

Florida. Our focus on constituent services and cutting through bureaucratic redtape has paid off. We have helped return almost \$2 million in benefits owed to Florida seniors and families, including more than half-a-million dollars to veterans.

While the numbers are impressive, the stories behind them are what really count. Stories like Kenneth McCray, a Vietnam veteran who was denied benefits by the VA until our office stepped in to help. In every vote and in every way, we always put the people of Florida first.

While working in Congress, the people of north Florida have never let me down. I have felt their love and support in each hug, whether at a press conference or along a parade route. I have witnessed their compassion after Hurricane Hermine, when neighbors helped neighbors clear debris and sheltered those in need. I have seen local leaders put partisanship aside to fight for our communities.

We call this the north Florida way, but we don't have a monopoly on that spirit. It is the essence of the American spirit. I have witnessed a bit of it here in Washington. Between campaigns and commercial breaks, I have seen that Republicans and Democrats can actually like one another. If we can begin talking to each other again instead of shouting at each other, we can move our country forward in a way that helps every American.

So, as I prepare to leave Congress, I offer up this parting advice to new and veteran Members. Take the time to form friendships, put partisanship aside, and always put the people you represent first.

Now that I have shared this advice, I would like to end my speech by saying thank you. Thank you to my committed staff, my family, and, most importantly, I want to thank the people of north Florida's Second Congressional District. I am so thankful to them for giving me the opportunity to serve. Running for Congress and serving in the House has been an enriching experience with many workdays, possum festivals, and parades along the way.

I am sad it is coming to an end, but this moment is bittersweet. I will always treasure the friendships and experience I have gained in Congress. I know that as this chapter closes, another opens, and I will continue to serve my community and the people of Florida for as long as I am able.

#### 75TH ANNIVERSARY OF PEARL HARBOR

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Utah (Mr. STEWART) for 5 minutes.

Mr. STEWART. Mr. Speaker, as I think all of us know, today marks the 75th anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor; a devastating event that took the lives of more than 2,300 Americans and ultimately led, of course, to the

United States' entrance into World War II.

Though it is painful to think of all the brave men and women we lost that day, I am grateful for this heroic generation of soldiers, including my own father, who served in defense of the freedoms of our country during World War II. I wear my father's wings. I have them on today. I wear them every day. My mom and dad love their country and they, like so many others, sacrificed so much. It was examples of heroes such as these that led me to make the decision when I was a young man to become a pilot in the Air Force.

I would like to take a moment and share the story of one brave Utahn, Mervyn Bennion, who was stationed at Pearl Harbor on the day of the attack. After graduating from high school in Salt Lake City, Bennion accepted his appointment to the United States Naval Academy, where he graduated near the top of his class. He later assumed command of the USS *West Virginia* in July of 1941.

The ship was moored with other vessels on Battleship Row on that Sunday morning. Just shy of 8 a.m., Japanese forces struck the USS *West Virginia* with at least six torpedoes and two bombs.

Under attack and struggling to organize a defense from the bridge, Captain Bennion was struck with shrapnel from one of these bombs; but, still, he continued to direct the ship's battle while using one of his hands to hold his own wounds closed. Several sailors attempted to convince him to go to the first-aid station and seek medical attention, but he refused to leave his post. Sadly, he later died from a loss of blood.

Captain Bennion was recognized with the Medal of Honor—our Nation's highest military honor—for his "conspicuous devotion to duty, extraordinary courage, and complete disregard for his own life."

Today, on the anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor, let us remember not only the brave men and women who lost their lives in that attack, but also those who have continued to fight for our freedoms for the last 75 years.

In dark and dangerous places all around the globe, American soldiers, sailors, and airmen are doing what they can to bring stability and safety to many parts of the world. We should remember them. We should thank them. We should keep them and their families in our prayers. What we have asked them to do is not easy. They deserve our gratitude and our respect.

#### CONGRATULATING COMPLETION OF THE FREEDMEN'S BUREAU RECORDS PROJECT

Mr. STEWART. Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a few minutes to congratulate the completion of the Freedmen's Bureau Records Project.

