

distinguished career, received the kind of recognition just provided.

Mr. Speaker, this is kick-off day, kick-off of the Rural Caucus. I particularly want to commend the gentlewoman from Missouri (Mrs. EMERSON); the gentlewoman from North Carolina (Mrs. CLAYTON); and the gentleman from Kansas (Mr. MORAN), my cochairs in the Rural Caucus, in announcing the rebirth of this important endeavor. As a representative of one of the most rural districts in the House, the entire State of North Dakota, I am very pleased with this initiative and proud to be a part of it.

In the last 7 years, our Nation's economy has been growing by leaps and bounds. Unemployment rates are at all-time lows, consumer confidence is at an all-time high, the rising stock market is creating unprecedented levels of wealth. But for this sky-rocketing economy for so many Americans, the situation in rural America, our smallest towns and villages across the country, has been quite different. The boom of Wall Street is not meeting necessarily the needs of rural Main Streets. I think rural America is at a serious crossroads tonight. As I travel throughout my home State, I literally see many fine, long-standing communities shrinking and disappearing.

In an ever-more urban House, we have to understand the distinct and enormous challenges facing rural America. In the House today, there are only 57 Members out of the 435 who represent predominantly rural areas compared to 130 years ago. We know that after the next decennial census now being conducted, the rural representation in this Chamber will shrink even further. According to census information, however, 1 out of 4 Americans, 62 million, live in rural areas. Due to the lack of representation, I believe, of rural America in the House, many rural Americans suffer from funding formulas or programs that do not represent their unique needs.

Mr. Speaker, we have had 110 Members, Republican and Democrat both, join in the rebirth and relaunch of the Congressional Rural Caucus. I think that this initial success is due in large part to the stress that the rural areas in each of our districts is experiencing. In North Dakota, the agriculture sector is facing a flat-out depression. Farmers are receiving \$2.50 a bushel for wheat, nearly 30 percent below the cost of production. In North Dakota the farm auctions replace the church picnic as a social gathering in many communities. I am hopeful that the Congressional Rural Caucus with Members from all over the United States will be able to advocate Federal policies that address our most pressing needs in rural America.

In addition to production agriculture, however, there are many inter-related facets of our rural communities

that need attention and will be emphasized by the Rural Caucus, issues like education, health care, technology and economic development. They are all essential parts of our small towns in rural America. Without the access to quality education, rural residents fall behind the learning curve. Without access to quality health care, they stand exposed to unexpected health concerns. Without access to technology, rural residents will be left out of the technological revolution. Without investments in rural development, our communities and our residents will not find places of employment, new economic opportunities for them, to continue living in these parts of the world.

Education, for one, is a vital component to the prosperity of rural America. We take great pride in the quality of our schools and the student achievement; but in keeping the quality of rural schools, we know that there is going to be an ongoing commitment of resources and partnership between local, State, and increasingly Federal participation. This critical investment in our children is one of the most cost-effective ways to ensure opportunity and prosperity. Unfortunately, most Federal funds are channeled to larger urban school districts. Small and rural school districts, we feel, have not gotten their fair due, and this will be a target area of the caucus.

Another pressing issue is rural health care. We hear about millions who lack health care coverage, and yet we see in rural areas the actual care delivery system being strained, people having to drive further and further distances to receive access to even emergency primary health care services.

On technology, we see people use the Internet to access a variety of information; and yet we see that the prospect of the digital divide, separating the kind of Internet access that provides so many new opportunities for us across the country, may provide a distinct have and have-not, with rural America being left behind as the latest technology comes on board.

For all of these reasons, I am very proud to join with my colleagues in the Rural Caucus. I commend the bipartisan effort, and I know that we will stand together as we face these challenges.

