

regional Bells. This is not a sustainable economic model, as we are now witnessing.

Recently, the Federal Communications Commission had the opportunity to turn things around in their Triennial Review. They failed to do so.

Instead of correcting the rate structure and creating the regulatory certainty necessary to stabilize the industry, the FCC managed to produce even more uncertainty by punting to the states the rate decision they were supposed to establish. This means that the rate structure for local telephone service will now have to go through lengthy legal battles in 50 different states and in the District of Columbia before it is resolved. Unless something is done, for years to come, lawyers will profit and the status quo will prevail.

I urge the FCC to reconsider its decision. You cannot fool an industry into recovery by creating a façade of competition.

HONORING THE WINNER OF THE
2003 VOICE OF DEMOCRACY
BROADCAST SCRIPTWRITING
CONTEST, "FREEDOM'S OBLIGATION"

HON. HEATHER WILSON

OF NEW MEXICO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, April 11, 2003

Mrs. WILSON of New Mexico. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Mr. Darshan N. Patel, a National winner of the 2003 Voice of Democracy Program. The contest theme this year was "Freedom's Obligation."

Mr. Patel is a sophomore at Albuquerque Academy in Albuquerque, New Mexico. I think you will agree that his entry earned the award. Mr. Patel has communicated a powerful message regarding "Freedom's Obligation." I submit his winning entry for the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD to honor Darshan's tribute to the American men and women of the military who have given us the many freedoms we enjoy today.

Mr. Speaker, I also extend my appreciation to the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States for their sponsorship of this program. This year more than 80,000 secondary school students participated in this contest competing for the 59 national scholarships. Darshan was sponsored by VFW Post 401 and its Ladies Auxiliary in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Please join me in congratulating Mr. Darshan Patel as a National winner and thanking him for his patriotism.

ENSURE ACCESS TO CRITICAL
DIALYSIS CARE UNDER MEDICARE

HON. GERALD D. KLECZKA

OF WISCONSIN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, April 11, 2003

Mr. KLECZKA. Mr. Speaker, today Congressman CAMP and I are introducing legislation, the Medicare Renal Dialysis Payment Fairness Act of 2003, which would require the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to create and implement by January 2004 an annual updating mechanism for dialysis reimbursement under Medicare.

While the Medicare program pays for about 75 percent of dialysis care, there is currently no mechanism to update the reimbursement to account for inflation, new technology, labor, and other cost increases. In fact, the dialysis reimbursement is the only Medicare prospective payment system that does not have an updating framework. As a result, in their March 2003 Report to Congress, the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission (MedPAC) states that Medicare is on average paying three percent less than the cost of a dialysis treatment. This payment disparity is even greater for small and rural dialysis facilities, which experience about an 11 percent payment shortfall per treatment.

A primary concern about this underfunding is the inability of dialysis facilities to compete with other providers—who do receive annual updates—for nurses and other health care workers. According to a study completed by Abt Associates, a dialysis center in Baltimore, Maryland is only able to pay \$25.75 per hour while the local hospital has the resources to pay \$35.00 per hour. Similarly, in northern California, a dialysis center pays staff \$32.00 per hour while the hospital pays \$40 per hour.

Across the nation, nursing salaries have increased an average of 27 percent (from \$23,140 to \$31,720) from 1992 to 2002. It has become more and more difficult for the renal community to keep up with these rising labor costs and recruit and retain trained staff for dialysis facilities when other providers have the capabilities to pay higher salaries.

Even more importantly, reports show that low reimbursement rates have started to create access to care problems for Medicare end stage renal disease (ESRD) patients. In 2001, on average 77 percent of patients treated at renal facilities were Medicare beneficiaries. However, among the dialysis facilities that closed in 2001, Medicare beneficiaries comprised 88 percent of patients. This evidence indicates the economic challenge that dialysis centers face in treating Medicare beneficiaries.

I am pleased that this legislation is supported by the Renal Leadership Council and the National Kidney Foundation.

Mr. Speaker, providing for an inflationary annual update would allow the Secretary of HHS to make appropriate, data-driven decisions each year on fair dialysis payment rates. We must ensure that dialysis care for Medicare beneficiaries is not jeopardized due to inadequate reimbursement. I urge my colleagues to cosponsor and support this important legislation.

CONGRATULATIONS TO MAURA
LYLE LASATER

HON. SHELLEY BERKLEY

OF NEVADA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, April 11, 2003

Ms. BERKLEY. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor and congratulate Maura Lyle Lasater of Las Vegas, NV, Nevada's 2003 Cherry Blossom Princess and dear friend of mine.

I have known Maura since she was a youngster. I have watched her grow from an energetic toddler, through her competitive ice skating and horseback riding years as a young girl, high school at Bishop Gorman High School in Las Vegas, college at the University

of Puget Sound graduating with a Communications degree, all the way to the intelligent, poised and personable young woman with a great sense of humor she is today. Maura was an active and valuable participant in her mother's two successful Las Vegas mayoral races and also her run at the Nevada governorship.

Maura is now a trusted and valuable member of my staff. Her first day at work was September 11, 2001. Reporting to work at 9 a.m. that morning, new to this city and without a network of friends, within less than 45 minutes America and the world changed and Maura's own personal world became even more unsettled. My staff, rallying together in the face of their own unknown terror, embraced "the new girl" and kept her with them as they sought and found a safe place to wait out the day's events. In the chaotic days following 9/11—including the anthrax scare—Maura established herself as a tireless, reliable and dedicated public servant, despite her short time on the Hill.

Much has transpired since that day and Maura now is an experienced and knowledgeable Hill veteran, much loved and respected by her colleagues. She has her own network of friends and has continued her volunteer efforts on behalf of candidates and causes. Maura is an excellent representative of her home State of Nevada in the Cherry Blossom Festival.

The story of the Cherry Blossoms has been told many times—the Japanese Government, working with then First Lady Helen Taft, donated 2000 cherry blossom trees. When they arrived, they were found to be diseased and unfortunately had to be destroyed to prevent the spread of the disease to our own agricultural products. The Japanese Government was gracious enough to provide another donation—this time 3000 gorgeous cherry blossom trees. These were planted not only in the Tidal Basin, but all throughout Washington, DC. There are now less than 200 of the original trees remaining, and efforts are underway through new research and cuttings to regrow these trees so there will always be descendants of Japan's gracious gift to America. Maura and the other Cherry Blossom Princesses are an integral part of this time-honored tradition fostering continued good will of our two countries and the beauty the trees provide.

Maura spent a whirlwind week of customs and ceremonies as Nevada's representative to the Cherry Blossom Festival. I was filled with pride when I escorted her in the introduction ceremony at the Congressional Reception, attended by the Ambassador of Japan and Mrs. Ryozo Kato. Las Vegas and all Nevadans can be proud to have Maura Lasater as their representative. I look forward to Maura's continued success in life and wish her all the best as she pursues her dreams and goals.

HONORING THE 100TH BIRTHDAY
OF MARY LOU DAVIDSON

HON. BART GORDON

OF TENNESSEE

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, April 11, 2003

Mr. GORDON. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to wish a happy 100th birthday to a dear cousin of mine, Mary Lou Gordon Davidson. She is a