

STATEMENT BY DUSTY TALLMAN, PRESIDENT,
COLORADO ASSOCIATION OF WHEAT GROWERS
TO FORUM ON AGRICULTURE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

On behalf of Colorado's wheat growers I wish to thank you for your continued support—in good times as well as bad. We especially appreciate your leadership and commitment.

While it may sound like a broken record, the farm crisis continues to impact the lives of wheat growers every day. USDA figures show that Colorado wheat prices are averaging only \$2.20 per bushel so far this marketing year. Wheat prices are now at 45 percent of the high achieved in the 1995-96 market year. Wheat prices this last summer hit a 22-year record low. That's worse than anything we say in the early 1980's—the era that saw numerous farm foreclosures and massive farm aid. And wheat prices have actually dropped another 22 cents per bushel since last summer.

After three years of low prices, the farm crisis is not going away. USDA's best analysts have predicted that wheat prices will not improve without some sort of adverse weather problem somewhere in the world. USDA will update its price projections at this year's Outlook Forum in late February. However, current estimates predict another 18 months of low wheat prices.

In the face of continued financial stress, some have started to blame the 1996 Farm Bill. While the Bill did not prevent this disaster, it is not fair to claim that it caused it. Colorado wheat growers support the concept of "Freedom to Farm." We like having greater flexibility and the risk associated with it. Today's crisis would have been much more devastating had we been forced to abide by the old, top-down management of previous farm bills.

However, while we do not want "Freedom to Farm" repealed, there is clearly a need to improve federal farm policy before more farmers are forced off their land. The 1996 Farm Bill lacks a reliable farm safety net. With no floor, wheat prices continue to drop.

The Colorado Association of Wheat Growers (CAWG) believes that we must add a country-cyclical economic assistance payment to the farm bill. For two years, we have relied on emergency spending to provide the assistance we need. This ad hoc system should be replaced with a statutory payment triggered by low prices.

The National Association of Wheat Growers (NAWG) is currently developing an outline for just such a payment. The plan will be finalized at the NAWG annual convention in February and presented during the House Agriculture Committee's field hearings this spring and summer.

There are also other things you and your colleagues can do today to help wheat growers. We continue to await congressional action on tax reform, Permanent Normal Trade Relations with China; crop insurance reform and sanction reform.

I am pleased to be with you today and pledge the support of CAWG to help you find real solutions.

Overall, Mr. Speaker, it was a good forum. The information derived must be used to ensure agriculture is not forgotten.

As the House prepares to reauthorize the 1996 Farm Bill the conclusion of the Colorado agriculture forum should be considered by our colleagues.

INTRODUCTION OF CARE 21

HON. NICK J. RAHALL II

OF WEST VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 30, 2000

Mr. RAHALL. Mr. Speaker, today I am introducing legislation to restore our Nation's historic commitment to insuring lifetime health care for retired coal miners. Joining me in introducing this bill, which will be known as CARE 21, is a bipartisan group of our colleagues: BOB NEY, SPENCER BACHUS, RICK BOUCHER, TIM HOLDEN, RON KLING, ALAN MOLLOHAN, JOHN MURTHA, TED STRICKLAND, and BOB WISE.

Enactment this year of CARE 21, the "Coal Accountability and Retired Employee Act for the 21st Century," is necessary if we are to avoid seeing a curtailment in health care coverage for thousands of retired coal miners and their widows. Indeed, this would not be the first time that Congress has acted in this matter. In 1992, in what is known as the "Coal Act" enacted as part of the Energy Policy Act, Congress established the UMWA Combined Benefit Fund (CBF) combining the union's 1950 and 1974 benefit plans. This action came in response to changes in the coal industry which created a large class of 'orphaned' miners whose benefits were no longer being paid by an active coal company. A key feature of the Coal Act was the financing of orphaned miner health care costs through an annual transfer of a portion of the interest which accrues to the unappropriated balance in the Abandoned Mine Reclamation Fund.

Simply put, in restoring abandoned coal mine lands we must not abandon the retired coal miner.

The Coal Act was working well, health care for retirees whose former employers could be identified would be financed by premiums paid by those companies while to date, \$193 million in reclamation fund interest and a one-time \$68 million additional appropriation has financed orphaned miner care.

However, a rash of recent adverse court decisions have been rendered which once again is threatening the financial integrity of the program. Among them, what is known as the "Chater" decision which overturned the Social Security Administration's premium determination reducing premiums by 10 percent. Another court decision ordered the CBF to refund about \$40 million in contributions. And the Supreme Court's decision in the Eastern Enterprise case added some 8,000 retirees to the orphaned miner rolls. The result: Without a new source of funds, the CBF will face a cash shortage beginning next year forcing the curtailment and ultimately the cessation of health care coverage for some 70,000 retirees and widows whose average age is 78.