The Freedmen's Bureau was organized by Congress in 1865 at the conclusion of the Civil War. It offered assistance to freed slaves in a variety of ways. The Bureau opened schools to

educate the illiterate. It managed hospitals, it rationed food and clothing for the destitute, and it even solemnized marriages. In the process, it gathered priceless handwritten personal information on potentially 4 million African Americans.

Due to the work and commitment of over 25,000 volunteers, with the help of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and FamilySearch International, they have been able to uncover the names and stories of over 1.9 million freed slaves. In some cases, for the very first time, African Americans are able to discover their Civil War-era families through an online and searchable database.

I was especially pleased to attend an event yesterday where the newly indexed database of the Freedmen's Bureau Records was delivered to the Smithsonian's new National Museum of African American History and Culture.

If I could just divert for a moment, I would like to share a story from this experience from one of the leaders of the museum, and I hope he will forgive me for stealing his story and repeating it to you. This gentleman told of how his grandparents passed away when he was very young. He had no memory of his grandparents, except for going to his grandmother's house and watching her cook on some old tin cookie sheets.

But as he was able to, for the first time, research his own family records, he found the records of one of his ancestors who was a slave; and part of those records was an accounting of money that was paid to her and some of the things that she was able to purchase. One of them was a line which recorded that she paid 22 cents for a set of tin cookie sheets. What an emotional moment it was for him to have that connection now with his ancestors that he would not have been able to otherwise.

The Freedmen's Bureau Records Project allows families to discover their ancestors. It allows them to connect with them. It allows them to see the heroes among their ancestors that so many of them have.

I would like to congratulate and thank the thousands of volunteers who sacrificed their time in this wonderful project.

#### HONORING REID RIBBLE AND RICHARD HANNA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. BLUMENAUER) for 5 minutes.

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, I have been privileged to serve with many exceptional people during my tenure in Congress. This year, there are a number of my Democratic colleagues who are leaving who will be sorely missed. We just heard from one—GWEN GRAHAM. And LOIS CAPPS is in a chair in front of me and will be speaking soon.

Today I would like to take a moment to recognize two exceptional friends of mine on the other side of the aisle, Republicans who enriched my time in Congress and brought honor to this body. I rise today to speak of the service of RICHARD HANNA and REID RIBBLE. These two gentlemen represent small town America—rural Upstate New York, in the case of RICHARD; and Green Bay, Wisconsin, and surrounding environments in the case of REID.

They have a number of similarities. They are both hardworking, dedicated Members of this Chamber, who leave after only three terms. They are fiercely dedicated to their family, and family concerns figured heavily into their decision not to seek reelection.

They have both been very successful businesspeople, building their own enterprises; taking pride, in the case of REID, in the employment and terrific service from a roofing company; and RICHARD, founding and growing a construction enterprise.

Both are accomplished in a broad range of other areas. RICHARD is a pilot who travels across the country piloting his own plane. REID recently completed a motorcycle trip from Alaska, all the way across North America to the Florida Keys; most of it with his wife riding along with him.

They are both what normally would have been regarded as conservative Republicans. That description really belies their approach and their value to the institution. In some respects, they may actually entertain some libertarian leanings. But they believe in less interference, whether it is liberal overreach or zealotry of the other extreme. RICHARD is equally disdainful of government telling women what they and their doctors should do with women's bodies.

They are both deeply concerned about budgets and the economy—core Republican values in the past—with REID famously, in an exchange with some of his Tea Party constituents, indicating that they weren't fair to their grandchildren by refusing to even consider raising the gas tax to meet our transportation needs, and he made an eloquent case.

RICHARD has been a partner with me for the last two Congresses as we work with transportation stakeholders to try to inform one another and find common ground, working forward on solutions to common problems of rebuilding and renewing America.

I fully respect the decision of both gentlemen to follow their instincts and their families to the next phase of their careers, but their decision to end congressional service weakens this institution. The fact that we could not find enough incentive to keep them here, being productive and adding their wisdom and energy, says something about the challenges that this Congress faces in the years ahead.

Serving with them has been a remarkable pleasure. They have helped both Republicans and Democrats func-

tion a little better in a largely dysfunctional climate. They have both given good advice to their Republican colleagues, which I hope, as they leave, will find greater resonance with those who are left.

