

These 77 million Americans share many of the same problems of big city residents—such as poverty, high unemployment, and chronic underemployment. But rural Americans face unique challenges because they are dispersed over hundreds and thousands of miles. And despite the similarity of some of the issues faced in urban and rural America, rural communities consistently get the short end of the stick when it comes to federal funding. And this is across the board in all agencies and all sectors—from economic development, to health care, to education and everything in between and beyond.

Now I represent a very rural district in Southern Missouri. And if you visited my district, I think many of you'd be amazed to see that white the American economy has been booming, communities in my district—like so many of our agricultural and rural communities across the nation—are being left behind.

The past several years have been very hard on American producers. And the hard times on the farm and ranch don't stop at the gate. These hard times impact rural main street, from the local shops, to the communities, schools and homes. The fact is, our rural communities are faced with a Catch-22 situation. They don't have the infrastructure needed to attract new and high-tech businesses. At the same time, they don't have the resources needed to invest in the infrastructure that can attract new and high-tech businesses.

The bottom line is that we simply must do all we can to ensure that rural communities have the tools they need to turn their challenges into real opportunities for growth and prosperity in the 21st century. Rural America is just too important to our nation to not do all we can. The Congressional Rural Caucus can play an important part in seeing this goal become a reality. After all, our rural American communities are our past, our present, and our future.

MINIMUM WAGE INCREASE ACT

SPEECH OF

HON. EARL POMEROY

OF NORTH DAKOTA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 9, 2000

Mr. POMEROY. Mr. Speaker, virtually every day we hear reports of our booming economy and the unprecedented economic expansion. Unemployment and inflation rates are at historic lows. Today we will debate the merits of a one-dollar pay raise for the American worker—a pay raise the American people overwhelmingly support, need and deserve.

The 1990s brought our nation's CEOs a 481% rise in pay while the average American worker saw an increase of only 28%. If the minimum wage earner's pay had increased at the same level as the CEOs, they would be now earning nearly \$46,000 a year.

In order to have the same purchasing power of the 1968 minimum wage, the current minimum wage would have to be raised to \$7.49 per hour. Further, the one-dollar wage increase we are debating would only restore the real value of the minimum wage to 1982 levels. As it stands, a working parent with two children will earn \$10,700 a year at the current minimum wage—\$3,200 below the poverty line.

When we debated the last minimum wage increase in 1996, many of my colleagues voiced fears that it would reduce the number of jobs in the workplace, particularly for those harder-to-place employees or welfare recipients moving back into the workforce. It is clear that in the four years since Congress passed the last wage hike, the opposite occurred: nearly 10 million new jobs were created, the unemployment rate dropped and employers are actually having trouble finding enough workers to fill job openings.

Mr. Speaker, this increase is about raising the standard of living for more than 10 million hard-working Americans. It is time that we stop delaying and pass this increase in the minimum wage.

TRIBUTE TO KRISTINE ELLIOT- THALMAN

HON. GARY G. MILLER

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, March 14, 2000

Mr. GARY MILLER of California. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to a fine public servant, Kristine Elliot-Thalman, who will be retiring this month from her distinguished career at the City of Anaheim, California. As part of her service to the City, especially for the last 13 years, she has headed intergovernmental affairs matters involving local, state, and federal initiatives that are so important to Anaheim's vital needs.

Mr. Speaker, I am especially honored to bring Kris Thalman to the attention of the U.S. House of Representatives, because on the very same day as her retirement, she is having a birthday as well and congratulations are doubly in order.

My colleagues in Congress, many of whom have had the pleasure to know and work with Kris through the years, wish her Godspeed in whatever endeavors she may choose in the future.

HONORING MICHELLE KATHERINE MIHIN

HON. JAMES L. OBERSTAR

OF MINNESOTA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, March 14, 2000

Mr. OBERSTAR. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize a special member of the staff of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, Michelle Katherine Mihin, who is leaving us this week to return to her home in Ohio and accept a position with the Charles Schwab organization, an exciting and richly deserved opportunity.

Originally from Youngstown, OH, Michelle came to the Washington area to attend Marymount University where she earned her Bachelor of Arts Degree in Political Science. Of particular relevance to us, Michelle was active for a number of years in, and served as President of, Marymount's Society for Political and Government Awareness. After graduation she stayed in the area and worked as an intern in the office of her Ohio Congressman, our colleague, JIM TRAFICANT.

Shortly thereafter in 1996, Michelle joined the Committee to work as a staff assistant

with both our Aviation and Railroad Subcommittees. During her time with us, she has earned a solid reputation for excellence and dedication in her work. What has especially impressed us is the initiative she has taken to reach beyond her assigned responsibilities. Michelle has always been ready to volunteer and see what jobs needed to be done and plunge in to help to do them no matter what the issue or hour of the day. As an avocation, she has become our unofficial "Social Director". If there is an occasion to celebrate or a staff member to bid farewell, Michelle is always ready to volunteer and put her organizational talents to work. Above all, we will miss the sparkle, enthusiasm and the laughter she brings to the Committee.

On many occasions I have quoted one of those gems of wisdom where the thought stays with you but the author's name does not: "Success is getting what you want, happiness is wanting what you get"—Michelle has earned both. I join with all Michelle's friends on the Committee in wishing her every success and happiness in her future endeavors.

