

mutual outpourings of assistance when destructive earthquakes struck both countries last year. Military cooperation between Greek and Turkish forces—which had been stalled by intractable disputes over the Aegean sea, airspace, sovereignty, militarization of islands, and Cyprus, since the early 1970s—could pave the way for further progress on bilateral problems. Although the two allies have not yet tackled these complex issues, their commitment to cooperation in NATO maneuvers in the eastern Mediterranean is an encouraging sign.

Turkey made the first gesture on Aegean disputes this time by agreeing to file flight plans for its military aircraft participating in the exercise, a Greek demand even though the 1944 International Civil Aviation Organization accords do not require military aircraft flying in international airspace to do so. Greece accepted the goodwill offer by allowing the flight plans to be filed in NATO's southern region headquarters in Italy, rather than in Athens.

Turkey is one of the staunchest NATO allies and continues to field the largest standing army in the Alliance after the United States. Turkey anchored NATO's southern flank from the time it joined the Alliance in 1952 through the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991. Turkey hosted NATO's southeastern land and air commands at Izmir, while counterpart headquarters in Larissa, Greece, were stood up just last fall. Turkey has played consistently in NATO exercises in the region, despite Greek boycotting of the maneuvers over disputed Aegean airspace and militarization of its islands.

Greek-Turkish military cooperation in NATO's southern region is crucial for the Alliance to shore up its defenses in the eastern Mediterranean, respond to potential crises in the Middle East, and promote stability in the Balkan region. Our allies in the eastern Mediterranean have already become the new front line states for post Cold War conflicts, such as the Gulf War, the conflict in Bosnia, and the war in Kosovo. Further military gestures to circumvent longstanding Aegean disputes, such as Turkey's compromise this time, will strengthen bilateral relations between two key allies and bolster NATO's ability to defend its southern region in the 21st century.

HIGH NEED HOSPITAL MEDICARE RATE RELIEF ACT

HON. JOHN J. DUNCAN, JR.

OF TENNESSEE

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, June 23, 2000

Mr. DUNCAN. Mr. Speaker, I recently introduced the High Need Hospital Medicare Rate Relief Act of 2000 to address the unintended consequences of the Balanced Budget Act of 1997. It had a disproportionate impact on hospitals that serve especially large numbers of Medicare and Medicaid patients. These hospitals are located in our most rural communities and in our largest urban areas and include sole rural hospitals and large academic medical centers.

What they have in common is the overwhelming amount of care they provide to our Country's elderly and poor, insured and unin-

sured. It is their service mission that distinguishes them and now puts them at grave financial risk.

With the revenue stream heavily weighted toward Medicare and Medicaid, these 600 or so safety net hospitals are more dependent on federal and state reimbursement than any other hospitals. They have relatively few commercially insured patients, and therefore, little or no ability to offset Medicare costs. This financial problem is exacerbated by the large numbers of uninsured patients that rely on these same providers for care.

We are talking about the providers that make up the Nation's health care safety net. The High Need Hospital Medicare Rate Relief Act of 2000 defines these hospitals as ones whose combined Medicare and Medicaid inpatient days exceed 65 percent and whose Medicare disproportionate share percentage exceeds 40 percent. The Act targets relief to these high-need hospitals through two separate payment mechanisms.

First, this bill directs the Secretary of Health and Human Services to calculate a qualifying hospital's market basket update—or inflation adjustment—for federal fiscal years 2001 and 2002 as if there had not been a 1.8 percentage reduction in the market basket adjustment for fiscal year 2000. By restoring the rate base at these hospitals for purposes of calculating future year rates, this proposal would partially offset the accumulated cuts inflicted by the Balanced Budget Agreement, which are compounded each year due to Medicare's rate setting methodology.

Second, since there is no uniform measurement of uncompensated care, this legislation provides a 2 percent adjustment to the Medicare inpatient rates of high-need hospitals to reflect the added costs incurred by providing large amounts of uncompensated care. The rate supplement is authorized for three years, with the expectation that new federal and state insurance initiatives will gradually reduce the number of uninsured patients.

The High Need Hospital Medicare Relief Act of 2000 targets relief to safety net hospitals across the Country from Tennessee to California and ensures that vulnerable patients have continued access to essential health care services.

THE NATIONAL AND COMMUNITY SERVICE AMENDMENTS ACT OF 2000

HON. CHRISTOPHER SHAYS

OF CONNECTICUT

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, June 23, 2000

Mr. SHAYS. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of the National and Community Service Amendments Act of 2000 which I have introduced today with my colleague from New Jersey, Mr. ANDREWS.

As a strong fiscal conservative, I believe National Service is one of the wisest and least costly investments our government can make. Every \$1 spent on AmeriCorps generates \$1.66 in benefits to the community; every full-time AmeriCorps member generates an average of 12 additional volunteers.

AmeriCorps is one of the most successful experiments in state and local control the federal government has ever embarked upon: two-thirds of AmeriCorps funding goes directly to Governor-appointed state commissions which then make grants to local non-profits.

Through service, Americans of all ages gain a sense of commitment to their community and their country which will prove valuable for their entire lives.

Since 1994 more than 150,000 Americans have served as AmeriCorps members in all 50 states. They have taught, tutored, or mentored more than 2.5 million students; recruited, supervised, or trained more than 1.6 million volunteers; built or rehabilitated more than 25,000 homes; provided living assistance to more than 208,000 senior citizens; and planted more than 52 million trees.

National Service is a powerful force in every state in the Union. This year, my state alone has nearly 14,000 National Service members solving problems and helping people. Of that total, AmeriCorps is providing 790 people the opportunity to dedicate a year to community service, Learn and Serve America creates the opportunity for 6,500 students from kindergarten through college to dedicate their time, and the National Senior Service Corps brings together 6,300 seniors to contribute their time as Foster Grandparents, Senior Companions or Retired and Senior Volunteers.

The National and Community Service Amendments Act of 2000 reauthorizes the Corporation for National Service and the programs it administers: the National Senior Service Corps, AmeriCorps, and Learn and Serve America.

This bill has been drafted in close consultation with more than 200 community service groups. It is a simple extension of the existing program, with a few key improvements.

This bill codifies the cost-cutting Grassley agreement reached in 1996 under which the Corporation lowered its average cost per AmeriCorps member to \$15,000 for Fiscal Year 1999, including a \$4,725 education award to finance college or repay student loans, and a mere \$7,421 for a living allowance.

The reauthorization expands the cost-cutting "Education Award Only" model, through which the Corporation provides only the education award, and the sponsoring organization provides all other support.

It also codifies the existing prohibition on AmeriCorps grants to federal agencies and expands the type of student loans that may be repaid with the education award.

This bill broadens the scope of the National Senior Service Corps by lowering the minimum age from 60 to 55 so more volunteers may participate, and by increasing the definition of "low income" from 125 to 150 percent of the poverty line so more can be served by Foster Grandparents and Senior Companions.

These improvements will make National Service better than it has ever been.

AmeriCorps members are not only helping meet the immediate needs in our communities, they are also teaching, through their example, the importance of serving and helping others. As a former Peace Corps volunteer, I know the significance of this long-lasting lesson.