

veterans in rural areas. First, due to the closure and consolidation of veterans health care facilities in Nebraska, veterans in rural areas frequently travel several hours simply to receive the basic services for which they are entitled and are eligible. As a result of this travel, they must incur transportation costs such as overnight accommodations which other veterans are not expected to incur for the same services. Furthermore, requiring elderly and frequently sick or incapacitated veterans to travel on Interstate 80 or other very busy roads and highways is not only unfair to them, but also places them and other citizens at risk.

The severity of this problem was brought to this Member's attention by a January 2002 Lincoln Journal Star article featuring one Nebraska veteran who served in the Navy during World War II. Three years after he was diagnosed with several diseases, his wife of 49 years could no longer care for her husband. She said that putting her husband in a nursing home was the hardest thing she had ever had to do in her entire life. Medicare and a private insurance supplement cover doctors' expenses, and the couple uses their retirement savings to pay for the \$4,000 monthly nursing home cost.

However, additional expenses include \$1,000 a month to cover the cost of seven prescription drugs that this veteran must take to stay alive. Although he qualifies for a prescription drug benefit through the VA, in order to obtain this benefit, the drugs must be prescribed by a VA doctor at VA-approved facilities. As a result, this veteran must travel 50 miles every 6 months in order to have prescriptions reauthorized.

Now, because that veteran is 74 years old, confined to a wheelchair, suffers serious blood clots which prohibit him from traveling, this 50-mile trip often proves to be impossible.

With the struggles of this veteran and many others in mind, this Member expresses his strongest support for H.R. 2379, the Rural Veterans Access to Health Care Act for 2003. Indeed, this Member is a proud cosponsor of this measure, which was introduced by my colleague, the distinguished gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. OSBORNE). He is to be commended for crafting this legislation, which addresses a critical problem about which our constituents in Nebraska are increasingly expressing their concerns.

Through H.R. 2379, no less than 5 percent of the total appropriated funds for health care would be dedicated to address veterans health care access problems in highly rural or geographically remote areas. As amended by this bill, highly rural or geographically remote would apply to areas in which the veterans have to drive at least 60 minutes or more to a VA health care facility. Each Veterans Integrated Service Network, that is called VISN, director would receive an equal level of funding from this account and then have the

discretion to address rural access issues as best fit each VISN. If a VISN would be unable to use all of these funds from this account, the VISN would not be allowed to retain unused funds. Instead, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs would then have the opportunity to reallocate those funds to other VISNs closely nearby or anywhere that is rural and geographically remote.

All Members of Congress should agree that the VA must provide adequate services and facilities for veterans all across the country regardless of where they live, in sparsely settled areas with resultant low-usage numbers for VA hospitals. There must be at least a basic level of acceptable national infrastructure of facilities, medical personnel and services for meeting the very real medical needs faced by our veterans wherever they live. There must be a threshold funding level for VA medical services in each State and region before any per capital funding level is applied.

Furthermore, I support H.R. 3777, the Healthy Vets Act of 2004. This Member is also a cosponsor of this legislation, introduced by our colleague, the distinguished gentleman from Colorado (Mr. MCINNIS).

This measure would allow those veterans in rural areas which are geographically inaccessible to the nearest VA medical facility to enter into contracts with community health care providers on a fee basis to receive primary health care in their own communities. This authority would allow rural veterans to receive preventive regular medical attention without being forced to travel what is too often a prohibitive distance to seek such care.

In spite of the fact that each Congress sets a new record on the amount of appropriation for veterans health care, there have been cutbacks in the access veterans in rural areas have to adequate health care, while there have been advances in other geographic areas. The health care needs of our military veterans must be met to the fullest extent possible. Veterans served in our armed services to protect our freedom and our way of life. As they served our Nation at a time of need, the Federal Government must remember them in their time of need. The debt of gratitude the people the U.S. owe to our veterans surely means we should assist the veterans wherever that need exists.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, this Member remains committed, I would say, to ensuring that Nebraska veterans receive the benefits they deserve, benefits they had expected and which the American people said they want to deliver. I urge support of H.R. 2379 and H.R. 3777.

