

was, according to his friend and colleague Tom Gaulke, "a firefighter's firefighter." And yesterday when I stood with Steve's firefighting companions, they told me that Steve was the go-to person when they needed somebody in times like this. They needed his counsel yesterday and his support during their sorrow, but he was gone, and that is why they have such sorrow.

Twelve thousand firefighters battled the armies of flames that once threatened to burn from Southern California's mountains to the Pacific ocean. Steve Rucker was the only firefighter to die in this historical battle. In this he receives a measure of immortality. He stands for all of the brave men and women who unselfishly risk their lives to save others, whether facing a wall of flames on a rural back road or the billowing smoke of the World Trade Center.

Mr. Speaker, Steve Rucker was an irreplaceable man, but his family must go on with life without him. I wish them consolation in knowing that this man, son, husband, and father, died giving the gift of himself.

WASHINGTON WASTE WATCHERS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. KING of Iowa). Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. GINNY BROWN-WAITE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. GINNY BROWN-WAITE of Florida. Mr. Speaker, as a member of the Washington Waste Watchers and of this body, I feel it is my duty to bring to the public's attention instances of fraud, waste, and abuse. Such actions of fraud, waste, and abuse not only steal from the taxpayers, but also from the beneficiaries very much in need of the benefits. A perfect example of fraud, waste, and abuse is actually occurring right now in my district. In July, after 10 years of service, the Department of Labor decided not to award the contract for senior employment to the group called Experience Works. It is a not-for-profit organization that has been working extremely well with seniors. The Department instead decided to award the contract to the American Association of Retired Persons or AARP. One might think this might be okay.

The transition that I have seen for my seniors going from Experience Works to AARP has been deplorable. At least ten of my constituents call my offices every day with complaints of verbal abuse. Imagine that. AARP abusing seniors. Some have left meetings with AARP in tears. I can only imagine how any Member in here would feel if they received calls from senior constituents claiming that AARP is abusing them. What happened is AARP has instituted new policies that seniors in my area are simply not used to. They have decided that they are going to shuffle these senior employees, who, by the way, are earning \$5.15 an hour, from job to job every 6

months, without exception, and many times without any warning. Today they are working for agency X; Monday they may be working for agency Y. It seems to me as if we did not learn from the shuffle game that we played with foster children. Nobody is nourished and nobody grows when we have a shuffling process where there is no continuity.

And, by the way, it is not just the seniors that I am hearing from. Many host agencies in the district are having problems as well. One of the agencies recently said that they have "had it with AARP." A gerontologist contacted me who has been working with seniors, and he said that he actually witnessed this verbal abuse of seniors by an AARP staff member. AARP is "looking into it." I am sorry, but that is not enough. There is not any reason why anyone should tolerate any employee who verbally abuses seniors.

I have also been working with the Department of Labor. AARP is not doing this out of the kindness of their heart. They receive \$75 million for operation of the SCSEP employment program in 27 States and in Puerto Rico. By the way, that is up from the \$52 million they received last year.

In the 10 years that I served as a Florida Senator and worked with Experience Works seniors, I never had one single complaint from my constituents, nor did I ever hear of any complaints from the time that I was elected. If AARP cannot spend taxpayer dollars that they receive helping seniors and working with the host agencies, I can think of a number of groups that certainly can accomplish this goal.

In addition to this case I cited in my district, I was also dismayed to learn that there was another Medicaid scandal happening in South Florida. Between 1999 and 2000, Medicaid actually paid roughly \$2 million to dead beneficiaries. Most of these funds were distributed despite the fact that the department's database had the dates of the deaths already logged in. Simple fact, we have some fraudulent providers out there who are trying to bilk the system.

Another example of the waste, obviously, is the \$600,000 that we are spending this year to have a blimp fly at sporting events to promote Medicare. I do not know of one senior out there who is not very familiar with Medicare.

When we look at all these expenditures, I know of lots of veterans back home who could suggest a lot better way to spend that taxpayer money.

