

has enhanced the entire profession. She will be remembered for that, as well as her humor and her uncanny ability to get to the heart of seemingly byzantine issues.

The city of Alexandria and I will miss Vola. I am sure her retirement presents more opportunities for her to have an even greater and more positive impact upon the lives of Alexandrians and all of those throughout the metropolitan Washington community. She is a very, very special person. I wish there were more people like her. I wish she was not retiring, but I am happy for her, as she deserves a little rest and a lot more appreciation. She is wonderful, and I am proud to have this opportunity to say a few words about her on the floor of the House of Representatives.

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H.R. 2777, THE TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT CAPITAL ENHANCEMENT ACT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Washington (Mr. METCALF) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. METCALF. Mr. Speaker, my top priority when I was elected to Congress was to balance the budget and rein in the skyrocketing national debt. These two goals are vital to the economic well-being of the United States.

Today's budget outlook is considerably more optimistic than when the phrase "deficits as far as the eye can see" was commonly used in conjunction with budget projections.

The Congressional Budget Office is forecasting enormous budget surpluses which provides Congress an immense opportunity to begin to pay down the \$3.3 trillion of marketable debt. Today, the Treasury auctioned \$10 billion worth of 30-year bonds, and they are expecting an additional small auction in August. After that, the Treasury is not expected to auction any additional bonds until February 2001. In fact, yesterday's Bloomberg article states that, "Wall Street bond dealers have decided that probably this will be the last bond ever: a collector's item to be displayed on the shelf along with golf trophies in the recreation room."

This poses an interesting dilemma for the Federal Reserve Board. Their job is to accommodate a substantial rate of economic growth by assuring needed increases in the money supply which has been accomplished in the past by buying United States Government securities at an average annual rate of about \$20 billion. When the Treasury stops buying U.S. securities, the Federal Reserve will be losing a vital lever to accommodate the needed increases in the money supply.

My bill, H.R. 2777, the Transportation Infrastructure and Local Government Capital Enhancement Act, would pro-

vide the Federal Reserve Board a replacement mechanism to accommodate the needed increase in the money supply without buying U.S. Government securities, that is, without going into debt. The Federal Reserve or its surrogate would buy zero interest mortgages on State and local infrastructure improvements.

These mortgages would be amortized over periods of up to 30 years depending on the nature of the improvement, and in almost every case where the State or local government incurs a debt to finance investment in infrastructure, the voters have to approve the loan and pay interest. That taxpayers do not lightly assume such obligations is testified by the nearly zero rate of defaults on municipal bonds.

The scheduled repayments of the zero interest mortgages would provide a constantly renewed source of funds for public projects without requiring the Treasury to pay interest on these loans. Unlike now, when Federal borrowing means virtually permanent increases in the public debt, the proposed mortgage loans would be regularly repaid by local governments.

Evidence of failures to maintain and improve infrastructure is seen every day in such problems as unsafe bridges, urban decay, dilapidated and overcrowded schools, inadequate airports. A General Accounting Office study finds that education is seriously handicapped by deteriorating school buildings, and that an investment of \$110 billion is needed to bring them up to minimally accepted standards.

I am particularly concerned about our crisis in critical transportation bottlenecks that are in trade corridors, and maritime vulnerabilities. We also need to make immediate investments to address our Nation's vulnerability in the end-to-end movement of forces, equipment and material necessary to support a rapid military deployment.

This plan is fiscally sound. It is a means of providing the Federal Reserve Board with a needed lever to increase the money supply and provide public infrastructure necessary to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

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A FAIR HEARING FOR ELIAN GONZALEZ

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Florida (Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, the seas are stormy, the waves are beating against your frail little face, the winds are bitter cold. Your dark eyes are blinded by tears. You feel your mother's hands as they struggle to hold you above the waves. You hear her gentle voice praying to God to protect you, asking God to help you reach the land of liberty, and whispering to you to pray to your guardian angel.

Suddenly, there is distress in your mother's voice. This turns into cries of anguish and the last words you hear from your mother are, "I love you, my child. You are in God's hands now."

