

on the centralized triage program for after-hours response.

Harris County will also develop a plan to allow private and public safety-net providers to share eligibility information, medical and appointment records, and other information. The program will beef up efforts to make sure families and children enroll in programs for which they might be eligible, including Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). In addition, Harris County would facilitate simplified enrollment procedures for children's health programs.

Among those participating in the Harris County group are the Asian American Health Coalition, the Baylor College of Medicine's Department of Family and Community Medicine, Communities Conquering Cancer, Community Education and Preventive Health, the Dental Health Task Force of the Greater Houston Area, the Gulf Coast CHIP Coalition, the Harris County Budget Office, the Harris County Hospital District, the Harris County Public Health and Environmental Services, the HIV Services Section, the Homeless Services Coordinating Council and the Houston Health and Human Services Department.

Also part of this consortia are the Mental Health/Mental Retardation Authority of Harris County, the Ryan White Planning Council, The Assistance Fund, The Rose, and the University of Texas's Health Science Center's Department of Internal Medicine.

What does this group hope to accomplish? It has four goals.

1. Establish a county-wide communication and referral system accessible to Community Health Partners, Affiliates, Clients and Funding Resources.
2. Document referrals from the Community Health Access Clearinghouse to Community Health Partners, Affiliates and Funding Resources.
3. Decrease the rate of non-emergency use of emergency rooms.
4. Increase the numbers of low-income persons with insurance coverage.

This group's plan—and it's a great one—is just one of 208 that were submitted to HRSA this June. Unfortunately, since funds exist only for about 20 projects, Houston and other cities and rural areas may get turned away unless Congress acts to pass the Community Access to Health Care Act of 2000.

Putting together the CAP application was the first step in building new collaborative efforts for many groups. I have heard of instances where providers serving the same populations in the same towns had never sat down at the same table together. Once they do, and once they begin to exchange information and ideas, great things can happen.

We in Congress have argued for years about the federal government's role in ensuring access to affordable health care. I believe that some type of universal care should be a priority for the long term. For the short term, however, authorizing the CAP program will place much-needed funds in the hands of local consortia who, working together, can help to alleviate this crisis—town by town and patient by patient. I am pleased to note that this legislation has also been included as part of Rep. Dingell's FamilyCare Act of 2000, of which I am a cosponsor.

In closing, I would like to recognize a person whose dedication to this effort has led to the introduction of this legislation today. Dr. Mary Lou Anderson, from the Health Resources Services Administration, actually came out of her retirement to oversee the CAP demonstration project. Her dedication to this project, and to the health of America's families and children, is commendable.

HONORING THE MINNESOTA RIVER BASIN JOINT POWERS BOARD

HON. DAVID MINGE

OF MINNESOTA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, July 26, 2000

Mr. MINGE. Mr. Speaker, today I recognize five years of outstanding work by the Minnesota River Basin Joint Powers Board to coordinate the clean up of the thirty-seven county Minnesota River Basin.

Since its inception in 1995, the Minnesota River Basin Joint Powers Board has been able to build progressive and trustworthy relationships among agricultural production, conservation, sporting, and environmental interest groups. They have also been instrumental in building sustainable relationships with local, state, and federal government agencies in order to advance the cause of a restored, fishable, and swimmable Minnesota River.

The Minnesota River Basin Joint Powers Board has also been extremely helpful in promoting the Minnesota River Basin's Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program. Minnesota River CREP hopes to retire and restore 100,000 acres of flood-prone farmland in order to improve water attributes in the Basin and the larger Mississippi River Basin as a whole. Furthermore, their ability to thoughtfully and even-handedly coordinate the needs of thirty-seven counties regarding watershed team tributary strategies has been important to the success of this basin-wide initiative.

I would also like to recognize this group's Executive Director, Steve Hansen, as a tireless and articulate advocate of water quality improvement and the State of Minnesota's continuing environmental commitment to its rivers and natural resources.

In conclusion, I would like to stress the importance of the integrative and comprehensive watershed planning that the Minnesota River Basin Joint Powers Board is engaged in to promulgate and implement successful recovery of this important natural resource—the Minnesota River.

IN REMEMBRANCE OF AMBASSADOR BIRABHONGSE KASEMSRI

HON. DANA ROHRABACHER

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, July 26, 2000

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Mr. Speaker, this week, a long-time friend of the United States, Ambassador Birabhongse Kasemsri, known as Bira to his friends, passed away in his hometown of Bangkok, Thailand. I last saw Amba-

sador Kasemsri, 65, in 1999 during a visit I was honored to have with Thailand's King Bhumibol, whom Bira served as His Majesty's principal private secretary. In service to his King and country, Bira, was granted three decorations, including Knight Grand Cordon of the Most Noble Order of the Crown of Thailand [Highest Class].