Waste, fraud, and abuse throughout the Federal agencies is, obviously, decades old, and Republicans led by the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. NUSSLE), chairman of the Committee on the Budget, and President Bush are working to eliminate the culture of waste that exists at the Federal Government. As a Republican, I will work to reduce wasteful spending in the government and to protect everyone's tax dollars.

IN SUPPORT OF A HEALTH-MONITORING PROGRAM FOR FIREFIGHTERS

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

Mr. BACA. Mr. Speaker, I would first like to thank all the firefighters and public servants who worked so hard this past week to help combat the devastating wildfires that occurred all over southern California and the Inland Empire. On behalf of myself and the people of the 43rd California Congressional District, I say "thank you."

In southern California and the Inland Empire, we have witnessed devastation like we have never seen before. Homes were destroyed, properties were damaged, lives were lost. More than 740,000 acres were burned. Nearly 3,600 homes were lost and 20 people lost their lives. At one point, nearly 16,000 firefighters were battling the blazes at the peak of devastation.

When the highway patrol and I toured the fires in my district 1½ weeks ago, we went into the ruins where residents had been evacuated. We saw the devastation of the homes and felt an overwhelming heat and breathed in the thick smoke of the fire. It was hard for us to be there simply for a few hours, but our firefighters did this for weeks, round the clock, with very little rest. They battled the blazes, inhaled the fumes, while the entire time reaching out to the communities. When I was there with the firefighters, we would come out of the fires and people would instantly stop us. They would beg us to check if their homes were still standing. And do my colleagues know what the highway patrol and I did? We charged back to where the flames were to see if the homes were still there. Often, as many know, we simply found an address on a curb and no home.

But who was still there, fighting the fires and trying to save the homes? The firefighters. We owe a great deal of gratitude to the brave men and women who fought these devastating fires, our American heroes.

That is why I believe that we should make sure that they have access to health care that they need so they can go home to their families safe and healthy. We do not know what the long-term effects of exposure to the smoke and fumes will be to the firefighters who fought the blazes in California. But with early evaluation, monitoring, and analyzing, we can offer them better treatment, the treatment they deserve for putting their lives on the line.

That is why I have introduced a bill that will require the Department of Health and Human Services to work with local health experts to conduct long-term health monitoring on firefighters who have responded to the California wildfires. This bill will create a health-monitoring program for

the firefighters who respond to catastrophic Federal emergencies like we recently experienced in California.

I want the firefighters to have constant monitoring about their health. I want them to be able to have access to health care that they deserve. That is what my bill will do.

At least 15 studies have shown statistical links between brain cancer and firefighting. According to the Center to Protect Workers' Rights, firefighters often jeopardize their health when they respond to disaster. Often these disasters are so severe that their equipment cannot even protect them. The health consequences for these firefighters can be as great as cancer or heart disease.

In nearly all of these instances where firefighters have responded to Federal disaster, they have often been provided with very little or no health monitoring. This is wrong, and we must change it to make sure that there is monitoring.

Firefighters risk their lives protecting our property, our families, our way of life. They deserve better. We must have more resources devoted to monitoring firefighters after they respond to Federal emergencies when there is prolonged exposure to dangerous smoke, fumes, and chemicals.

A program like this was developed after the collapse of the World Trade Center. It has been very successful in identifying the health problems of those first responders.

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Many of these firefighters at the World Trade Center suffered serious coughing illness after dealing with the wreckage of the towers. Thanks to monitoring programs, we can evaluate the health of these fire responders and get them the care that they need.

I want early detection for the men and women who responded to fires in California. I want them to be able to go back to their families safe and healthy. We must make sure that our firefighters are safe and healthy after they respond to a Federal disaster. We must make sure that we decrease such possible risk.

We owe a great gratitude to these brave men and women who fought the recent fires in California and the Inland Empire. Providing them adequate health care is the least we can do to say thanks to these American heroes.

ROOTING OUT WASTE, FRAUD AND ABUSE IN GOVERNMENT

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. KING of Iowa). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. GINGREY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. GINGREY. Mr. Speaker, my Washington Waste Watcher colleagues and I, Republican members of the freshman class, have come to the floor tonight to devise new and innovative ways for trimming the fat out of government. I believe we owe it to the

American taxpayer to hold Washington bureaucrats accountable for wasteful spending and to discover new ways for reducing fraud in government at all levels. A great American from Ellijay, Georgia, Mr. Joe McCutchen, reminds me of this at least once a month.

