

June 14, 1999

life-long education, and Edgewood has long been a leader in this field.

I would also note that Edgewood College will confer two honorary degrees, to Gaylord Nelson, former Wisconsin Senator and one of our nation's greatest environmentalists; and to Sr. Angelo Collins, OP, the internationally recognized science education expert. I invite my colleagues to join with me in saluting the Edgewood College Class of 1999.

RECOGNITION OF OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH AWARENESS DAYS

**HON. RICHARD E. NEAL**

OF MASSACHUSETTS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Monday, June 14, 1999*

Mr. NEAL of Massachusetts. Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to recognize the efforts of the Region I chapter of the Voluntary Protection Participants' Association and the Safety Council of Western Massachusetts. I applaud the work of this group in combating the serious threat that work-related injuries pose to our communities.

I want to pledge my support for the upcoming Occupational Safety and Health Awareness Days, June 16-17, 1999 organized by the Safety Council. I am pleased to see that the itinerary consists of both interesting and important presentations by local authorities on safety-related topics.

I feel that it is very important to have events such as this to educate the public about what everyone can do to prevent on-the-job accidents and ensure a safe working environment for the people of Western Massachusetts. It is clear that the work of the Safety Council is invaluable in this regard.

Finally I would like to thank the Safety Council for its tireless advocacy of occupational safety and health awareness. Along with the citizens of the Second Congressional District of Massachusetts, I express my most sincere gratitude and the hope that your important work will continue for years to come.

CELEBRATING THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF W.B. NEILSON HOSE COMPANY NO. 4

**HON. JOHN E. SWEENEY**

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Monday, June 14, 1999*

Mr. SWEENEY. Mr. Speaker, on July 6, 1999, the W.B. Neilson Hose Company No. 4 celebrates its 100th anniversary of fine service to Mechanicville, NY. It is my honor to represent the 22nd Congressional District that is served by a dedicated department.

I would like to offer my sincerest and most enthusiastic congratulations to every member of the W.B. Neilson Hose Company No. 4 who has worked to maintain such a high level of excellence in fire fighting. With the flicker of an

EXTENSIONS OF REMARKS

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idea, thirty-five enthusiastic volunteers took action, bringing this company to life in 1899.

Over the years the W.B. Neilson Hose Company No. 4 has encountered many obstacles. During the early years, members had to draw the heavy horse cart through narrow, hilly streets and haul the heavy load over a steep bridge, all while facing treacherous weather conditions. These bumps in the road could have spelled disaster for an ordinary company, but they only made the W.B. Neilson Hose Company No. 4 stronger.

The devoted and dedicated members of this company deserve to be commended for their outstanding citizenship. These great men and women selflessly risk their lives in an effort to help and protect their friends and neighbors. Their heroic deeds reach far above and beyond the duty of an everyday citizen, and for this I am eternally grateful.

Mr. Speaker, please join me in thanking W.B. Neilson Hose Company No. 4 for a century of outstanding volunteer service to Mechanicville, New York. I am sure that this first hundred years is only the beginning for this wonderful company.

VETERANS' CEMETERIES ASSESSMENT ACT OF 1999

**HON. CORRINE BROWN**

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Monday, June 14, 1999*

Ms. BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be an original cosponsor of H.R. 2040, the Veterans' Cemeteries Assessment Act of 1999, introduced by Chairman BOB STUMP of the Veterans' Affairs Committee.

America made a solemn commitment to those who put their lives on the line for her when in 1862, President Abraham Lincoln signed legislation authorizing the purchase of "cemetery grounds" to be used as national cemeteries "for soldiers who shall have died in the service of the country."

The stated goal of the Department of Veterans Affairs National Cemetery Administration is to assure that the burial needs of veterans are met with a final resting place that commemorates their service to our Nation. Unfortunately, today nearly a third of America's veterans do not have the option of being buried in a national or state veterans cemetery within a reasonable distance from their residence—determined by the VA to be 75 miles.

I was distressed that the VA's Fiscal Year 2000 proposed budget failed to request funding for even the planning of any new national cemeteries although the Department's own statistics show that demand for cemetery space will increase sharply in the near future, with burials increasing 42 percent from 1995 to 2010, and annual veteran deaths reaching 620,000 in the year 2008.

Additionally, I have been deeply concerned that VA continues to ignore the long-identified national veterans cemetery needs of the southern part of my home state of Florida. In both 1987 and 1994, the Miami area was designated by congressionally mandated reports

as one of the top geographic areas in the United States in which need for burial space for veterans is greatest. Yet, as late as August 1998, VA's strategic planning through the year 2010 indicated nothing more than a willingness to continue evaluating the needs of nearly 800,000 veterans in the Miami/Ft. Lauderdale primary and secondary service area. Mr. Speaker, that is over 54 percent of the estimated state veteran population and 3.3 percent of the total U.S. veteran population.

Florida has the oldest veterans' population of any state. By VA's estimate, there will be nearly 25,000 veteran deaths in the greater Miami area in FY 2000, and by the year 2010, the annual death rate in South Florida will be nearly 26,000. Unfortunately, the nearest veterans cemetery is 250 miles away. That is why I introduced H.R. 1628 to require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a national cemetery in the Miami, Florida, metropolitan area to serve the needs of veterans and their families.

The independent study required by H.R. 2040 to assess, among other things, the number of additional national cemeteries that will be required for the interment and memorialization of veterans who die after 2010, will better identify the critical needs of all of Florida, as well as the Nation. Throughout America, Mr. Speaker, 90 percent of eligible veterans are not buried in a state or national veterans cemetery.

Another important matter required to be studied by H.R. 2040 would be improvements to VA burial benefits to better serve veterans and their families. The legislation specifically mandates consideration of a proposal to increase the amount of the plot allowance benefit.

The plot allowance, when paid to a state veterans cemetery, helps defray the state's operating costs of those burial grounds. At a recent hearing of the Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, of which I am the Ranking Democrat, veterans organizations and State Directors of Veterans Affairs testified that the concern for high operating cost obligations keeps many states from seeking a VA grant to build and equip a state veterans cemetery.

Mr. Speaker, I would note that the plot allowance benefit—\$150—has not been increased in over 20 years, and is limited to only veterans with wartime service. I believe that an assessment of the plot allowance benefit will find (1) that the current benefit does not cover the cost of interment, (2) that the current eligibility criteria discriminates against 20 percent of the veteran population who are buried in a state cemetery but who are otherwise eligible to be buried in a national cemetery, and (3) that an increase in the benefit amount and an expansion of the eligibility criteria would provide the needed incentive for more states to establish state veterans cemeteries as complements the national cemetery system.

H.R. 2040 will provide Congress with the road map needed to fulfill the Nation's solemn obligation to its heroes—that they and their families be provided an appropriate resting place of honor. I urge Members to support this legislation.