CARE 21 takes a relatively simple and straightforward approach to addressing this impending crisis. First, it would transfer the amount of interest that is currently languishing in the Abandoned Mine Reclamation Fund to the CBF that was not previously made available for orphaned miner health care. This would provide an immediate infusion of roughly \$172 million. Second, it would lift the restriction in current law that reclamation fund interest can only be used for orphaned miner health care. This action would serve to cover future shortfalls in the CBF.

I would note that interest accrues to the Abandoned Mine Reclamation Fund at a rate of about \$83 million a year. Meanwhile, there is a \$1.7 billion unappropriated balance in the Fund. CARE 21 in no way adversely affects the abandoned mine reclamation program. The principal remains intact for that effort, and is fueled by annual reclamation fees assessed on every ton of mined coal which finances the program.

As such, one of the key features of CARE 21 is that the general taxpayer is not being called upon to pay for retired coal miner health care, but rather, the coal industry itself would provide for this coverage through the interest which accrues to the fees it pays into the Abandoned Mine Reclamation Fund.

Mr. Speaker, I noted earlier there is a historical commitment to providing health care for retired coal miners. This is a unique situation in that what would normally be a matter solely for the private sectors is not in this instance. The genesis for this situation dates back to 1946 in an agreement between then-UMW President John L. Lewis and the Federal Government to resolve a long-running labor dispute. At the time, President Truman had ordered the Interior Secretary to take possession of all bituminous coal mines in the country in an effort to break a United Mine Workers of America strike. Eventually, Lewis and Secretary Julius Krug reached an agreement that included an industry-wide, miner controlled health plan.

In fact, the 1992 Coal Act itself was formulated partly on the basis of recommendations from the Coal Commission, established by former Labor Secretary Libby Dole, which in 1990 recommended a statutory obligation to help finance the UMWA's Health Benefit Funds.

Mr. Speaker, the people covered by this health care program spent their careers producing the energy which powered this Nation to greatness. We must not forsake them. We must not cast them adrift in their later years, robbed of the health care they so desperately need.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. JACK METCALF

OF WASHINGTON

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 30, 2000

Mr. METCALF. Mr. Speaker, on March 28, I was excused from the business of the House. Had I been here, I would have voted "yes" on rollcall vote 76 (H.R. 2412); "yes" on rollcall vote 77 (H. Con. Res. 292); "yes" on rollcall vote 78 (H. Con. Res. 269); "yes" on rollcall vote 79 (H.R. 5), The Senior Citizens' Freedom to Work Act.

2000 EMERGENCY SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATIONS ACT

SPEECH OF

HON. VAN HILLEARY

OF TENNESSEE

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 29, 2000

The House in Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union had under

consideration the bill (H.R. 3908) making emergency supplemental appropriations for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2000, and for other purposes:

Mr. HILLEARY. Mr. Chairman, I am very pleased today to support this important amendment, which will help clean up methamphetamine labs and come to the aid of law enforcement across the country.

Last year, funding was ended for this support program, and the funds were entirely diverted into training. I feel that decision was a mistake. Local law enforcement needs this money directly in order to offset the high costs associated with meth lab cleanups. They need it in order to more effectively fight the war on drugs and clean up the contamination and environmental problems these labs leave behind.

In my own district, individuals like Sheriff Eddie Bass of Giles County in Tennessee have effectively used these dollars in the past. Working in conjunction with the Drug Enforcement Agency, Sheriff Bass has made great strides in reducing the number of methamphetamine labs in Giles County. But cleaning up these labs is expensive, very expensive for rural law enforcement agencies that have limited resources to begin with. Our rural law enforcement officers, like Sheriff Bass need our help to combat this national problem.

Sheriff Bass has already implemented state-of-the-art programs and facilities. I personally have toured the local jail in Giles County and can say from first-hand experience that it is deserving of every accolade as one of the model examples in the state. Now, I also want to provide him, and outstanding officials like him, the ability to continue the model meth lab cleanup programs that they had in place.

We must give officials like Sheriff Bass the support that they need. Otherwise, we will be sending them a message that it may not be financially worth their trouble to stop the production in these labs. Let's instead send a message to drug dealers and producers that we will stand behind the efforts of federal and local law enforcement in the war against drugs in our communities.

I encourage all of my colleagues to support this amendment so that these dollars will once again be able to be used by local law enforcement officials like Sheriff Bass.

VETERANS' HISTORIAN AL KADY PRESERVES CENTRAL NEW JERSEY'S CIVIL WAR HERITAGE

HON. RUSH D. HOLT

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 30, 2000

Mr. HOLT. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in recognition of two veterans, of two wars, 80 years apart. Aaron Hush is an African-American Civil War veteran buried in South Brunswick. Al Kady is a World War II veteran and the military historian for the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 9111 who located Hush's burial ground in South Brunswick, NJ. I commend Mr. Kady for his commitment to locating and preserving a significant piece of New Jersey history.

Aaron Hush was a resident of nearby Franklin Township. Upon his death on January 20, 1916, he was laid to rest in the Sand Hills Area of South Brunswick Township, also known as the Thompson Plot.

