright line for companies that deliberately and repeatedly withhold revenues to the taxpaying public. Unfortunately, there is a history of underpayments in this field that requires a strong legislative response. I would hope the Congress ends its practice of ignoring these underpayments and instead takes actions on this legislation to assure that taxpayers receive the royalties they are due.

TRIBUTE TO BRIDGET MEYER

HON. ANNA G. ESHOO

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 24, 1999

Ms. ESHOO. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor Bridget Meyer, an extraordinary high school student who is being honored as a Young Woman of Excellence by the San Mateo County Women's Hall of Fame.

Bridget Meyer has been described by her teacher as someone who always gives one hundred percent and puts the feelings and concerns of others first. Bridget is a special young woman who, through difficulties with her family and finances, has worked every day after school to pay her rent. This alone is remarkable. However, when one considers that she's been doing this while maintaining a 4.0 grade point average and serving as Senior Class Vice President, the achievements of her young life are all the more amazing.

Bridget is a young woman who leads by example. Whether she is volunteering at Habitat for Humanity, Safe Rides or AIDS Awareness, Bridget is constantly giving of herself to make our community better.

Mr. Speaker, Bridget Meyer is an outstanding young woman who serves as a role model to her classmates, her family and her community. To those who say we live in a time when we lack heroes, they haven't met Bridget Meyers. I salute Bridget for her remarkable contributions and commitment to her community. I ask my colleagues to join me in honoring her on being named a Young Woman of Excellence by the San Mateo County Women's Hall of Fame.

KNOW YOUR CUSTOMER

HON. RON PACKARD

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 24, 1999

Mr. PACKARD. Mr. Speaker, I would like to applaud the efforts of citizens in my district and across the country. Thanks to their unending efforts, the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) recently retracted their proposed "Know Your Customer" rule. This proposal would have required banks to monitor their customers and snoop out information for federal government files.

According to the FDIC, the intent of the "Know Your Customer;" rule was to ensure that banks and savings institutions have policies and procedures for screening transactions tied to criminal activities, such as money laundering or drug trafficking. In reality, this legislation would have created an Orwellian system of government. Our constituents recognized this and voiced their strong opposition to it.

We should not forget that Americans have the right to expect privacy protections. The fact is, under the "Know Your Customer" rule, banks would have been required to track money sources and report all "out-of-the-oridinary" transactions to the federal government. In other words, this would have allowed the banks and our government the right to snoop in our personal information. That is wrong! Good business practices should already allow banks to know their customers.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank American citizens for strengthening our democratic system of government by loudly voicing their opposition to this rule. "Know Your Customer" would have been a clear invasion of privacy of all citizens and I am pleased it has been retracted.

JOHN LEE SULLIVAN MAKES HIS MARK ON THE WORLD

HON. BOB ETHERIDGE

OF NORTH CAROLINA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 24, 1999

Mr. ETHERIDGE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Caroline and Richard Sullivan of Charlotte, North Carolina. On March 7, 1999 at Presbyterian Hospital in Charlotte, they welcomed into the world their first child, John Lee Sullivan. There is nothing more wonderful and joyous than watching a child grow and I known that they will treasure every new day with their son. Faye joins me in wishing the Sullivans great happiness during this very special time of their lives.

CONSUMER CREDIT REPORT ACCURACY AND PRIVACY ACT OF 1999

HON. LUCILLE ROYBAL-ALLARD

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 24, 1999

Ms. ROYBAL-ALLARD. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to join eleven of my colleagues in introducing the Consumer Credit Report Accuracy and Privacy Act of 1999. My bill gives every American the right to examine and correct their credit reports free of charge.

The credit reporting industry affects the lives of virtually every working American. Information used in a credit report can affect the ability to obtain a job, credit card, insurance policy, or even a place to live. For this reason, it is imperative that the credit industry maintain accurate records on American consumers.

In spite of the fact that the reporting of false delinquencies, errors in personal demographic information, and missing credit accounts all have the potential to result in the denial of credit, only six states (Colorado, Georgia, Massachusetts, Maryland, New Jersey and Vermont) offer consumers free credit reports on request. For the rest of the nation, most consumers cannot obtain a free credit report until after they have already been denied credit or suspect they are a victim of fraud.

The fact that the three largest credit bureaus have 450 million files on individual consumers and process over 2 billion pieces of data every month presents a daunting challenge to maintain the most accurate records possible. Given these figures, the chance of acquiring inaccurate information is highly likely. In fact, some studies have shown that up to one third of credit reports could contain serious mistakes.

It is important to note that the credit reporting industry gathers its information without the direct consent of American consumers, and in turn, uses this information for its own profit through the sales of reports to credit grantors, employers, insurance companies, and landlords. Consumers should have the right to know what is being said about them, especially if the information will affect their overall credit standing.

My bill will also help to address the growing problem of identify theft. Increasingly, criminals are able to obtain personal credit reports and assume a consumer's credit identity. In the process, they are able to run up huge debts while ruining the unsuspecting victim's credit records. We could minimize this problem if consumers more regularly audited their own credit reports to find out who else has been looking at them.

This bill has the endorsement of the nation's key consumer advocacy organizations, including U.S. Public Interest Research Group, Consumer Action, Community Reinvestment Committee, Consumer Federation of America, Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now, and the National Community Reinvestment Coalition.

In closing, the Consumer Credit Report Accuracy and Privacy Act encourages consumers to be pro-active in reviewing and protecting their personal credit history from possible mistakes and fraud. My bill simply gives