things like smoking cessation clinics, which is import because smoking may lead to low-birth-weight babies, and low birth weight is the leading cause of infant mortality.''

When Bedford-Stuyvesant lost a majority of its financing in 1997 for Healthy Start, a federal program intended to help poor women have healthy babies, the infant mortality rate shot up, said Ngosi Moses, who runs the Brooklyn Perinatal Network. ''When resources became scarce, those rates rose,'' Ms. Ngosi said. ''This shows you when money is put into the community, good things happen, and when the money is pulled out, they go out.''

The $6.8 million that was spread over 22 programs in the early 1990's now has to cover 94 programs.

Brownsville is a neighborhood that a decade of economic expansion seems to have left untouched, where Healthy Start does not even exist. Rows of private homes are boarded up, and stores are scarce, save for a few of the dollar-bin variety.

The number of people, especially women, who are infected with the AIDS virus is ''astonishing,'' Dr. La Guardia said.

In most hospitals in the city, it is almost a given that a mother will leave the maternity ward with a healthy baby in her arms. In Brownsville, it is often just short of a victory.

Dr. La Guardia and her boss, Dr. Martin Gimovsky, who heads the obstetrics department at Brookdale, spend their days trying to unravel the histories and medical problems of the poor women who come through its clinics and labor and delivery floor each day. Many have never had a day of prenatal care.

On a recent Wednesday afternoon, during Dr. Gimovsky's clinic for women with high-risk pregnancies, dozens of women crammed into a waiting room. Almost all of them had had children before, including the recently homeless woman with AIDS who did not know her due date and had had virtually no prenatal care.

''You've gained weight,'' the resident said reassuringly.

''Well, I'm living somewhere now, so I am much more relaxed,'' said the woman, who would not give her name.

Cynthia Martinez, who has three children and is pregnant with a fourth, still calls her first baby, the one who was stillborn, by her name, Cynthia Michelle. ''She is 10 now,'' she said. The baby stopped moving at 7 months, and by the time Ms. Martinez delivered her, the doctors told her she was dead.

Distraught, Ms. Martinez said that she grabbed the baby of the woman she shared a room with when it was brought in for a feeding and refused to let her go. ''I just kept saying, 'You can't take this baby from me,'' Ms. Martinez, 24, said, ''I guess I thought she was mine. My mother told me that God had taken one from me but would give me more.''

Few patients at Brookdale, one of the city's most financially strained hospitals, pay the full price of their care, if they pay at all. Many are covered by the Prenatal Care Assistance Program, a state-financed program for poor pregnant women.

''We work with the patients no one wants,'' said Dr. Gimovsky, a plump and congenial doctor, who jokes easily with the teenage girls who fill the cramped clinic space. He recruited Dr. La Guardia by likening her work to that of the Peace Corps. ''You don't make any money at this,'' he said cheerfully, ''but this is what I want to do with my life.''

Although the infant mortality rates in Brownsville are historically lower than in Bedford-Stuyvesant, the March of Dimes earmarked the neighborhood for a $152,000 program to try to get more services to women. It is also pushing legislators in Albany to raise the maximum income women may earn and still qualify for prenatal care.

Dr. La Guardia has been at Brookdale for only a few months. Unlike Dr. Gimovsky, she is businesslike, almost stern, and deeply weary over the hospital's dire fiscal situation.

''I am still in shock,'' she said. Money would permit the hiring of more doctors and nurses. Ultrasound machines, standard equipment in any Manhattan obstetrics office, are scarce. A portable ultrasound, the latest in technology, is unheard of.

''Clearly, there are more dollars that need to be funneled into this area,'' Dr. La Guardia said. ''You wonder if there is any hope.''

SENIOR CITIZENS' FREEDOM TO WORK ACT PASSED TODAY

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. KUYKENDALL). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California (Mr. ROYCE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. ROYCE. Mr. Speaker, the Social Security earnings limit is a very outdated provision in the Tax Code. In fact, it goes back to the Great Depression. It was designed at that time to open up more jobs for young people during the Great Depression. The idea was that this would force seniors out of the workforce by putting this special earnings limit on them. But today in this era of low unemployment and in this era of much longer life spans, seniors should be welcome to stay in America's workforce.

What we did today in this House is to pass a bill that repeals this penalty on senior citizens who make the choice to continue to work. This was long overdue. Our seniors have worked their entire lives to build our country into what it is today. It is wrong for the Government to force them to choose between contributing to society or receiving their full Social Security checks.

In my home State of California alone, there are more than 161,000 seniors affected by the Social Security earnings test that were penalized by that test.

1700

If this legislation is passed by the Senate and signed into law, that means all these Californians over the age of 64 will be able to continue adding to our economic productivity while keeping all of their Social Security. These are individuals who paid into Social Security on the assurance that their money would be there when they retired.

The idea that the Federal Government can withhold access to their money, frankly, is outrageous. However, this is precisely what the Federal Government has done with the earnings test. It is denying seniors the benefits that they have paid for. It is denying them their earned right, and this is wrong.

With this booming economy and tightening of the labor force, the Federal Government should not discourage Americans from working. Rather, it should encourage people to be more productive. By repealing the earnings limit, more individuals will now work, pay more social security taxes, increase Federal revenues, and improve economic efficiency. America would also benefit from older workers' valuable work experience and work skills.

The earnings test discriminates against those who must work to supplement their benefits, because only wages are counted for purposes of this test. Income from hard-earned paychecks should not be treated less fairly than income from investment, and that is another reason why we needed to repeal it.

Repealing the Social Security earnings limit will also eliminate the need to recalculate affected retirement credits and benefits. And how much would that save a year? One hundred fifty million dollars annually is spent by the bureaucracy in doing this calculation.

Now, I constantly hear from seniors in my district about this issue. Whenever we hold a town meeting, or if we stop at a senior center or community center, the issue of allowing senior citizens to work without losing Social Security comes up.

Senior citizens have a place in our society and in our work force, and no one should ever discourage or deny that. It is unfair for the government to penalize them for wanting to work, and that is why the best thing we can do to honor seniors and their contributions is to repeal this senseless outdated earnings limit.

So, Mr. Speaker, I hope the Senate and the President move quickly on this legislation that we have passed today and which I coauthored.

SPECIAL ORDERS GRANTED

By unanimous consent, permission to address the House, following the legislative program and any special orders heretofore entered, was granted to:

(The following Members (at the request of Mr. DOGGETT) to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material:)

Mr. WEYGAND, for 5 minutes, today.

Ms. WOOLSEY, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. CUMMINGS, for 5 minutes, today.

Ms. CARSON, for 5 minutes, today.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas, for 5 minutes, today.

Mrs. MINK of Hawaii, for 5 minutes, today.

(The following Members (at the request of Mr. SOUDER) to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material:)

Mrs. CHENOWETH-HAGE, for 5 minutes, March 8.

Mr. BILBRAY, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. FOLEY, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. PAUL, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. WALSH, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. SOUDER, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. METCALF, for 5 minutes, today.