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

(Mr. PETERSON of Pennsylvania addressed the House. His remarks will ap-

pear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

JOBS

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

Mr. BROWN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, the President flew Air Force 1 to Cleveland today to campaign in my home State of Ohio, talking with 700 or 800 female small business owners. While the President came and talked about small business and job creation and all that he wants to do in a State which has suffered the worst or second worst job loss in the country, the President, at the same time, and this Congress today, this House today considered this legislation, is slashing \$94 million from a loan program essential to small business development. He has shrunk the size of the Small Business Administration.

This President basically treats small business one way, with very little assistance, and large businesses, like the Halliburton Corporation, which still pays Vice President CHENEY \$3,000 a month from their payroll, the Halliburton Corporation, very differently.

The President really does not get it when he comes to a State like Ohio, a State where we have lost 166,000 manufacturing jobs since he took office, 300,000 jobs overall since he took office; one out of six manufacturing jobs in the State of Ohio has simply disappeared in the last 3 years. The President's solution to all of this is continued tax cuts for the most privileged people, with the hope that some of that money will trickle down and create jobs.

The other solution the President has is more trade agreements, NAFTA-like trade agreements, that ship jobs overseas; that hemorrhage jobs to Mexico, to China, and all over the world. He continues, as he campaigned in Cleveland today to those small business owners, he continued to say more tax cuts for the most privileged and more trade agreements. And, clearly, for 3 years that has not worked. One-sixth of our manufacturing base is gone in Ohio and about one seventh of the manufacturing base around the country.

That was really brought home to me last week. I was in Akron, Ohio, speaking to a group of owners of machine shops, about 60 people. And a gentleman came forward and he dropped a stack of brochures, leaflets like this. He dropped about four times this many, and he said this is what I get in about a month in the mail from companies around the country. And these stacks of brochures, these stacks of leaflets are auction notices for companies going out of business. Every one of these represents a company that is going out of business or is downsizing as a result of the Bush recession.

Here is one plant. Closed, everything sells. Here is another one from Mansfield, Ohio. Two complete stamping

and machine tool shops. They are closing and selling. From North Carolina, public auction. Plant closing. Everything must sell. From Marion, Ohio, complete shop close-out auction. From Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio, in my district, absolute auction. Everything is going. From Scottsboro, Alabama, precision job shop downsizing. Another one here for a CNC machining tool room and production machinery. Excess equipment due to corporate outsourcing.

Excess equipment due to corporate outsourcing. President Bush's top economic adviser the other day said outsourcing is a good thing when these plants move overseas and they ship jobs overseas, because it makes our businesses more efficient. Tell that to the 50 or 60 workers that worked at this plant when the owners of this plant say excess equipment, we are selling due to corporate outsourcing.

From Massachusetts, a large-capacity fabricating and machine shop closing. Another one from Chicago. Six CNC lathes, 12 chucks, 22 bar machines sold. Surplus to the continuing operations. They have lost businesses and they are selling most of their equipment. Here is another one. Three days, two tremendous public auctions. Machinery, equipment, and real estate. Plant's closed, everything must go. Real estate for sale. Here is another one that says Dominion Castings Foundry, equipment machine facility. Plant closed, everything sells. Another one from Baltimore, Maryland. Complete facility selling. Another, 5-day public auction. Plant closing due to relocation. Another one, on and on and on. This company is closing for the same reasons.

Now, Mr. Speaker, it is bad enough that these places are closing and the President's response is more tax cuts. That is not working. More trade agreements hemorrhaging jobs overseas. That is not working. That is bad enough, but there are 800,000 Americans whose unemployment compensation has expired in the last 3 months. That is 800,000 workers, 800,000 families living in communities around this country; and the President and this Congress, the Republican leadership in this Congress, will not extend their unemployment compensation. That is morally wrong. It is bad for our country, it is bad for our communities, it is bad for our families, and it is bad for our workers.

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

(Mr. OTTER addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

RURAL VETERANS HEALTH CARE

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

Mr. STUPAK. Mr. Speaker, I rise tonight in support of rural veterans and in support of H.R. 2379, the Rural Veterans Access to Care Act of 2003. I would like to thank the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. OSBORNE) for his leadership on this issue.

