

She has helped secure a Federal grant to enhance social services at Pine Oaks Village, encouraged residents to develop and direct their own programs, such as art shows, gardening, bridge, and quilting, organized holiday parties, and produced a monthly newsletter for her residents. Ms. Hunt makes consistent strides to improve the quality of life of her elderly residents.

Here in Congress, we are debating Social Security and Medicare reform, reauthorization of the Older Americans Act and other important issues affecting our Nation's senior citizens. It is comforting to know that while the needs of seniors are often overlooked by some—they are not forgotten at Pine Oaks Village.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. VITO FOSSELLA

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, June 15, 1999

Mr. FOSSELLA. Mr. Speaker, on rollcall No. 204, I missed the vote due to weather-related problems.

Had I been present, I would have voted "yes."

A TRIBUTE TO WENDY RASO OF PUEBLO COLORADO

HON. SCOTT McINNIS

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, June 15, 1999

Mr. McINNIS. Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to recognize the dedication, hard work, and great achievements of Wendy Raso, of Pueblo, Colorado. Her efforts, in conjunction with the March of Dimes, to improve the health of babies and to prevent birth defects and infant mortality and membership in national nursing organization, have contributed to her selection as a recipient of a \$5,000 national nursing scholarship.

Ms. Raso has devoted eight years of work at the Pueblo Community Health Center while pursuing graduate studies at the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center. As a perinatal case manager, she focuses her time on the health of an infant before birth. Wendy's desire to better the lives of unborn children is the reason why she promotes healthy lifestyles for her patients.

Ms. Raso is hopeful that her award will call attention of Colorado's fifth-highest of low birth-weight rate in the nation. Through her work and achievements she is optimistic that Colorado can improve its birth weight ranking. Ms. Raso's determination and dedication to improving the health of unborn children have

led her to pursue graduate work in Denver in order to achieve certification as a midwife.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank Ms. Wendy Raso for helping to ensure the health and future of Colorado's newest citizens. Individuals such as Ms. Raso who give so much time and energy to bettering the lives of others are to be commended. I would also like to congratulate Wendy Raso on being chosen as a recipient of the national nursing scholarship, and I would like to wish her the best of luck as she continues to pursue her education and service to others.

INTRODUCTION OF HOUSE RESOLUTION 208 CALLING FOR VETERANS CEMETERY PLANNING JUNE 15, 1999

HON. CORRINE BROWN

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, June 15, 1999

Ms. BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, today I am introducing, together with Mr. Evans, the Ranking Democrat on the Veterans' Affairs Committee as an original cosponsor, House Resolution—that would reaffirm the commitment of the United States to the men and women who have honorably served this Nation in the Armed Forces to provide reasonable access to burial in a national or State veterans cemetery. Our Resolution also would call on the National Cemetery Administration of the Department of Veterans Affairs, vested with the responsibility of providing a final resting place for America's heroes, to commence without delay the planning for the construction of new national cemeteries and other activities to provide America's veterans reasonable access to burial in a veterans cemetery.

I am appalled at the Department of Veterans Affairs' less-than-inspired goal for performing its mission "to honor veterans with a final resting place and lasting memorials to commemorate their service to our Nation."

Currently, nearly one-third of United States veterans do not have the option of being buried in a national or State veterans cemetery located within a reasonable distance of their residence—being 75 miles, as determined by the VA's National Cemetery Administration. Shockingly, the National Cemetery Administration, as its fiscal year 2000 performance plan program objective, will try to provide only 80 percent of United States veterans with a burial option within a reasonable distance of their residence.

Mr. Speaker, a National Cemetery Administration goal, which does not provide 20 percent of United States veterans with a burial option within a reasonable distance of their residence, is not acceptable to me nor should it be to this House.

By VA's own statistics, the demand for cemetery space will rise 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. However, for some inadequately explained reason, the VA's Fiscal Year 2000 proposed budget failed to request funding for even the planning of any new national cemeteries.

Last week I joined with Chairman Stump and Ranking Member Evans of the Veterans' Affairs Committee as an original cosponsor of H.R. 2040, the "Veterans' Cemeteries Assessment Act of 1999". That bill would require VA to contract for an independent study on improvements to veterans' cemeteries. Among other things, the study would assess the number of additional national cemeteries required for the interment and memorialization of veterans who die after 2010.

Mr. Speaker, my home State of 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. It is for that reason, on April 29, 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.

I would note for my colleagues that 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.

The burial space needs of veterans are approaching a crisis stage in Florida; but Florida is not alone. According to testimony received at a recent hearing of the Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, of which I am the Ranking Democrat, ninety percent of eligible veterans are not—I repeat, are not—buried in a national or state veterans cemetery. Such hallowed grounds are simply located too far from their home and family.

Mr. Speaker, standing on the threshold of a new century as we are, it is our obligation as Members of the 106th Congress to again affirm America's long and solemn commitment to her veterans—past, present, and future—that they and their families will be provided an appropriate resting place of honor, and that the Department of Veterans Affairs will fully carry out its responsibilities to that end.