THE CONGRESSIONAL RURAL CAUCUS: SPEAKING OUT FOR RURAL AMERICA

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

Mr. MORAN of Kansas. Mr. Speaker, tonight I join the gentleman from North Dakota (Mr. POMEROY) and my other cochairs, the gentlewoman from North Carolina (Mrs. CLAYTON) and the gentlewoman from Missouri (Mrs.

EMERSON), as we celebrate today the coming together of about 212 Members of Congress, both Republicans and Democrats, to revitalize the Congressional Rural Caucus. Last year the four of us came together with this common goal: to speak out for rural America and to find ways that we could do that here in the U.S. Congress. Today, we have celebrated the hard work and our ability to bring us all together for a united voice for rural America.

Our jobs as Members of the Congressional Rural Caucus, and we would enjoin any of our colleagues to continue to join us in this pursuit, is to promote economic and social policies that support and help the continued viability of our rural communities. In many instances throughout my home State of Kansas, our rural communities continue to struggle. We continue to lose population from once-thriving communities and elsewhere across the Great Plains region. Demographic trends show that young people are leaving the lands of their ancestors and that the population left behind is rapidly aging.

Kansas has 105 counties. Fifty-eight of those counties are smaller today than they were in 1890. Eighty Kansas counties have lost population in the last 2 decades. Seventy counties will lose population in the next decade.

So as a result, Kansas communities are confronted with serious challenges of prosperity and even of survival. Concerned parents wonder if their children will receive a public school education sufficient to meet the demands of tomorrow's global marketplace. I myself want to raise my children, I have a 9-year-old daughter and a 12-year-old daughter, I would like for them to have the opportunity to be raised in rural America and to raise their children, if they so choose, in rural Kansas; and we are concerned about the availability not only of education but of health care, especially in our smallest communities. Even though our unemployment rates are low, we see significant under-employment in many areas of rural Kansas. That is the state of the job market in too many of our small communities.

The world of information technology, the Internet, is equally important to our towns and to our homes. Connecting that last mile will be a formidable challenge. Telecommunications is vital to rural America's economic development. It is vital to our schools and our hospitals, and it is vital to our businesses. Business must have access to deal with their customers and suppliers; students and individuals need access to the Internet to communicate, to acquire knowledge and develop skills to maintain our competitiveness.

I serve as the chairman of the Telecommunications Task Force of the Congressional Rural Caucus; and I am committed to working with other

Members of Congress, with the industry and with the administration, to ensure the availability of advanced telecommunications services in our rural communities. Many of the challenges confronting rural America can be met and overcome with the commitment that adequate resources are directed toward the development of rural communities, and access to telecommunications is one of those critical issues we face.

By bringing quality health care, education, information, and commerce to rural families and to business, an advanced telecommunication infrastructure can overcome any disadvantages of distance and low density.

By providing one voice for rural America, the congressional caucus will ensure communities remain viable and competitive. Our job in Congress is to raise the awareness of rural issues to preserve this way of life. As Congress debates important issues like access to telecommunications, we must address the opportunities and challenges that we face in rural America. Rural America across this country needs to demonstrate to ourselves and to the rest of the world our commitment for a better life. I urge my colleagues to join us in this effort to fight and to speak out for rural America.

EXPRESSING SUPPORT FOR HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE TO THE REPUBLIC OF MOZAMBIQUE

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

Ms. MILLENDER-McDONALD. Mr. Speaker, we just passed out of this House tonight H.R. 431, a very important piece of legislation, expressing support for humanitarian assistance to the Republic of Mozambique. I want to commend our government, nongovernmental organizations, and other nations for their response to the flood crisis in Mozambique. Cyclone Eline devastated that poor country, driving residents from their homes, children from their schools, shopkeepers from their businesses, and doctors and patients from their clinics. The only refuge was roofs, treetops and scraps of land protruding here and there from swirling waters. One young woman, Sophie Pedro, gave birth to a baby girl in a tree top where she had sought refuge for 4 days.

The heavy toll on the population and massive destruction of the infrastructure, however, have dwarfed these early emergency relief-and-rescue efforts.

