

My amendment would have prohibited the abusive practice of monopoly contracts, requiring the Administration to use contract vehicles that allow multiple contractors to compete for individual projects. That way we could have some competition between the companies at the project level—and competition is the best way to control costs.

Finally Mr. Chairman, my amendment would have required the Department to submit to appropriate congressional committees a list of all audits that find more than \$1 million in contractor overcharges, and to provide full copies of specific audits requested by the chairmen and ranking members of those committees. In this way, the amendment would have enhanced the ability of Congress to discover contractor abuses and promoting greater transparency.

Unfortunately, the current Administration has tried to hide contractor overcharges from Congress, international auditors, and the public, impeding oversight and diminishing accountability.

For example, for months the Defense Department refused to provide copies of audits completed by the Defense Contract Audit Agency relating to Halliburton's oilfield reconstruction work in Iraq. Slowly, we gained access to these reports through unofficial channels. The first report showed overcharges of more than \$100 million. We now have six of these audits, and the overcharges exceed \$212 million. To this day, we have still not received the remaining audits under this contract.

By refusing to allow a debate on the common sense changes proposed by my amendment, the Republican leadership in Congress is trying to bury these serious problems as well.

I will vote for this bill. I support our troops and this bill will enhance the safety of our men and women in uniform and improve their quality of life. But I am deeply concerned that Congress is not doing nearly enough to stop wasteful and unethical contracting practices.

INTRODUCING THE CLINICAL SOCIAL WORK MEDICARE EQUITY ACT

HON. FORTNEY PETE STARK

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, May 26, 2005

Mr. STARK. Mr. Speaker, today I am pleased to join with my friend and colleague Rep. JIM LEACH (R-IA) to introduce the Clinical Social Work Medicare Equity Act of 2005. Sen. MIKULSKI is introducing the companion bill in the Senate. This simple, bipartisan bill would greatly improve access to mental health services for Medicare beneficiaries in skilled nursing facilities (SNFs) by allowing clinical social workers to direct bill for their services.

This legislation seeks to correct a flaw in the Balanced Budget Act of 1997 with respect to Medicare coverage of clinical social work services to nursing home residents. The law omits Certified Social Workers (CSWs) from a list of clinical professionals allowed to directly bill Medicare Part B for mental health services provided to Medicare beneficiaries in SNFs. As a result of this omission, Medicare beneficiaries in nursing homes often go without necessary mental health services.

Numerous reports suggest that mental illness is highly prevalent in nursing homes, with mental health problems affecting more than 80 percent of the residents. These mental disorders—including major depression, anxiety, and severe cognitive impairment of Alzheimer's disease—interfere with a person's ability to carry out activities of daily living. Furthermore, older people have the highest rate of suicide of any age group, accounting for 20 percent of all suicide deaths. Thus, access to mental health services for seniors in nursing homes is critically important.

Clinical social workers are highly trained mental health professionals and have been approved providers in the Medicare program since 1987. They provide 61 percent of mental health treatment in our country, and constitute the single largest group of mental health providers in the United States. Clinical social workers are also cost effective because they are paid less than Medicare's other mental health providers. They are reimbursed at 75 percent of the rate paid to psychologists.

Sadly, in many cases vulnerable nursing home residents have no access to mental health services when highly skilled CSWs are unable to bill Medicare Part B for services in SNFs. Rural and other medically underserved areas are particularly disadvantaged because psychiatrists and psychologists are often unavailable.

Before the Balanced Budget Act of 1997, clinical social workers were able to bill Medicare directly for providing mental health services to SNF residents, just like clinical psychologists and psychiatrists. Their current exclusion from this provider list is indefensible.

The ultimate victims of the current regulations are the vulnerable seniors who need mental health care. Mental health treatment works. Alzheimer's patients and their families can benefit enormously from psycho-education and counseling around how to cope and manage behavior problems. Research trials have repeatedly demonstrated that psychotherapy, either alone, or in combination with medication, can be effective in treating depression and debilitating anxiety.

The Clinical Social Work Medicare Equity Act of 2005 again makes it possible for CSWs to provide mental health services in skilled nursing facilities. This legislation helps to ensure access to needed mental health services for the many Medicare beneficiaries who reside in skilled nursing facilities. This bill is a small technical change to existing law, but would have the enormous effect of improving the lives of Medicare beneficiaries in nursing homes who are suffering from mental illness. We urge our colleagues to work with us to enact this important legislation this year.

MEMORIAL DAY TRIBUTE TO BRONX WAR HEROES

HON. JOSÉ E. SERRANO

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, May 26, 2005

Mr. SERRANO. Mr. Speaker, the ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are a constant reminder of the high cost of war. As they have done throughout America's history, selfless men and women continue to make the ultimate sacrifice for our country. We as Ameri-

cans may disagree on when, where, or if the country should go to war but we must all agree that the men and women who stand ready to sacrifice their lives for their Nation deserve nothing less than the respect and admiration of us all. As we commemorate the contributions of our fallen soldiers on this Memorial Day, I want to pay special tribute to Sergeant Cornelius Charlton and Private First Class William Thompson, two brave African American soldiers from the South Bronx who were posthumously awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for their outstanding service in the Korean War. The stories of these two soldiers are dramatic but largely unknown.

Sergeant Charlton was living in the Bronx, New York when he enlisted. Originally assigned to a desk job, Charlton volunteered for combat duty with Company C of the 24th Infantry Regiment of the 25th Infantry Division. On June 2, 1951, Charlton's platoon commander was wounded and evacuated from the field. Charlton took command of the unit's assault against Hill 543 and knocked out two enemy positions. Even though he had suffered a serious wound, Charlton led a third charge to capture the hill. Without regard for his own safety, he personally attacked the last enemy position on the other side of the hill. Fatally wounded by a grenade, Charlton struggled onward and single handedly took out the enemy. As a result of his indomitable courage, superb leadership, and gallant self sacrifice, Sergeant Charlton was posthumously awarded the Purple Heart and the Congressional Medal of Honor.

Private First Class Thompson enlisted in the army in 1945 at the young age of 18. His address at time of enlistment was the Home for Homeless Boys in the Bronx. Thompson was described by his friends as being helpful and cheerful but few if any of his friends believed he could succeed as a soldier. However, he proved them all wrong. On August 2, 1951 near Haman, Korea, enemy forces mounted a surprise attack on Pfc. Thompson's unit. Acting quickly and decisively, Thompson set up his machine gun in the path of the onslaught and pinned down the enemy, giving his unit time to withdraw to a more tenable position. Although hit repeatedly by enemy fire, he continued to return fire until he was mortally wounded by an enemy grenade. Thompson's dauntless courage and gallant self sacrifice saved the lives of many in his unit and earned him a posthumous Congressional Medal of Honor.

What makes the stories of these two men so outstanding is the fact they were African Americans fighting for a country that refused to fight for them. These two men epitomized every characteristic we expect our soldiers to possess: selflessness, dignity, courage and honor.

Mr. Speaker, fortunately, there is a group of dedicated veterans, the Friends of Charlton Garden, who are working tirelessly to preserve the memory of these fallen heroes in the Bronx by establishing a memorial park aptly named the Charlton-Thompson Korean War Veterans Memorial. I am proud of the work that the Friends of Charlton Garden are doing to ensure this monument stands as a symbol of gratitude to the selfless acts of heroism displayed by all of our fallen soldiers, and I know in my heart that we as a legislative body must do more to supplement their good works. I'm