

[From Politico, Nov. 17, 2013]

EMBRACING HER OLD KENTUCKY HOME

(By Elaine Chao)

Deep in the heart of Kentucky's rugged Eastern Mountain region there lives a woman who has fascinated and inspired me for two decades. She is known locally these days as "Mayor Nan"—the octogenarian chief executive of Hazard and advocate for its 5,467 residents.

Nan Gorman was born in Memphis, Tenn., on St. Patrick's Day. She moved to Hazard in 1929 when her father, James Hagan, a recent medical school graduate and aspiring surgeon, went to work there. The stock market was about to crash and soon the Great Depression would be under way and take a brutal toll on the rural mountain economy. In the early days, her father was often paid for his services with chickens and eggs. Later, her father became chief surgeon for the region at the Hazard Hospital.

Hazard was not just small but remote because of the lack of roads in the region so the Hagan family, with little Nan in tow, traveled there from Tennessee via Virginia mountain passes. Nan's parents, who she says still inspire and guide her today, ensured that she had a good education and gave her the opportunity to attend college but, as was prevalent then, expected that she would soon settle down as a young woman, marry and have children.

She eventually did all that, but not until after she had experienced some of the world far from Hazard and her beloved eastern Kentucky mountains that she says "are like the arms of a mother around us." So enraptured was she with the natural beauty around Hazard that she became an artist to record scenes in pencil, ink, watercolors and oil paints.

After World War II, Nan graduated from the University of Cincinnati and attended the prestigious Parsons School of Design in New York City. With an adventurous spirit, Nan flew to Egypt by herself to study ancient history and then traveled on for solo explorations of Greece, Rome, Paris and London. Having been exposed to such exotic, vibrant cities so full of opportunity, one could hardly have begrudged a choice to make her life elsewhere. But instead, she chose to come home to Kentucky. She got an apartment in Lexington and worked as a freelance artist drawing advertisements for clothing stores, doing architectural renderings and sketching historical landmarks. One day she saw a classified advertisement in which the state was looking for a full-time artist, and she subsequently became the first one ever employed by the Commonwealth of Kentucky. Among her tasks was designing the state seal—United We Stand, Divided We Fall—which is still in use today.

At age 50, Nan settled again in Hazard, remarried—to her high school sweetheart, Bill, and together they formed a partnership that would have a lasting impact on virtually every sphere of the community. Bill was elected mayor in 1978, served for 35 years and never accepted a salary. When he returned home to the Lord three years ago, Nan asked that donations go to a fund to benefit local public schools. Wishing to continue Bill's legacy of service to the community, Nan was subsequently elected mayor as a write-in candidate, winning by a 3-to-1 margin.

Nan's governing personal ethic is to constantly strive to do better for Hazard's residents for as long as she can. When last I spoke with her, Nan was alternately expressing pride over a young local girl's success overcoming disadvantages, helping with the Appalachian Regional Hospital's fundraising campaign and her efforts to obtain refrigerators for families in need.

An octogenarian well-deserving of retirement, Mayor Nan instead toils from sunrise to late in the evening on behalf of her town. She takes pleasure in the people and the mountain scenery and loves nothing more than to watch wildlife in her yard or to hear that some good fortune is improving someone's life. My takeaway from every visit with Nan is appreciation for the big difference that one woman in a little town can make.

RECOGNIZING THE UNIVERSITY OF PIKEVILLE

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I rise today to honor a venerable institution of higher learning from my home State of Kentucky the University of Pikeville. UPIke, as it is more commonly known, is celebrating 125 years of educating young minds on its campus in eastern Kentucky.

September 16 marked 125 years since the first classes were held at what was then called Pikeville Collegiate Institute. The college was founded by a group of Presbyterians, and has maintained its religious foundation ever since.

In addition to its religious background, UPIke has also always maintained a strong commitment to its community. The university invests deeply in the Appalachian region through community service projects, humanitarian efforts, and its educational offerings. As former President Hal Smith remarked at the anniversary ceremony, UPIke's mission has always been "to provide educational opportunity for the youth and adults of this region."