Too often, American policymakers underestimate the importance of our strategic alliance with Thailand, which extends to our Civil War when the King offered President Lincoln a herd of fighting elephants from the Royal Thai military. Ambassador Kasemsri reinforced the strategic relationship during the height of the post-Vietnam Cold War period, during his exemplary service as Thailand's ambassador to the United States. In addition, during the early 1980's while he served as Thailand's ambassador to the United Nations, Bira was a hero of the Reagan doctrine in Southeast Asia by protecting Thailand from communist aggression. During that time, Bira was instrumental in arranging for noted military historian and journalist Al Santoli—who currently serves as my foreign policy advisor—to visit areas of Thailand that were under attack by the Soviet-backed Vietnamese communist army and their surrogates from Cambodia and Laos. Thanks to the sponsorship of Ambassador Kasemsri, the articles that Al wrote for the New Republic and Parade magazines on the threat to Thailand directly contributed to the cessation of chemical warfare in Indochina and the withdrawal of the Vietnamese occupation forces in Cambodia.

On behalf of my wife Rhonda and I, and my colleagues who have had the pleasure of working with Ambassador Kasemsri over many years, I extend deepest sympathy to his wife, Rampiarpha and their three children. I believe that the seeds of solidarity that Bira sowed during his many years of representing The Royal Government of Thailand in America will lead to further development of the friendship between the governments and people of Thailand and the United States.

TRIBUTE TO THE LATE MACEDONIO A. PADILLA

HON. GRACE F. NAPOLITANO

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, July 26, 2000

Mrs. NAPOLITANO. Mr. Speaker, it is with particular sadness that I offer this memorial tribute to Mr. Macedonio A. Padilla of Pico Rivera, California, a politically active citizen of the 34th Congressional District. Mac Padilla served his community with an inspired passion for education, insisting on the importance of broadening the horizons of young minds.

Born in Los Angeles, California, on September 12, 1929, Mr. Padilla grew up with his family in the greater Los Angeles community. Having not completed his high school education, he enlisted in the United States Army and served his country in World War II.

He had two daughters, Sylvia and Margaret, with his first wife, Antolina Barba, whom he married in 1950 and divorced some years later. As a single man, he was employed at

the Los Angeles Times and later at Farmer John's Meat Distributors.

In 1997, Mr. Padilla finally met the love of his life. He and his new wife, Lillian Aguilar, were fortunate to have her daughter from a previous marriage, Theresa, and were later blessed with Rosalie, their only daughter together. Mr. Padilla raised his four daughters, as well as his twelve grandchildren, teaching them that academic excellence was most important. Putting in much of his personal time and effort into his ideas, he was an assistant at South El Ranchito Elementary School. He loved to educate children. He was also a prominent voice with the local city officials and legislative members.

Even in his eventual health conditions, Mr. Padilla spoke his mind when it mattered most. He made it his life-long goal to help improve his community to the best of his abilities.

Macedonio Padilla passed away on July 18, 2000. He is survived by his four children, their spouses, and his twelve grandchildren: His constant devotion to the members of his community, his family, and his country will forever be remembered.

Mr. Speaker, I extend our sincere sympathy to his family and ask God's comforting graces for them in their time of sorrow.

HONORING THE CLARK COUNTY,
ARKANSAS REUNION PICNIC

HON. DALE E. KILDEE

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, July 26, 2000

Mr. KILDEE. Mr. Speaker, today I speak of a group of people who share a common history and a rich heritage. On July 29, my hometown of Flint, Michigan, will be the site of the Clark County, Arkansas Reunion Picnic.

Following the Civil War, many former slaves settled in an area of Clark County called "Okolona." They had endured slavery by developing and strengthening their bond with God, and with each other. Regularly, they would gather at Rome Spring Hill where they would sing, pray, and eat together as a community. They began to depend on each other as a family.

This tradition continued until the end of World War II, as many Americans moved from southern agricultural communities to the more industrialized cities of the North. Residents of Clark County often moved together in groups, allowing them to retain the bond they had established for so many years. In 1974, the tradition of the Clark County Reunion was resumed in the Northern states. This picnic has since become an annual event, held in five locations around the country, Clark County, AR, Chicago, IL, Seattle, WA, Los Angeles, CA, and Flint, MI. The last time the Reunion Picnic was held in Flint was 1995, and the Flint delegation was joined by over 500 members of their extended family, and they anticipate repeating this accomplishment, if not surpassing it.