IMPROVE THE QUALITY AND COST EFFICIENCY OF THE MEDICARE SYSTEM: SUPPORT REIMBURSE- MENT FOR CERTIFIED REG- ISTERED NURSE FIRST ASSIST- ANTS

HON. MAC COLLINS

OF GEORGIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, March 14, 2000

Mr. COLLINS. Mr. Speaker, today, I am pleased to introduce The Certified Registered Nurse First Assistant (CRNFA) Direct Reimbursement Act of 2000, which will provide equity in reimbursement for certified registered nurse first assistants who provide surgical first assisting services to Medicare patients.

Having received more advanced education and training in first assisting than any other non-physician provider, CRNFAs serve a vital role, directly assisting physicians with surgical procedures. Additionally, CRNFAs and RNFA's are the only providers—aside from the rare physician making house calls—who sometimes provide post-operative care by actually visiting patients at home following surgery. Thus, not only do CRNFAs have more clinical experience and education than other non-physician providers, but they also provide continuity of care to patients enabling higher quality and better patient outcomes.

CRNFAs also provide the additional benefit of cost efficiency. Health claims data from the Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA) reveal that physicians file more than 90% of the first assistant at surgery claims for Medicare reimbursement. Physicians receive 16 percent of the surgeon's fee for serving as a surgical first assistant. Under this legislation, CRNFAs will receive only 13.6 percent of the surgeon's fee for providing first assistant services. Furthermore, CRNFAs are equally as cost-effective as other non-physician first assisting providers who currently are reimbursed at 13.6 percent of the surgeon's fee for first assisting. Use of CRNFAs would, therefore, be a high quality yet cost-effective alternative for the nation's health care delivery system, affording additional flexibility to surgeons, hospitals and ambulatory surgery centers.

In closing, I would like to express my appreciation for the hard work of the Association of periOperative Registered Nurses (AORN) and its president, Patricia Seifert, RN, in bringing this issue forward. As a provider of health care, the CRNFA is a viable solution for controlling rising health care costs. Working in collaborative practice with surgeons, CRNFAs are cost-effective to the patient and to the health care delivery system. I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting equity for certified registered nurse first assistants by co-sponsoring The Certified Registered Nurse First Assistant Direct Reimbursement Act of 2000.

HONORING MICHAEL VICK

HON. ROBERT C. SCOTT

OF VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, March 14, 2000

Mr. SCOTT. Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I take this time to acknowledge the accomplishments of one of Newport News, Virginia's hometown heroes, Michael Vick, who recently led the Virginia Tech Hokies to this year's Sugar Bowl. His leadership and humanity during this exciting battle of champions continue to make a lasting impression on the minds of many in Newport News and indeed throughout Virginia.

Michael's talent on the field is more than evident. His remarkable athletic achievements as quarterback for the Hokies included being named Big East Conference Offensive Player

of the Year and Rookie of the Year, Player of the Year by Virginia's sports information directors for the Division I all-state football team, and being named to the all-state team. To top off this impressive list, Michael led the Nation in pass efficiency and earned third place in the Heisman Trophy balloting.

Although Michael has gained national prominence for his athletic achievements, he remains well aware that he is a role model to young people in the local community. As a graduate of Warwick High School in Newport News, he returns often to speak with young students. Michael encourages them to set goals and work hard to achieve success. In doing so, he displays humility and an appreciation for his own accomplishments. These are the same skills he champions on the field and in the classroom at Virginia Tech where he is a sophomore studying criminal justice.

The City of Newport News will join with Michael's family and friends to salute him and celebrate his accomplishments throughout the weekend of March 17. These activities include a student assembly at his alma mater, where his high school football jersey number will be retired. The program also includes a recognition dinner and a community rally.

In a time where we are inundated with negative media accounts of our Nation's youth and sports figures, Michael shines as a positive example that hard work, determination and perseverance do, in fact, equal success. Newport News will long remember his outstanding role as an athlete and a gentleman while leading the Hokies to a national championship game. I join with the citizens of Newport News, Virginia in looking forward to Michael's continued legacy of success.

A TRIBUTE—RECOGNIZING RACHEL OWEN

HON. SCOTT McINNIS

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, March 14, 2000

Mr. McINNIS. Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a moment to recognize the accomplishments of one of Colorado's bright youth, and participant in the JASON Project in Houston, TX, Rachel Owen. In doing so, I would like to honor this teenager for her academic accomplishments.

As a student in middle school, Rachel became very active in the Science Outreach Center in Carbondale, CO. She then became an Argonaut in the JASON Project and from there, was chosen to attend a program at NASA in Houston. She is the first student from the Roaring Fork Valley to participate in this program.

Rachel is active in the Kids Teaching Kids program through the Science Outreach Center. She is also an exemplary student, receiving A's throughout her academic career. Her peers and teachers recognized her great accomplishments and held a pep rally in her honor.

It is with this, Mr. Speaker, that I say thank you to Rachel Owen on a truly exceptional accomplishment at the age of 14. If we had more citizens like her, I am certain that we would live in a very harmonious place.