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The flood waters have destroyed a decade-long economic recovery undertaken by Mozambique. Before these

disastrous floods, Mr. Speaker, the government had embarked upon sustained efforts to manage public resources better, improve the climate for investors, and promote private sector development. Mozambique had complied with the Structural Adjustment Program requirements, the Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility, and more recently the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative.

Last year, Mozambique completed the requirement to receive \$3.7 billion in debt reduction from external creditors, the largest reduction under the HIPC Initiative. Prudent fiscal and monetary policies and structural reforms increased international confidence in Mozambique's economy, reflected in higher long-term capital inflows and a stable exchange rate.

However, the disaster now will cost the country nearly all their hard-won economic gains. It will take hundreds of millions of dollars to rebuild the transportation and communication infrastructure, schools, clinics, homes, and businesses.

While Mozambique has been one of Africa's economic success stories, the floods threaten to return the country to conditions reminiscent of the command economy of the 1970s and the ravaging civil war of the 1980s.

To sustain its economic gains, Mozambique will need more than emergency aid and logistical relief. It will need long-term reconstruction and rehabilitation assistance. Already the multilateral institutions are considering new construction loans. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, these new loans will only compound Mozambique's existing debt burden, even with the substantial reductions under the HIPC program.

I applaud the President's decision to forgive Mozambique's remaining bilateral debt and encourage this Congress, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund to follow suit. Mozambique has played by the rules. They have restructured their economy, adhered to all conditionalities imposed by the multilateral financial institutions, and stayed the course with their fiscal and monetary policies.

The Mozambican people have made great short-term sacrifice for the long-term future prosperity of their country. If we do not address this current crisis with speedy and substantial current multilateral debt forgiveness, we will betray our social contract with the men, women, and children of Mozambique.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, we should look at a permanent relief force so we will not have to come before this body every time a disaster occurs.

CONGRESSIONAL RURAL CAUCUS/ RURAL TRANSPORTATION

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. DEAL of Georgia). Under a previous

order of the House, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. NEY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. NEY. Mr. Speaker, tonight I rise, along with my colleagues before me, to promote the kick-off of the Congressional Rural Caucus. I am proud to be a member of this caucus, which will work to better represent the interests of rural America by raising awareness of the needs of communities in these areas.

Mr. Speaker, my district, the 18th Congressional District of Ohio, is mostly rural, made up of people who proudly support the coal and steel industries, agriculture, and various other manufacturing industries. A native of the Ohio Valley, I have represented this district for a number of years, both as a State Representative and a State Senator, and now in Congress. I am well aware of the needs of the people who live there.

Tonight previously Members heard from colleagues who talked about education in rural America. We also heard about telecommunications. Tonight I want to focus on transit, but there are a lot of other needs today. There is housing.

We were visited by Bruce Veldt from the Ohio Department of Development who was talking to us about rural housing initiatives. We have had many people who are concentrating on the things that are important, and they are coming from the State of Ohio. They are communicating more. But I think this kick-off of our Congressional Rural Caucus is something that is going to be able to work across all 50 States to help rural America.

Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, too often rural communities have been an afterthought in Federal policy discussions and program development. The establishment of the bipartisan Congressional Rural Caucus, which currently has 112 members, will help to ensure that the interests of rural America are properly represented in Federal policy and legislation.

One area that undoubtedly exhibits the need for better representation of rural America is the transportation arena. Rural areas are often left out of negotiations when State transportation planning is being planned, with most of the decision-making power being left to the State and metropolitan officials, who have a place at the table.

In June 1998, when Congress passed the landmark Transportation Equity Act for the 21st century, better known as TEA-21, it marked the beginning of a new era in rural transportation. In addition to providing more Federal funds to help improve the infrastructure and services in rural America, the new law reinforces the intermodal philosophy and takes an important first step in strengthening the role local officials wield in the decision-making process and planning process.