We are going through a great period of a national civics lesson, where Americans discover that elections have consequences, that facts really should matter, and voters need to be very discerning about the decisions they make.

RICHARD HANNA and REID RIBBLE have helped, through their service, to advance that civics lesson. I will be grateful to them for as long as I am a citizen, and I look forward to years of friendship in the future and maybe ways to advance that national civics lesson that they speak to so eloquently by their service.

□ 1030

#### WRDA CONFERENCE REPORT: WATER FOR CALIFORNIA; FIRE PROTECTION FOR TAHOE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California (Mr. McCLINTOCK) for 5 minutes.

Mr. McCLINTOCK. Mr. Speaker, the conference report on the Water Resources Development Act is the product of many hours of good faith negotiations between the House and the Senate and between Republicans and Democrats. Like any compromise, I don't like everything that is in it, but the net effect is an important step forward in protecting against the devastation of future droughts in California and catastrophic wildfire that threatens Lake Tahoe.

It provides \$335 million for desperately needed surface water storage. It opens a new era of hatcheries to provide for burgeoning populations of endangered fish species. It adds flexibility to the management of New Melones Reservoir and enables water transfers to assure that water can be more efficiently moved to where it is the most needed. It adds strong protection to northern California area of origin water rights. It expedites the review and approval of new projects. It updates flood control management criteria to make better use of our existing reservoirs.

I particularly want to highlight the provisions related to Lake Tahoe. For many years, we have spent enormous resources to adjust drainage in the basin to improve water clarity at the lake. The Senate version of the measure, which was introduced this session by Senators HELLER and FEINSTEIN, continued this effort; but the Heller-Feinstein bill neglected the most immediate environmental threat to Lake Tahoe, and that is catastrophic wildfire. The Senate bill had no provision for forest management, specifically for fire prevention.

The number of acres burned by wildfire in the Lake Tahoe Basin has in-

creased each decade since 1973, including a tenfold increase over the past decade. Eighty percent of the Tahoe Basin forests are now densely and dangerously overgrown. They are dying. At lower elevations, there are now four times as many trees as the land can support. Modeling by the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit warns that, in two-thirds of the forest, conditions now exist for flame size and intensity that are literally explosive. If a super fire of the size we have seen in other parts of the Sierra were to strike the Tahoe Basin, it could decimate this lake and its surroundings for a generation to come.

For this reason, Congressman AMODEI and I introduced a bill focused on fire prevention. This measure was specifically designed, after extensive input from fire districts throughout the Tahoe region, to reduce excess fuel before it burns. It provides for expediting collaborative fuel reduction projects consistent with the Lake Tahoe Land and Resource Management Plan, and it calls for funds generated by timber sales and other fee-based revenues to stay in the Tahoe Basin to provide for further fuels management and other improvements.

This was falsely portrayed by left-wing activists in the region as a substitute for the Senate bill. As Congressman AMODEI and I made clear repeatedly, it was designed to supplement that bill and fill a glaring deficiency that ignored the single greatest environmental hazard to the lake.

I am very pleased to note that the critical provisions of both bills—for lake clarity and fire prevention—are now in the conference report, thanks to bipartisan negotiations between House and Senate negotiators, most notably by Senator FEINSTEIN and House Majority Leader McCARTHY.

Unfortunately, in the last 48 hours, Senator BOXER has threatened to blindside this effort and destroy the fruit of these years of labor and endless hours of negotiation. She has threatened to assemble enough votes, not to put forward a positive and credible plan of her own to address these critical needs but, rather, to ruin the painstaking negotiations of many others just as they are coming to fruition.

In the last 4 years, the King Fire, the Butte Fire, the Rough Fire, and the Rim Fire have destroyed more than 1,000 square miles of forest in the Sierra Nevada. If we don't restore sound forest management for fire prevention in the Tahoe Basin now, the next fire could reduce its magnificent forests to cinders and clog the lake with ash and debris for decades to come. We can only pray that wiser heads prevail in the Senate and that this conference report is speedily adopted by both Houses and signed into law by the President.

#### MY TENURE AS RESIDENT COMMISSIONER

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from