Committed to honor your mother's wishes, strengthened by her love and faith, you cling to an inner tube, all alone in the vast Atlantic Ocean. You continue to pray and on Thanksgiving Day, 1999, you are rescued by two fishermen off the coast of Florida.

Despite the harrowing experience, you are filled with joy, joy in the knowledge that you made it to the United States, that your mother's sacrifice was not in vain.

This is the story of Elian Gonzalez, who was then 5 years old and his mother, Elizabet Broton. One cannot help but wonder if there was divine intervention.

Elian has repeatedly spoken about the schools of dolphins who surrounded his inner tube. He is emphatic about the fact that these dolphins protected him from the sharks while using their snouts to push him closer to our U.S. shores.

Donato, one of the fishermen who saved Elian's life, has publicly stated and has personally said to many Members of Congress of this chamber how he as a Christian believes that God guided him toward Elian on that fateful day. Donato explains, "At first I thought it was a doll. I would have never seen Elian's tiny little hands clinging to the inner tube had there not been some force driving us toward him."

Some who have looked into Elian's eyes have seen the purity of his spirit, the antithesis of the evil that is Fidel Castro and his atheist regime. Some can see the collective anguish of the Cuban soul, in chains since Castro came to power and banished God and religion from Cuba, replacing it with Communist doctrine and institutions.

However, all who have come in contact with the child, including Jeanne O'Laughlin, who facilitated the meeting between Elian and his grandmothers, are touched by Elian.

Sister O'Laughlin was hand-picked by Attorney General Janet Reno and the INS. She is a neutral observer who answers to a higher call. Yet, after looking into Elian's tiny dark eyes, she said, "He would grow to greater freedom of manhood here." She believes that Elian should "live free of fear" and that "the final challenge of finding the best way for Elian to heal and to be nurtured should lie with a court that has experience in seeking the best interests of children."

Yet, there are those who shut themselves to this possibility and want only for Elian to be returned to his father in Cuba.

For those, I would like to quote Sister O'Laughlin again. She writes, "It troubles me that Elian's father has not

come to the United States. I realize how he must love Elian. What, if not fear, could keep a person from making a 30-minute trip to reclaim his son? And what might Elian's father fear if not the authoritarian Cuban government itself? Could we send the boy back to a climate that may be full of fear without at least a fair hearing in a family court," Sister Jeanne asks.

Some would discount that this fear exists. Some would question that the regime takes any action that would instill fear. No, that would not be, they say. But imagine how intense the fear must be, how horrific the oppression and subjugation must be in Cuba, that thousands upon thousands of mothers and fathers risk their lives to bring their children to freedom here in the United States. Imagine how the spirit of the Cuban people is strangled by the Castro regime that they are driven to such desperate measures.

Imagine not being able to go to church or to turn to any religious leader for guidance or support because you would be arrested and interrogated. Where would those be who would doubt that there is fear in Cuba? What would they say to the dissidents who are persecuted because they want human rights, or to the political prisoners because they want freedom and democracy for Cuba? What would they say to the Cuban mothers and fathers who must relinquish control of their children's upbringing and education and leave it to the Castro regime, a regime which teaches children to read using books such as these:

This one, for example, is used to teach Elian and his classmates and it says, "G" is for guerrilla. It also includes songs such as the ones where the children pledge their devotion to Castro, to Che Guevara, and to other Cuban revolutionary leaders. This one, for example, says, "I want to be like him. I could be like him. I will have to be like him. Like whom," it says. "Like Che."

Is this the environment that Elian should be returned to without so much as an opportunity to have him speak and express his desires?

I ask that my colleagues search their consciences and let God guide their steps as they consider this issue.

□ 1730

**URGING REPUBLICAN MEMBERS TO SIGN DISCHARGE PETITION ON H.R. 664, THE PRESCRIPTION DRUG FAIRNESS FOR SENIORS ACT**

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BASS). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Maine (Mr. ALLEN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. ALLEN. Mr. Speaker, Congress is back in session. We heard from the President the other night, and he laid

out an agenda for this country of priorities that we need to work on during the course of this year. Many of those priorities in fact are the unfinished business of last year, when we did not accomplish all that we might have.

