

decades ago. And, I might add, light years ahead of the common wisdom.

Seventh, I'd like you to teach that Members of Congress do pay attention to their constituents.

Often I hear that Members of Congress only pay attention to power brokers and big-time donors and don't care about ordinary citizens. That simply is not true.

Sometimes when I stood in front of a roomful of voters, I could feel a curtain of doubt hanging between them and me: I took the positions I did, they believed, because of this or that campaign contribution, not because I'd spent time studying and weighing the merits of issues. They had given themselves over to cynicism, and cynicism is the great enemy of democracy. It is very difficult for public officials to govern when their character, values, and motives are always suspect.

Of course, Members of Congress are influenced by special interests—often too much, in my view—but they are even more influenced by their constituents.

Members are—for the most part—very good politicians. They know what their constituents think. They hold numerous public meetings, poll their districts regularly, talk on the phone with constituents frequently, and answer hundreds of letters and e-mail messages daily. They are constantly helping to solve constituents' problems.

Members really do believe that constituent views are important; during all my years in Congress I never heard a Member say otherwise.

My view, in fact, is that Members are sometimes too close to their constituents—particularly when they risk reflecting their constituents' views at the expense of their own judgment. It was Lincoln who said that the art of democratic government is to be out in front of your constituents, but not too far out in front.

Eighth, I'd like you to emphasize that citizens play an essential role in making Congress work.

The American people bear more responsibility for the success of our representative democracy than they realize. If people don't participate in the political process, their views cannot be effectively represented. This is not just a matter of voting. Our system depends upon open and trusting interaction between representatives and the people who elected them.

Let me give you an example of what I mean. Back in the late 1970s, I was meeting with a group of constituents in Switzerland County, a deeply rural, tobacco growing county in the far southern corner of Indiana. It was not a place I expected to come for enlightenment on international politics.

While talking with the group, though, the subject of the Panama Canal treaties came up. This was well before the media had focused on the issue, but a man I'd never met suddenly stood up and laid out the clearest, most evenly reasoned argument for ratification that I ever did hear on the matter—even after the treaty debate mushroomed into a raging national issue. I was flabbergasted, but took it as a humbling reminder that as a Member of Congress, you can always find constituents who can teach you a thing or two about an issue.

My constituent in Switzerland County understood that the relationship between a citizen and a representative requires more than a quick handshake, or a vote, or a moment's pause to sign a computer-generated postcard. He understood that there must be a conversation, a process of mutual education, between citizens and representatives.

Many Americans have given up on the conversation. They must understand that they need to get involved if they want our system to improve.

They need to know that the nature of this relationship between the representative and the represented—and the honesty of the exchange between the two—shapes the strength of our representative democracy.

Ninth, I hope you teach that Congress needs a lot of improvement—to make it more accountable, transparent, responsive and efficient.

I urge you to be unrelenting critics of the Congress—but in the context of everything else I've said so far.

I won't go into detail here because you are familiar with these problems.

The incessant money chase—to fund increasingly costly campaigns—diverts Members' attention from their important responsibilities and leads to a growing sense that access is bought and sold.

Many Members—especially Members of the House—operate today in a state of perpetual campaigning. Rather than trying to develop consensus and pass laws, they view the legislative session primarily as an opportunity to frame issues and position themselves for the next election.

It is extremely difficult to defeat incumbents in Congress. Their financial advantages are great and they use the redistricting process to create districts that are heavily partisan in their favor.

Bitter partisanship and personal attacks have become all too common in Congress—poisoning the atmosphere and making it harder to meet the needs of the country.

Special interest groups have too much influence over Congress. They play an important role by representing the views of different segments of the population, but they often have tunnel vision—advancing narrow interests at the expense of the national interest.

The committee system has been eroded and is close to collapse. Legislation is regularly drafted in informal settings outside the authorizing committees and brought directly to the House or Senate floor.

Congress devotes too little attention to some of the country's major long-range challenges. How can we ensure that we have adequate food, energy, and water supplies well into the future? How do we maintain a prosperous and open economy? What domestic and international environmental challenges will we face? Congress spends so much of its time struggling to pass its basic spending bills that these kinds of long-term issues are simply set aside and not dealt with.

Congress doesn't perform adequate oversight of government programs. Oversight of the implementation of laws is at the very core of good government. But congressional oversight has shifted away in recent years from the systematic review of programs to highly politicized investigations of individual public officials.

Current scheduling practices make it difficult for Congress to carry out its responsibilities. The 2 1/2 to 3 day legislative work-week makes it impossible for Members to attend all of their committee meetings and other official business.

