

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 United States 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 enjoy 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.

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

(Mr. PALLONE addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentle-

woman from North Carolina (Mrs. CLAYTON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mrs. CLAYTON addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Missouri (Mrs. EMERSON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mrs. EMERSON addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

EXPRESSING SUPPORT FOR HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE TO THE REPUBLIC OF MOZAMBIQUE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman 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 edu-

cation 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 of 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.

As a member of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, I was privileged to have served on the TEA-21 conference committee. I am proud to have fought for the language which increased the presence of local rural officials in the transportation and planning process. This is good for rural America and it is good for transportation.

However, challenges abound in rural areas. The needs still greatly outpace Federal, State, and local resources. I would like to just give a few examples.

One in every 14 households in rural America is without a vehicle, despite being the most prevalent mode of transportation. Nearly 38 percent of county roads are inadequate for current travel, and nearly half of major rural bridges are structurally deficient.

This is significant, as 81 percent or 3.1 million miles of the Nation's public highway system exist in rural America.

While still an important mode of transportation, inner city bus service has almost completely disappeared off the face of rural America. In 1965, 23,000

communities were linked together with daily bus service. As we start the new century, that number has dwindled to a mere 4,500, from 23,000 down to 4,500. Those are communities with rural routes. Too often the rural routes are the ones that are eliminated.

This decline has implications, not only for passenger service, but also for essential freight services, as intercity buses often provide the only daily package express service in remote rural communities.

Public transit is becoming a vital source of transportation in rural areas, especially as disabled and elderly populations rise. Yet, 38 percent of rural residents live in an area without any form of public transportation. This can be directly linked to the fact that less than 10 percent of Federal spending for public transportation goes to rural communities.

Air service is often seen as an essential factor in attracting and retaining businesses in rural communities, but the high cost of subsidizing service limits its availability. On this, the eve of the day when Congress is scheduled to take up the Aviation Investment and Reform Act, or known as AIR-21, the conference report, a bill which will reauthorize and increase funding for Federal aviation programs, as well as provide improved passenger service to rural areas, on this eve, I wish to thank the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. SHUSTER) and the rest of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure who, on a bipartisan basis, have recognized the needs of rural America when it comes to aviation.

TEA-21 does help ensure rural elected officials and communities are represented in the planning process, which is best described as the gateway for accessing Federal transportation funds. This will help States develop comprehensive plans that use our limited resources most wisely, as well as contribute to the economic and social growth of rural areas.

Even with the new TEA-21 provisions, however, rural elected officials are still on an uneven playing field with urban and state officials. That is why members of groups like the National Association of Counties, National League of Cities, National Association of Development Organizations and the American Public Works Association continue to advocate federal legislation that closes the equity gap in planning and programming.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, transportation is an essential component of addressing the needs of rural America. It not only connects people to jobs, health care and family in a way that enhances one's quality of life, but it also serves as the lifeline of the rural and national economies. I look forward to serving with the other members of the Congressional Rural Caucus and to bettering the lives of those we serve.

I just want to pay tribute to the rural caucus, who is going to absolutely make life better across rural America by their bipartisan effort.