

overhauling and greatly improving the G.I. Bill. Our legislation is modeled on the Commission's recommendation, and I am encouraged and hopeful that the new Administration will work with us to pass this important bill. Clearly, Sec. Principi's appointment is a positive development.

America's military supremacy has been unquestioned since the end of the Cold War. In the Gulf War, Bosnia, and Kosovo we proved that our armed forces set the world standard for excellence. While much of our battlefield success has to do with the superiority of our weapons systems, weapons are only as good as the people who operate them. Our success on the battlefield boils down to the quality and ability of our troops.

Today, Mr. Speaker, the military is having increasing difficulty recruiting the quantity and quality of troops it needs to meet today's challenges. Recruiting shortfalls are a serious problem, and as statistics have grown worse, recruiting budgets have soared. In addition to new advertising campaigns, the services have resorted to gimmicks, including sponsoring drag racers, deploying psychedelic humvees, and offering emergency cash giveaways. I do not criticize the armed forces for these efforts, but they highlight the need for a greater, more effective recruiting tool. The best recruiting tool is education, and we would best help our armed forces by modernizing the military's primary education benefit, the Montgomery G.I. Bill.

The Department of Defense's Youth Attitude Tracking Studies (YATS) confirm that fewer young men and women are considering serving. This shouldn't come as a surprise. "Money for college" is the top reason young men and women choose to serve. College costs have quadrupled in the last 20 years, but the G.I. Bill hasn't. At the same time, more non-service financial assistance has become available, which has benefited society but not the military.

Today's G.I. Bill does not provide enough assistance to attract the number of high quality high school graduates the armed forces need, especially when considering the risks of service. This has forced the military to accept lower quality recruits. Statistics tell us that lower quality recruits, as measured by aptitude tests, have a much greater attrition rate. Troops that fail to make it through training or fulfill their service obligations cost taxpayers dearly.

The Montgomery GI Bill Improvements Act ensures that our all volunteer armed forces have the ability to attract quality recruits, and provides veterans with skills to better our economy and their lives. In exchange for four years of service, our legislation would provide servicemembers a benefit covering the full cost of tuition, fees and books and provide a subsistence allowance. Those opting for a shorter enlistment or enrolled in the current program would earn a basic benefit of \$900/month. Our legislation is not inexpensive, but we must invest to stay the best. The young men and women who will benefit from this legislation will have to earn it through service to our country.

Mr. Speaker, I strongly urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to join us in standing up for our armed forces, servicemembers and

veterans by supporting this much needed legislation.

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#### HIGH-ACHIEVEMENT FOR SILVER GROVE HIGH SCHOOL

### HON. KEN LUCAS

OF KENTUCKY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, February 6, 2001*

Mr. LUCAS of Kentucky. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in recognition of Silver Grove High School. This is a success story about a school in a high poverty district that has overcome adversity and has become one of the models in education reform.

Silver Grove High School is one of eight schools to be recognized by Kentucky's Commissioner of Education for its outstanding performance in Kentucky's state testing program. Silver Grove High performed so well that it has become a model of the best Kentucky's public schools have to offer.

I rise today to commend Silver Grove High School and all of the educators, staff and students of this fine educational institution. I ask you to join me in congratulating Silver Grove High School and the entire community of Silver Grove on their achievements.

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#### TRIBUTE TO MAYOR AND MRS. BILL HEXT

### HON. LARRY COMBEST

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, February 6, 2001*

Mr. COMBEST. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to commend Mayor Bill Hext and Jane Hext for their tremendous contributions to the city of Odessa, Texas. They were recently honored by being named "Outstanding Citizen(s) of the Year" for 2000.

The "Outstanding Citizen of the Year" award was established some 44 years ago to recognize those who dedicate their time, talent and resources to improve the quality of life for the community. Mayor and Mrs. Hext are more than civil servants, but also leaders and role-models.

Their commitment to public and community service and their adherence to family- and faithbased principles truly make them ideal for such an honor. Mayor Hext has been actively involved in such organizations as the Texas Municipal League, the MOTRAN policy advisory committee and Grace Christian Fellowship, serving in various leadership positions. He was inducted into the Business Hall of Fame in 1995 in recognition of his entrepreneurial ventures in two successful businesses and served as a member of the City Council for two years. Last May Mayor Hext was elected mayor of Odessa with the focus to continue the successes and build upon new opportunities in education, health care and the economy.

Mrs. Hext has dedicated her time and talents over the years to the Ector County Independent School District schools, Meals on Wheels, the Girl Scouts, Operation Blessing,

and the Boys and Girls Club of Odessa. Mayor and Mrs. Hext went above and beyond the call to service when they established the Hext Family Foundation committed to providing resources to foster educational, medical and faith-based organizations in Odessa.

It is with great pride that I commend Mayor Bill Hext and Jane Hext for their active involvement and leadership in the community and I congratulate them on being awarded the "Outstanding Citizen(s) of the Year."

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#### CELEBRATING THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF MRS. MARY COOK, CONGRESSIONAL LIAISON, V.A. REGIONAL OFFICE, DECATUR, GEORGIA

### HON. MAC COLLINS

OF GEORGIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, February 6, 2001*

Mr. COLLINS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor Mrs. Mary Cook for her contributions to the veterans of the State of Georgia. Over the past 34 years, Mrs. Cook, who works in the V.A. Regional Office in Decatur, Georgia, has gone above and beyond the call of duty. She has always assisted my office and other legislative offices in providing courteous, expeditious and judicial treatment of veterans in the Southeast area.

Mrs. Cook began her career in federal service in 1960 with the Federal Aviation Agency. In 1970, she came on board with the Veterans Administration, where she has remained for the last 30 years.

In all our dealings Mrs. Cook has never allowed cases to languish in government red tape. She has always been very aggressive in pursuing these cases and making sure our office was kept informed of all developments.

She has taken on many special projects over the years, including serving as the VA Regional Office Women's Veterans Coordinator from January 1993 to March 2000. As the WVC, Mrs. Cook interviewed, counseled and provided help to women veterans seeking specialized assistance. She also worked with the Women Veterans Committees at the Georgia VA Medical Centers to insure coordinated services and assistance were provided to women veterans.

Mr. Speaker, we often overlook the daily sacrifices and dedication of federal employees. Mrs. Cook is an example of a federal employee who not only takes pride in her work, but has a true dedication to the people she is charged with serving. As she retires from federal service and goes on to another phase in her life, please join me in congratulating her on a job well done and wishing her the very best in the future.

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#### TRIBUTE TO RETIRING CARRIER EXECUTIVE T. HUME LAIDMAN

### HON. JAMES T. WALSH

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, February 6, 2001*

Mr. WALSH. Mr. Speaker, today I want to congratulate a man from my New York's 25th