There is a severe lack of accountability in the appropriations process. Congress increasingly turns to omnibus legislation—combining hundreds of different provisions into one huge bill, tacking on unrelated riders and wasteful earmarks.

The rules for the consideration of bills in the House are often too restrictive. Although

there has been some improvement in the 106th Congress, the House leadership has tended over the years to design rules that sharply curtail debate, restrict the opportunity for the average Member to participate, and limit the amendments and policy options that can be considered.

The Senate regularly fails to consider presidential nominations for key judicial posts and cabinet positions in a timely manner. This practice blocks appointments that are critical for the effective functioning of our government.

Congress must take its own reform seriously. It should work on reform every year—not every ten years, as has been its pattern.

Finally, I'd like you to teach that in spite of these many problems with Congress, our representative democracy works. It may be slow, messy, cumbersome, and even unresponsive at times, but it has many strengths, and continues to serve us well.

Some say our institutions of government—including the Congress—create more problems than they solve. In the past decade, we experienced an intensified assault on government from some quarters, and "government" and "Washington, D.C." became bad words, symbols of the worst kind of corruption and waste. My hope is that we are now beginning to move away from that kind of extreme anti-government rhetoric. The more positive tone of the present presidential campaign would suggest that we are.

Representative democracy, for all its faults, is our best hope for dealing with our nation's problems. It works through a process of deliberation, negotiation and compromise—in a word, the process of politics. Politics is the way we represent the will of the people in this country. At its best, our representative democracy gives a system whereby all of us have a voice in the process and a stake in the product.

I don't for a moment agree with those who think that our representative democracy has failed or that the future of the country is bleak.

Just consider the condition of America today. In general I think it is a better place than it was when I came to Congress some 35 years ago.

Of course, our country still faces serious problems—from reducing economic inequality to improving access to health care to strengthening our schools—but overall we are doing quite well.

We must be doing something right. Churchill's remark that "democracy is the worst system devised by the wit of man, except for all the others," still rings true.

I would hope that when each student leaves your class, he or she would appreciate that this representative democracy of ours works reasonably well.

RECOGNIZING THE NATIONAL
WALK OUR CHILD TO SCHOOL
DAY IN HONOR OF JOHN LAZOR

HON. DENNIS J. KUCINICH

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, October 3, 2000

Mr. KUCINICH. Mr. Speaker, today I recognize Wendy Lazor, Councilman Ed Fitzgerald, the Lakewood City Council, and the Lakewood Board of Education for their work in establishing the "International Walk your Child to School Day," in honor and memory of John Lazor.

The tragic loss of three-year-old John Lazor occurred on April 26, 2000, while on an innocent walk to the corner store with his day care provider. A pickup truck backed from across the street into the driveway which young John was standing in, killing him instantly. This tragedy emphasizes the importance of taking precautions and the need for children's safety education. John's courageous mother, Wendy Lazor, has decided to dedicate herself to the advocacy of pedestrian safety, especially children. Amazingly, she found strength in the midst of her loss to work as an advocate for the public good. She is the driving force behind Lakewood, Ohio's recent resolution to establish Wednesday, October 4, 2000, as National Walk Our Children to School Day.

Along with the help of the Lakewood Board of Education, City Council and Councilman Ed Fitzgerald, The Lakewood Early Childhood Professionals has decided to dedicate a special event, the National Walk Our Children to School Day, in John Lazor's honor. All of Lakewood can participate in this event, in which the purpose is to provide an opportunity for adults to teach children about pedestrian safety and choosing safe routes to school, and to help make our communities more safe for walking. Because Lakewood is a densely populated city, and one in whose children typically walk to and from school on a daily basis, the City Board of Education has decided to support and encourage participation in National Walk Our Children to School Day. The city's main event, honoring the memory of Wendy Lazor's son, John, will be held at his old school, Franklin Elementary.

Mr. Speaker, I ask my fellow colleagues to rise with me in recognition of the hard work and dedication of Wendy Lazor, Councilman Ed Fitzgerald, and the rest of the City of Lakewood's Public and Educational Leadership for their support of the National Walk Our Children to School Day. And let us honor the memory of the young John Lazor, and the courage of his mother, Wendy, for striving to better the community even in the face of personal strife and distress. Her selfless compassion and triumph in the face of tragedy is inspirational to all.