No veteran should ever have reason to doubt America's gratitude for his or her service to the Nation and to the cause of freedom. America's veterans deserve nothing less than our highest gratitude, our deepest respect, and our strongest support. Veterans from rural areas, like my district, deserve nothing less than their comrades living in more populated areas.

Michigan's First Congressional District has the highest population in any congressional district in Michigan. There are 65,000 veterans in my district, one-fifth of all the veterans in the State of Michigan.

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They live over a huge area. The Upper Peninsula alone spans 450 miles from east to west. While the VA provides wonderful care in northern Michigan, it is far too hard for veterans to access health care. Recently, a Vietnam veteran from the Upper Peninsula had to go to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, for the treatment that he needed. Milwaukee is a long way from home, so our veterans go as far as the Iron Mountain VA Medical Center, and they spend the night there. The next day they are put on a bus and they are shipped down to Milwaukee, Wisconsin. And that is repeated once their treatment is done, whether it is 1, 2 or 3 days. They are put back on a bus, they go back to Iron Mountain, Michigan, and then they spend the night and go on home.

It is outrageous that they have to travel so many miles, in some case 450 miles, just to get treatment. At best the distance is an inconvenience. At worst, it puts veterans' lives at serious risk. I had another case where a retired Navy veteran from Sault Ste. Marie had surgery at the VA Medical Center in Milwaukee to treat his cancer. After surgery, he was transported via van all of the way back to Sault Ste. Marie, 379 miles away. The next morning, his spouse had to take him to the emergency room in Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan, and the emergency room could not help him. The nearest VA medical center in Iron Mountain could not help him either, so he had once again to be shipped by ambulance 379 miles down to Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Mr. Speaker, we cannot have veterans being shipped back and forth across state lines. It is dangerous, and it is just not right. These two constituents represent the challenges faced every day by rural veterans across this country. Congress needs to act to address the specific needs of rural veterans. That is why I am a cosponsor of H.R. 2379, the Rural Veterans Access to Care Act of 2003. The legislation would allow veterans to enroll in an option to

seek routine health care closer to home.

H.R. 2379 sets aside 5 percent of each VA region's medical care allocation to be used for routine medical care for highly rural or geographically remote veterans. The legislation would allow rural veterans to be closer to their health care providers, rather than traveling hundreds of miles for an appointment at the VA, which could be especially dangerous during inclement weather.

In Michigan, I will also continue to work to open a community-based outpatient clinic in Gladstone. Over 2 years ago, the VA announced to open the CBOC, as we call them, in Gladstone. Yet during every successive round of CBOC openings across the country, somehow our region just cannot seem to get Gladstone funded. It is estimated a Gladstone CBOC would provide much needed basic health care to our veterans, in fact, to approximately 750 veterans alone in its first year of operation. This facility is critical towards keeping our promise to those who serve our country so well.

I think today, Americans have a deeper understanding of the sacrifices of our military personnel than at any time in recent history. Our commitment to veterans must be more than just waving the American flag in times of armed conflict and recognizing them on national holidays. We owe it to our veterans to do more. We must be prepared to take their battle-borne scars of war and military service throughout their lifetime, and make sure they have the quality of service they need.

Today I was visited by a couple from Chassel, Michigan, representing the VFW. They handed me the VFW's priorities for the coming year. We can see here the VFW priority goals for 2004. It says veterans health care now, we earned it. If you look at it, it says the number one priority of veterans is health care. They say underfunding of the VA budget, 6-month waits to see a doctor, denial of care to category 8 veterans, little or no long-term care, little or no mental health care, and millions of fed-up veterans.

Well, those of us who represent rural areas, and no matter where veterans are, we believe they should be taken care of. There are special challenges for rural veterans, and we stand here tonight to urge this Congress to pass H.R. 2379 to take care of all of our veterans, but especially those of us who have veterans who live in our rural districts.

CARBON DIOXIDE CONTRIBUTES TO CLIMATE CHANGE

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

Mr. GILCHREST. Mr. Speaker, I did not come here to talk about veterans, but I will add my voice to the chorus of