The Record of Officers and Men of New Jersey in the Civil War has recorded that Aaron Hush served from February 29, 1864 until August 22, 1865, in the 32nd regiment of the United States Colored Troops. He is one of nearly 3,000 New Jersey African-American soldiers to serve in the Civil War.

The Emancipation Proclamation permitted African-American soldiers like Aaron Hush to enlist, be drafted, or receive bonuses to serve as replacements. Records reveal that 2,872 New Jersey African-Americans wore the uniform of the Union Army. There were 469 African-American casualties from New Jersey.

Mr. Kady has brought to life the importance of the Hush burial ground. He has worked tirelessly to ensure that the cemetery is preserved and maintained. He is to be commended for his dedication and hard work. As a veteran of World War II and past commander of VFW Post 9111, he knows the importance of maintaining sites important to our national heritage.

Mr. Kady will present a copy of Aaron Hush's discharge papers to the South Brunswick Township Council on April 11 for display in the township. This is a wonderful opportunity for us to learn about our local heritage, as well as our national history.

Mr. Speaker, VFW Post 9111 military historian Al Kady represents what is right with central New Jersey and the United States of America. His discovery and preservation of Hush's gravesite is a wonderful reminder to the community and the country at large. Kady has served his country in times of great national crisis and continues to do so by preserving history in central New Jersey.

This is an important example of what makes America special. A veteran of one war preserving the memory of a veteran of a different war; our common history bridging our individual differences.

I urge my colleagues to join me in commending Mr. Kady for his hard work and dedication to the preservation of historical landmarks throughout central New Jersey.

SUPPORT FOR THE CRUSADER

HON. J.C. WATTS, JR.

OF OKLAHOMA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 30, 2000

Mr. WATTS of Oklahoma. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of the Army's new advanced field artillery system, the Crusader. When fielded in 2008, Crusader will provide unprecedented fire support capability to the U.S. Army.

The DoD budget requests \$355.5 million in Fiscal Year 2001 to continue the development of the Crusader system.

Field artillery is the one combat capability where the United States significantly lags behind its allies and potential adversaries. While the Abrams tanks and the Bradley fighting vehicle is recognized as the best in the world, the U.S. field artillery ranks 9th in the world in terms of systems and the current howitzers is outperformed by at least four more modern foreign systems. With Crusader that balance will be reversed.

In anticipation of the fielding of the Crusader, the Army dramatically reduced its field artillery organization by eliminating six howitzers from each cannon battalion. Additionally, the Army later reduced the number of tanks, infantry fighting vehicles and soldiers in its mechanized divisions. Again, this was done because of the offsetting capabilities of the Crusader advanced field artillery system. Should we not follow through with fielding the Crusader, then all these systems and soldiers would have to be added back to the Army organization and force structure to maintain its combat capability.

In recent testimony before our committee, General Shinseki, the Army Chief of Staff, emphasized the importance of the Crusader to the Army, both its counterattack corps and its transformation forces. He is fully supportive of its development and fielding and was the major architect of its modification to become more supportive of the Army transformation initiative and its objective force. General Shinseki insisted upon the maintenance of its key combat capabilities, (range, rate-of-fire, mobility and survivability) while enhancing its global, strategic deployability. With changes that will reduce the Crusader's weight to approximately 40 tons, two can be airlifted to any theater in the world on a single C5B aircraft. Those two howitzers will provide more fire support capability than six of today's Paladin systems. That six-gun Paladin unit with its 94 soldiers, like the one sent to Kosovo in Task Force Hawk, required 8 C-5B sorties to deploy, while a smaller, but more lethal Crusader capability would include just 31 soldiers and need only 4 C-5B sorties.

Mr. Speaker, the Army needs the Crusader to be developed and fielded without delay to enhance its capability to rapidly and globally respond to threats to the nation's interests and ultimately to win the nation's wars.

TRIBUTE TO THE NEW LOTHROP HORNETS GIRLS' VOLLEYBALL TEAM

HON. DAVE CAMP

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 30, 2000

Mr. CAMP. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to Michigan's new girl's highschool volleyball State Champions, the New Lothrop Hornets.

At the start of a long and challenging season, New Lothrop's girl's volleyball team set out to achieve their goal of being the best. They believed in themselves and knew that with their heart, drive and tremendous teamwork the state championship was within their grasp. With the support of their fans and the community these athletes fought a hard battle, never once doubting their amazing ability. With their motto "Together we can," the women exemplified teamwork. Their combining passion for victory made them unstoppable.

At the recent championship match, the Hornets proved victorious and their coach Sheri Warner hoisted the championship trophy for their fans. This tremendous victory was well deserved. They have lead their community to new athletic heights and have become wonderful examples of good sportsman. They may now pride themselves not only with the spectacular honor of being Michigan's top women's volleyball team, but also carrying the title of New Lothrop's first prep volleyball champions.