The issue that I want to address this evening has to do with the high cost of prescription drugs for our seniors, because there is a problem that in the past year has only become much worse.

Two years ago, in 1998, I first had a study done in my district that showed that seniors on average pay twice as much for their prescription medications as the drug companies' preferred customers. Those preferred customers are HMOs, hospitals, and the Federal government itself, which purchases drugs for Medicaid and for the Veterans Administration.

In October of 1998, we released a second study in the first District of Maine. That study showed that people in Maine pay 72 percent more than Canadians and 102 percent more than Mexicans for the same drug in the same quantity from the same manufacturer.

That price discrimination is going on all over the country. We have now had over 150 different studies, one study or the other demonstrating this price discrimination by the pharmaceutical industry against those who do not have insurance for their prescription drugs.

Seniors make up 12 percent of the population, but they buy one-third of all prescription medications. Seniors, 37 percent of them have no coverage at all for their prescription medications. About 8 percent have prescription drug coverage through a MediGap policy, but those Medigap policies are very limited in terms of their benefits. Often they are capped out at \$1,000 or \$1,500 per year. Often the policies cost more than the benefit that they provide.

About 8 percent of people in this country have prescription drug coverage through an HMO. Medicare beneficiaries have HMO coverage. But if we read the news about what is happening to HMOs providing coverage under Medicare, some of them are dropping coverage in areas entirely because it is not profitable. Most of them are lowering the cap that they provide for a benefit on prescription drugs, and most of them are increasing the premiums that they are asking people to pay.

So HMOs under Medicare are no way to provide secure, reliable coverage for prescription drugs. The fact is that the industry charges whatever the market will bear for prescription drugs, and they give discounts to big customers, to favored customers, they give discounts to Canadians and Mexicans and Europeans, but seniors in this country pay the highest prices in the world.

The fact is, the bottom line is that the most profitable industry in the country is charging the highest prices

in the world to people who can least afford it, including our seniors.

The bill that I introduced last year, H.R. 664, the Prescription Drug Fairness for Seniors Act, would deal with this problem by eliminating the price discrimination. The bill is very simple. It allows the government to negotiate lower prices for people who are on Medicare, people who are already in a Federal health care plan. It is called Medicare. It works, but it does not have prescription drug coverage, and it needs to.

All my bill would do is allow pharmacies to buy drugs for Medicare beneficiaries at the best price given to the Federal government, either the price given to the Veterans Administration or the price paid by Medicaid.

I thought that this bill would attract Members of the other side of the aisle when they understood it was a bill that created no new bureaucracy, it involved no significant amount of expenditure by the Federal government, and it would provide a discount of up to 40 percent for seniors in this country who really need the help and need it now.

But the truth is that though we have 140 Democratic cosponsors of this legislation, not one Republican, not one has seen fit to step up and cosponsor this legislation.

I grant that this is a battle. The pharmaceutical industry does not like this bill. The pharmaceutical industry is running TV ads all across the country touting what a wonderful, warm, and fuzzy industry it is, and how they do research and development that is important for the American people. About that, they are right. But what they are trying to do is block the President's prescription drug benefit plan. They are trying to block the progress that we are making in getting a discount for Medicare beneficiaries.

This is a huge battle. On this battle, the Democrats are lining up, taking on the pharmaceutical industry. We are going to be introducing a discharge petition to bring this bill to the floor next week. We would like to have some Republican support. I certainly hope at some point we will get it.

**WISHING A HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO GLENYS BURQUIST**

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Washington (Mr. NETHERCUTT) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. NETHERCUTT. Mr. Speaker, February 3 marked a special day for a person close to my heart, for it was the 90th birthday of a wonderful woman with whom my family had a long association of close to 60 years. Her name is Glenys Burquist, and she was a legal secretary to my late father for 36 years, and a secretary to me for 18