

Agency for over 20 years, and held the position of General Manager for the last 15. Throughout his career in the California water industry, Tom has shown vision and tenacity when tackling the challenges of competing water interests. He has long been recognized for his negotiating skills and ability to find a resolution acceptable to widely divergent points of view.

Tom is a second generation Californian and a lifelong resident of Bakersfield. He attended Standard Elementary, Standard Junior High, and North High School, graduating in 1963. After marrying Karen on June 19, 1966, Tom spent 2 years in the Army at Fort Irwin, California. After taking classes at Bakersfield College and California State University, Bakersfield for 2 years, Tom then ventured across the country to complete his coursework at the University of Pittsburgh, earning his Master of Science in Water Supply—Water Pollution Control in 1974.

Tom moved back home to California, starting his long career in California water in 1974 with the Kern County Water Agency as a Water Resources Planner. After nearly 4 years with the Agency, Tom sought a new challenge as water manager for Nickel Enterprises and La Hacienda, Inc., where he was responsible for managing the water rights of this farming, commercial and residential water rights development firm. Tom returned to the Kern County Water Agency 8 years later as an Assistant Manager and was promoted to Assistant General Manager 3 years later. In 1990, Tom took on the mantle of General Manager, overseeing all operations of the Agency, including management of its allocated State Water Project water supplies.

Tom is well known for his visionary leadership in promoting the idea of water banking in and around Bakersfield and for his dedicated work to balance California's commercial, residential and agricultural water needs. Tom has always sought to educate water users in more urban areas of California about the importance of water for agriculture, given that the Central Valley is the most productive agricultural region in America. He was one of the lead players in developing the Bay-Delta Accord of 1994 and following that through to State and Federal authorization in subsequent years. In the 108th Congress, I worked with Tom and others at the Agency to ensure a Federal reauthorization of the California Bay-Delta Program, a program that seeks to provide a balance to competing water needs in California.

I wish Tom the best of luck in his retirement. While I understand he is retiring from his high-profile and high-pressure position, he will continue to be a voice and force in California water policy for many years to come.

IN RECOGNITION OF THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF UNIVERSAL FOREST PRODUCTS OF GRAND RAPIDS, MI

HON. VERNON J. EHLERS

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, February 1, 2005

Mr. EHLERS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to give recognition to a company located in my district, Universal Forest Products Inc., which clearly deserves its place under the heading of "American Success Stories."

Universal Forest Products, Inc. was incorporated on February 10, 1955, as a lumber wholesale office specializing in sales to the manufactured housing industry. William F. Grant was the major stockholder and sole salesman. When Mr. Grant decided in 1962 to grow his business, he hired a graduate of Michigan State University, Peter F. Secchia. Nine years later, when the company had sales of \$12 million, Secchia, today's company chairman, purchased control of Universal. A year later, he hired William G. Currie, today's CEO and vice-chairman. Together, they have led Universal through three decades of strong, steady growth and great success.

Today, Universal is a \$2.5 billion, publicly traded company, trading on the NASDAQ index as UFPI. The company is the leading supplier to the four strong markets it serves—do-it-yourself retail, suit-built construction, industrial and other packaging and components, and manufactured housing. Universal is the largest producer of pressure-treated lumber in the world, the largest producer of roof trusses for manufactured housing in North America, and the nation's largest residential truss manufacturer. Furthermore, it is a leading supplier of value-added products to the do-it-yourself market, maintaining this leadership role as a result of the company's commitment to manufacture, distribute, and market its own products.

Universal is an employer of choice, where more than 9,000 people work. In fact, among the senior ranks, the turnover has been virtually zero; most officers have been with the company for decades. The same is holding true for the new generation of leadership: They're joining the company and staying.

With 96 locations throughout the United States, Canada, and Mexico, Universal produces finished goods within the markets it serves, offering unparalleled distribution and service to its customers.

In 2004, Forrester once again named Universal to its "Platinum 400," an annual ranking of the 400 best performing companies in the U.S. with more than \$1 billion in revenue, and continues its climb up the Fortune 1000 list, up 35 places to No. 734 in the most-recent rankings. In addition, Industry Week magazine in August 2003 named Universal to its list of "Top 50 U.S. Manufacturers" and CNN's Money Gang show named Universal a "Stock Pick of the Day" in February 2004.

Universal is a great American business success story and it is my privilege to honor the company, its chairman, Peter Secchia, and its thousands of employees today in the U.S. House of Representatives. Congratulations on the occasion of Universal's 50th anniversary.

PROVIDING FOR CONSIDERATION OF H.R. 54, CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL ENHANCEMENT ACT OF 2005

SPEECH OF

HON. CHARLES B. RANGEL

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, January 26, 2005

Mr. RANGEL. Mr. Speaker, I rise due to my continuing concern about the measure H.R. 54, which was passed by the Republican majority last week. In its present form the meas-

ure seeks to restrict the number of Congressional Gold Medals that can be awarded in a given year to two. It forbids the medal from being awarded concurrently to a group, as well as from being awarded posthumously—except during the 20-year period beginning 5 years after the death of the individual. This latter requirement regarding posthumous medals is perplexing and arbitrary at best, but it also exemplifies the faults of a most peculiar piece of legislation.

The first question that this proposed measure elicits is "Why". Since the American Revolution, Congress has awarded the Congressional Gold Medal as its highest expression of national appreciation to those who lived a life of great achievement. Why now does the majority see fit to restrict how the Congress honors the country's most deserving citizens? With a U.S. population that grows daily in number and diversity, reducing the amount of honors that Congress can award to that population is simply perplexing.

In the long history of the U.S. Congress, rarely has the Congressional Gold Medal been awarded to more than 2 people in a year. This is not due to a mandated limit, such as what the majority is now proposing, but rather due to the longstanding requirement that at least two-thirds of the House and Senate co-sponsor the resolution. This requirement has created a "natural" ceiling, as it necessitates that the potential recipient have the support of an overwhelming majority of Congress. As such, it renders the forced limit that H.R. 54 proposes, needless.

In the rare instances that awardees for the Congressional Gold Medal have exceeded more than two in a year, the cohort included some of the most deserving individuals of which I can think. Presidents Harry Truman and Ronald Reagan, Pope John Paul II, Nelson Mandela, and Mother Teresa all received their medals in years when more than two were awarded. Competition in those years was particularly keen. If H.R. 54 had been in effect, some of these recipients may have been prevented from receiving the medal when they did.

Additionally, some of the most deserving individuals from America's minority communities would not have received medals at all under H.R. 54. The "Little Rock Nine" and the Navajo Code Talkers would have both been precluded due to the measure's restriction on group medals. Interestingly, all three of the medal recipients from 2004—who all happened to be African American and major contributors to the civil rights movement—would have been precluded under H.R. 54 because their medals were awarded posthumously. The mere possibility of the aforementioned examples reveals the immense shortcomings of H.R. 54. Unfortunately, the measure passed in the House along partisan lines, and now resides in the Senate for consideration.

The great writer Thomas Carlyle once wrote, "Show me the man you honor, and I will know what kind of man you are." The Congressional Gold Medal is not a token gesture offered liberally. Rather, it is awarded to those whose life and deeds embody the ideals our Nation holds sacred. It is in effect an annual affirmation of our national values. H.R. 54 seeks to limit this process. As such, it is a measure I cannot support, and one this Congress can ill-afford to enact.