COMMENDING THE AMARILLO
VETERANS AFFAIRS HEALTH
CARE SYSTEM

HON. LARRY COMBEST

OF TEXAS

HON. MAC THORNBERRY

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, October 3, 2000

Mr. COMBEST. Mr. Speaker, I, along with my distinguished colleague, Mr. THORNBERRY, wish to congratulate the Amarillo Veterans Affairs (VA) Health Care System for receiving the Robert W. Carey Quality Award from the Department of Veterans Affairs. This annual award is one of the highest honors that a VA facility can receive. The Carey Award recognizes model organizations for their quality transformation efforts, organizational effectiveness, and improvements in performance serv-

ice and satisfying customers. The Amarillo VA Health Care System, which provides medical assistance to veterans throughout the Texas and Oklahoma Panhandles and portions of Eastern New Mexico and Southern Kansas, received the 2000 Carey Award for the health care category.

The Amarillo VA Health Care System serves a population of 75,000 veterans and houses an acute care facility, nursing home, two community-based outpatient clinics, and four contractual primary care clinics. Over 25,000 patients are treated annually, including 3,300 inpatient and over 200,000 outpatient visits. They have implemented a wide variety of innovative measures, from moving the Substance Abuse Program to an outpatient setting to restructuring Primary Care and to establishing a safety program to reduce employee accidents. Through the use of employee teams, the hospital now administers a Bar Code Medication Administration, which uses computer technology to track and monitor patient medications. In addition, they have established a pilot program of the Computerized Patient Record System, enabling the hospital to coordinate patient information so that all aspects of the health care system may be utilized.

The mission of the Veterans Health Administration and the Amarillo VA Health Care System is to improve the health of the served population by providing primary, specialty, and extended care, and related social support services through an integrated health care delivery program. As a learning organization, the VA Health Care System continually raises the standard for VA facilities nationwide. By focusing on trust, teamwork, and continuous improvement, the Amarillo VA has been able to greatly reduce the costs of primary care, increase the quality of health care available and improve employee relations. These combined efforts have built a facility that provides an invaluable service to thousands of veterans.

It is with pride that we recognize the doctors, nurses, administrators, volunteers, and other staff who have contributed to this outstanding accomplishment. Thanks to their tremendous efforts, West Texas is home to an outstanding veteran health care provider. We wholeheartedly extend our congratulations to the Amarillo VA Health Care System for receiving the 2000 Robert W. Carey Quality Award.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. ROB PORTMAN

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, October 3, 2000

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. Speaker, because I was unavoidably detained, I missed Roll Call Votes #503, 504 and 505 yesterday.

Had I been present, I would have voted "Yea" on each bill.

HONORING KATARYNA CHOMIK

HON. DALE E. KILDEE

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, October 3, 2000

Mr. KILDEE. Mr. Speaker, I am happy today to recognize the accomplishments of a woman who has unselfishly worked to improve the quality of life for our citizens. On Tuesday, October 10, members of Flint, Michigan's International Institute will gather to present to Mrs. Kataryna Chomik its prestigious Golden Door Award, given annually to an immigrant who has made a positive impact on the greater Flint community and the Institute itself.

Born in February of 1920, in the Western Ukraine, Irena, as she has come to be known, grew up with her parents and seven sisters. As a child, Irena promised to never leave her home or family. However, several family tragedies, including the death of her father, prompted Irena's mother to send her away to work as a companion and nursemaid to Maria Lewicka, the daughter of a Ukrainian priest who was recovering from a spinal injury. Although Irena's strong faith had been forged early in her life, this experience strengthened her beliefs and her commitment to service.

At the beginning of World War II, Irena was sent to a school for kindergarten teachers, and upon graduation, managed a village program. The war progressed and headed in the direction of Irena's town. Ukrainian churches were being destroyed and the clergy exterminated, but Irena continued to work to preserve her heritage. As a result, she was sentenced to ten years of hard labor by a Soviet war court, but was later retried and released. After this, Irena fled on foot, finding refuge in a Czechoslovakian convent, where the Sisters bought her a plane ticket to Belgium.

It was in Belgium that Irena met Nicholas Chomik, who would later become her husband. On Christmas Eve 1950, the Chomiks, along with their daughter, Olga, were welcomed to their new life in the United States by a sight that told them that all their struggles had not been for naught—the Statue of Liberty. After living on the East Coast for a year, the Chomiks moved to Flint, where Nicholas found employment with General Motors, and Irena worked as a seamstress. During this time, the Chomiks were blessed with two more daughters, Mary and Daria.

It was during this time that Irena began a long-standing relationship with the group that greatly helped her when she first came to America, the International Institute. Irena was always on hand volunteering on various committees, and participating in activities such as international dance exhibitions, parades, and her annual Ukrainian Easter Egg workshops.

Mr. Speaker, I am truly fascinated by stories such as Kataryna Chomik's. Through tremendous adversity, she has been able to live the true American dream. She is truly an inspiration to all who come into contact with her. I ask my colleagues in the 106th Congress to please join me to congratulate and wish Irena the very best.