Mr. Speaker, after spending 28 years as an OB-GYN doctor, it should be no surprise that part of my legislative agenda is to reorganize and revamp this Medicare program, which is currently responsible for billions of dollars of waste, fraud and abuse. The General Accounting Office has estimated that one of every 10 dollars is wasted because our current Medicare system is open to poor management and fraud. Dishonest individuals find new and more creative ways to cheat our Medicare system every day, burdening Americans with higher taxes, higher premiums, and higher copays.

For example, according to the Bureau of National Affairs in an April 25, 2003, article of "Health Care Daily," a Florida woman was sentenced for her role in a scheme that allegedly billed Medicare and Medicaid more than \$25 million worth of false claims for, get this, wheelchairs, alternating pressure mattresses, and other durable medical equipment; \$25 million of taxpayer money that is lost and unrefundable, money that could have been used to improve our schools or aid our soldiers in Iraq or provide health care for the uninsured.

Another example comes from the Health and Human Services Inspector General report to Congress, April 2000. It was reported that Medicare paid an estimated \$20.6 million for services that started after the posted death dates of certain recipients. My good friend and colleague, the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. GINNY BROWN-WAITE), just a few minutes earlier mentioned the same thing. Of this amount, \$8 million was paid, despite the fact the Department had already noted their deaths in the main database.

These are just examples of the mismanagement of time and resources that are costing Americans billions of dollars every year. In these times of war and emphasis on homeland security, we cannot afford to spend another dollar on wasteful programs, and we must save money by eradicating fraud against and within the Federal Government.

Mr. Speaker, it is time to restore responsibility and accountability to government programs by rooting out this waste, fraud and abuse in our government. I urge my colleagues to help pass needed Medicare reform.

REPUBLICAN EFFORT TO PRIVATIZE GOVERNMENT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Connecticut (Ms. DELAURO) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. DELAURO. Mr. Speaker, I rise to discuss something I believe goes vir-

tually unsaid in this institution every day, not merely the ramifications of what Congress does on a daily basis, but rather the underlying intentions of those in the majority. And that is how this majority, in concert with the administration, is acting to remake how our Nation governs and thinks of itself. Indeed, it is remaking the very role of government itself.

I think it is particularly appropriate that we discuss this matter at a time when Congress is heading toward its annual appropriations endgame, when many of the most important budgetary decisions affecting millions of citizens are being made behind closed doors by a handful in this Republican majority. So this week I am going to be talking about Republican efforts to privatize functions that are currently the responsibility of government and specifically how that relates to our failure to meet public commitments.

Let me be clear: the goal is not more government. Far from it. In most cases, we want our business enterprises and the market to flourish. But there are some very important areas where we want community values, not the market, to prevail or to set limits on behavior. There is a reason we have public schools, environmental regulation, and retirement programs, because there are things we want to ensure for all individuals, whatever their station in life or wherever they live in the country.

For nearly 75 years, our approach to government has reflected the idea that our society can act with a shared sense of purpose and responsibility to address tasks before our country. But it is no secret that this leadership has some very different ideas about the role of the Federal Government and helping us meet those challenges. Accordingly, the budget Republicans put forward earlier this year was designed simply and efficiently to destroy the capacity and obligation of the government to provide key social support. Their plans are to debase the quality of public services so much that citizens will give up and turn, out of necessity, to the private market.

The examples are many, and they are far-reaching. The twin pillars of our retirement security safety net, Social Security and Medicare, environmental protection, transportation safety, education, all public commitments historically the responsibility of the Federal Government, all undermined by this administration and majority.

Republicans pass legislation to create new tests and higher standards for public schools, then support a budget that cuts the funding to enforce those standards by \$8 billion, in effect guaranteeing failure and providing a justification for the shift to vouchers and private education.

Their Medicare plans offer prescription drug coverage for seniors, but moves seniors into the private insurance market and into HMOs for their Medicare coverage. The budget cuts