

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