

King. Still not satisfied, he and June Carter Cash wrote the country music hit 'Ring of Fire,' which was recorded by Johnny Cash and sold more than 16 million records. To this day, Merle Kilgore has continued to be a prolific songwriter, cataloging more than 300 songs and selling almost 50 million records.

He recorded his first top 10 record in 1959, the self-penned "Dear Mama", while he was a DJ and the manager of a radio station in Louisiana. In his signature style of never being satisfied with just one big hit, Merle added the records "Love has made you beautiful," "42 in Chicago," and "Fast Talking Louisiana Man" among others to his already impressive collection of songs and records. Merle's favorite record, entitled "Mr. Garfield" by Merle Kilgore and Friends was recorded with longtime friends and fellow country music legends Hank Williams, Jr. and Johnny Cash.

As if his accomplishments in recording and songwriting were not enough, Merle Kilgore's talents in the entertainment industry extend even further. As an actor, he has appeared in the box office hits "Coal Miner's Daughter," Robert Altman's "Nashville," "W.W. and the Dixie Dance Kings," "Roadie," and the CBS-TV movie, "Willie." He also played himself in NBC-Telecom's Living Proof, the life story of Hank Williams, Jr.

While lesser men would have been satisfied with such an impressive list of lifetime accomplishments, Merle Kilgore went further. In 1962, Merle moved to Nashville to open and manage the Nashville branch of the prestigious Shapiro Bernstein and Al Gallico music publishing companies. He became the general manager of Hank Williams, Jr.'s music publishing companies in 1969 and on April 7, 1986 was named Executive Vice President and head of management of Hank Williams, Jr. Enterprises. Merle Kilgore has been affiliated with Hank Williams, Jr. for more than 30 years and has served as his personal manager for the last 16 years.

The management experience and leadership of Merle have been tested and proven in a number of successful business ventures and industry leadership positions. He has been involved as Vice President of the Country Music Association and has served on that organization's Board of Directors for the last fourteen years. He has been the President of both the Nashville Songwriter's Foundation and the Nashville Songwriter's Association International; a fitting position for an individual of his talent.

Merle Kilgore's outstanding accomplishments have not gone unnoticed. In 1987, he was named as an honorary State Senator for the State of Tennessee. He was selected by his fellow entertainers as Country Music Association's first ever Manager of the Year in 1990. Three years later, in 1993, Merle was inducted into the Louisiana State Hall of Fame in Lafayette and was also inducted into the Shreveport's Byrd High School Hall of Fame. In 1998, Merle received the Legendary Songwriter's Award from the North American Country Music Association and was inducted into the Nashville Songwriters' Hall of Fame.

Merle continues to direct the operations of Hank Williams, Jr. Enterprises in Paris, Tennessee and Merle Kilgore Management in Nashville.

Mr. Speaker, I am honored to have the opportunity to pay tribute to a living legend in American entertainment and an icon of Amer-

ican country music. Mr. Merle Kilgore has consistently outperformed and exceeded even his own high achievements. I join all of his fans around the world in saying "Thank You" for sharing his incredible talent with all of us and wish him many more years of health, happiness, and continued success.

NORTHEAST REGIONAL
DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

HON. MICHAEL H. MICHAUD

OF MAINE

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, June 25, 2004

Mr. MICHAUD. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce a bill I authored that will create the Northeast Regional Development Commission. The Commission would be charged with investing federal resources for economic development and job creation in the most distressed areas of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont and New York.

This is an idea whose time has come. Its roots can be traced as far back as 1965, when Congress approved the creation of the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC). This unique Federal-State partnership was charged with promoting development in the depressed Appalachian area through regional planning, technical assistance, and funding of projects aimed at encouraging economic prosperity.

It was a bold idea, and it worked. According to the National Association of Development Organizations, since its creation, the ARC has reduced the number of distressed counties in their region from 219 to 100. It has cut the poverty rate from 31 percent to 15 percent, and helped 1,400 businesses create 26,000 new jobs in the region since 1977.

With a record like that, other regions began to look at this model, and realize that they needed the same thing in their own area. Over the past decade, this has led to the creation of three additional commissions and proposals for two more.

When I arrived in Congress and saw these proposals, it became clear that other regions were catching on to a good idea, but that the Northeast could be missing the boat. There is currently no single body focused on the need for jobs and economic development in the Northeast region.

The Northeast has a clear, compelling case for coordinated federal investment. Compared to the counties of some of the other regions that have an existing or proposed commission, a sample of Northeast counties along the Northern border showed higher unemployment, much higher outmigration, and extremely similar, and low, household income. All of these measures were far worse than the national average.

Creating a regional commission would give us the chance to look at economic development in a whole new way: as a challenge that we can tackle together as a region. Together we all face declining natural resource industries, aging infrastructure, and youth who are leaving to seek opportunity elsewhere. But together, we also still possess abundant resources, a good geographic location with opportunities to ship our products to the world, and a trained workforce that is ready to take on new challenges.

The Commission created in my bill would utilize the successful ARC approach where

local development districts and other non-profit organizations bring project ideas and priorities to the Commission from the local level. Because local plans are approved by the state, no state would have mandates thrust upon it from outside.

Whether the need is new irrigation systems for agriculture, land and forestry conservation to maintain productive traditional uses, investment in our fishing infrastructure, new roads, or health care facilities—a Federal commission can play a key role in investing in our economy. Our region needs this kind of investment.

Already, the interest that this proposal has generated among many diverse groups has been a step in the right direction, as it has helped to bring people together from many different sectors to think creatively, constructively, and cooperatively about our future. We are off to a good start, and now there is a lot more work to be done.

HONORING JOSEPH A. PICHLER ON
HIS RETIREMENT FROM THE
KROGER COMPANY

HON. ROB PORTMAN

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, June 25, 2004

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor a friend and constituent, Joseph A. Pichler, who retired on June 24, 2004 as Chairman of the Board of The Kroger Company, which is headquartered in my hometown of Cincinnati. He has been an exemplary leader in academia, business and our community.

After earning an undergraduate degree from Notre Dame and a Master's and Ph.D. from the University of Chicago, Joe taught for 15 years at the University of Kansas School of Business, and served as Dean for six years. From 1968 to 1970, he was Special Assistant to the U.S. Department of Labor's Assistant Secretary for Manpower.

Joe has had a truly extraordinary business career, bringing energy, hard work and leadership to every assignment. Before his election as Kroger's Chairman, Joe served the company as Chief Executive Officer; President and Chief Operating Officer; and Executive Vice President. Joe joined Dillon Companies in 1980 as Executive Vice President, and was elected to Kroger's Board of Directors when Dillon merged with Kroger in 1983.

Joe has pursued community service in our area with equal enthusiasm. He heads the Cincinnati Center City Development Corporation's (3CDC) working group that created a new development strategy for Cincinnati's Washington Park area. For many years, Joe and his wife, Susan, have volunteered in the historic Over-the-Rhine neighborhood near Kroger's headquarters building, and we worked together on the new National Underground Railroad Freedom Center.

Last year, Joe asked me to help craft a legislative solution that would allow Cincinnati's "One Stop" Employment Center to continue serving clients in the Over-the-Rhine area. Since then, other Ohio counties have received similar legislative assistance. Joe's role in keeping these key job training facilities open cannot be overstated.

All of us in Cincinnati congratulate Joe on his retirement from Kroger and wish him the best in the new challenges ahead.