Mr. Speaker, the Clark County Reunion Picnic serves many purposes. It provides an opportunity for family to come together, intensify old bonds, and forge new ones. It gives the

younger members a chance to learn of their ancestry, and grow emotionally and spiritually. I am proud to know that Flint is a central point in their effort to maintain a strong sense of unity. I am pleased to ask my colleagues in the 106th Congress to join me in congratulating all the Reunion participants.

AZERBAIJAN'S PARLIAMENTARY
ELECTIONS

HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, July 26, 2000

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, today I introduce a resolution calling on the Government of Azerbaijan to hold free and fair parliamentary elections this November. After a series of elections marred by irregularities, the upcoming election will help define the country's political orientation and its international reputation. Is Azerbaijan developing towards Western-style electoral democracy or mired in the Soviet pattern of controlled voting results? The answer to that question is important for the United States, which has significant strategic and economic interests in Azerbaijan.

At age 77, Azerbaijani President Heydar Aliiev is the most experienced politician in the former Soviet space. Since returning to power in 1993, he has created a semi-authoritarian political system that features highly centralized, hands-on presidential rule, with constant positive coverage in the state-run media. President Aliiev controls all branches of government and the state's instruments of coercion. His implicit bargain with Azerbaijan's citizens offers stability in return for unquestioned predominance. While Azerbaijan's constitution enshrines separation of powers, neither the legislature, judiciary, press nor opposition parties may challenge President Aliiev's hold on power. Indeed, in an interview published in last Sunday's New York Times, he openly said, "I will always be president here."

Opposition parties function, publish newspapers and have some representation in parliament. But they have no access to state media, which portray them negatively, and their opportunities to influence the political process—let alone actual decision-making—are carefully restricted.

With respect to elections, Azerbaijan's record has been poor. The OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) monitored the 1995 and 1998 parliamentary and presidential elections, and concluded that they did not meet OSCE standards. Council of Europe observers harshly criticized the first round of the local elections in December 1999, though they noted some improvements in the second round. These flawed elections have exacerbated the deep distrust between the government and opposition parties.

On May 25, the Helsinki Commission, which I chair, held hearings on the upcoming election, in which Azerbaijani Government representatives and opposition leaders participated. At that time, the main bone of contention between them was the composition of the Central Election Commission. During the hear-

ing, a government spokesman announced that Baku was prepared to let government and opposition members veto the other side's nominees for the Commission posts set aside for independents, a major step forward. In fact, that assurance subsequently turned out to be not entirely reliable when the hard bargaining began in Baku, with the mediation of the ODIHR. Nevertheless, the agreement eventually reached did give opposition parties an opportunity to block decisions taken by the pro-presidential majority and was acclaimed by ODIHR as a fair and necessary compromise.

Since then, unfortunately, the process has collapsed. Azerbaijan's parliament passed an election law on July 5 that did not include amendments recommended by the ODIHR to bring the legislation into accord with OSCE standards. The law excludes an opposition party registered in February 2000 from fielding a party list; other problematic aspects include territorial and local election commissions which are effectively under government control, the restriction of voters' rights to sign petitions nominating more than one candidate or party, and the right of domestic observers to monitor the election.

President Aliiev claims that he proposed modifications to the election law but parliament refused to accept them. This assertion, considering his hold on the legislature—where a loyal, pro-presidential party controls over 80 percent of the seats—is simply not plausible. In any case, if he did not approve of the law, he could have vetoed it. Instead, he signed it.

On July 7, the ODIHR issued a press release "deploring" shortcomings in the election law. Opposition parties refused to participate in the work of the Central Election Commission unless the law is changed. In response, parliament amended the Central Election Commission law, depriving the opposition of the ability to block decisions. On July 20, 12 political parties, among them the leading opposition parties, warned that if parliament refuses to amend the election law, they will boycott the November ballot. Most recently, the State Department issued a statement on July 24, regretting the recent actions of Azerbaijan's parliament and urging the government and parliament in Baku to work with ODIHR, the opposition and non-governmental organizations to amend the election law in accordance with OSCE standards.

Mr. Speaker, this turn of events is extremely disappointing. The last thing Azerbaijan needs is another election boycott by opposition parties. The consequences would include a parliament of dubious legitimacy, deepened distrust and societal polarization, and a movement away from electoral politics to street politics, which could threaten the country's stability. November's election offers a historic opportunity to consolidate Azerbaijani society. It is essential for the future development of Azerbaijan's democracy and for the legitimacy of its leadership that the election be free and fair and the results be accepted by society as a whole.

This resolution calls on the Administration to remind President Aliiev of the pledge he made in August 1997 to hold free and fair elections, and urges Azerbaijan's Government and parliament to accept ODIHR's recommendations