Three other former presidents, as well as the current President Dr. James Hurley, were in attendance Tuesday for the ceremony. During the ceremony, Dr. Hurley announced a campaign to raise \$75 million for the university. It is a fitting endeavor to ensure many more years of excellence in education at the University of Pikeville.

I now ask that my Senate colleagues join me in paying tribute to the University of Pikeville's 125 years of excellence in education.

WYMT Mountain News recently published an article detailing the University of Pikeville's 125th anniversary ceremonies. I ask unanimous consent that the full article be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

UNIVERSITY OF PIKEVILLE KICKS OFF 125TH ANNIVERSARY BY HONORING FOUR FORMER PRESIDENTS

(By Hillary Thornton)

PIKEVILLE, KY. (WYMT).—Four former University of Pikeville presidents were on hand for a ceremony that was all about honoring their past and celebrating their future. As Tuesday marks 125 years since the first class was held at the Pikeville Collegiate Institute . . . now known as UPIke.

Opening convocation officially starts the school year, however this year also marks the 125th anniversary.

Through all those years, the many additions and changes . . . all agree the mission of the institution remains the same.

Former President Hal Smith (1997–2009) says, "To provide educational opportunity for the youth and adults of this region."

President James Hurley calls it a very surreal day, as he honors four past presidents with honorary degrees from the institution they say continues to break barriers and exceed expectations.

Smith says, "Each of us laid a little bit of a foundation for the things that are happening and clearly I think the future is very, very bright."

To help ensure another 125 years of success at UPIke, Dr. Hurley announced a \$75 million comprehensive capital campaign.

"Investing in the future of Central Appalachia . . . with the decline in the coal industry we have to think about a new economy, an economy based on education," explains Hurley. He adds, "That is going to be our focus . . . we are going to raise 75 million dollars to invest in new infrastructure."

KYCOM student Fritz Stine says, "I think this definitely shows that we are moving in this trajectory and we are spearheading the future of the area."

"Working to honor their past, while planning for and celebrating their future."

COMPETITIVE PAY FOR HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, of the 21 million veterans in our country, about 750,000 live in Illinois. I hear from many of them as I travel around the State meeting with different groups. Like veterans throughout the United States, Illinois veterans are concerned about their health care. They are frustrated by lengthy wait times to get an appointment and, like all of us, they are furious about the wait list scandal uncovered this year. One factor that has contributed to the long wait times is a shortage of medical personnel at VA hospitals and clinics. In many cases there are not enough doctors and nurses to meet demand. Many of the doctors and nurses we do have are overwhelmed.

One way we can address this is to give VA doctors and nurses a raise. I am happy that VA Secretary Bob McDonald announced this morning the agency is going to lift a salary freeze on medical personnel and plans to increase compensation for the health care providers who work with our veterans. This is a positive step in improving the ailing Veterans Health Administration.

Salaries for VA doctors and nurses often are lower on average than those of their private sector counterparts, and those salaries have been frozen for 3 years. Primary care doctors and internists at VA facilities earned about 33 percent less than private sector primary care physicians in 2012, according to the Medical Group Management Association. A similar disparity can be found in nurses' pay.

Last week Secretary McDonald testified at a Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee hearing that the VA needs about 28,000 new medical staffers—doctors, nurses, other care providers, and

administrative staff—to improve the timeliness of care to the 8 million veterans enrolled in the Veterans Health Administration. We can help meet that demand if we make those jobs more competitive by adjusting the pay scale.

In the bill we passed this summer—which is now law—Congress gave Secretary McDonald the authority to fire underperformers. The other side of that coin is competitive pay for those who are performing. These doctors and nurses are caring for the men and women who put their lives at risk through military service. Let's lift the pay freeze on their salaries. The VA should have the best and the brightest medical staff out there. That means hiring the best and firing those who do not pass muster.

The shortage of health care providers is not a new issue—particularly in rural areas of the country. We have struggled with this in Illinois. The Danville and Marion VA medical centers—both in small towns far from an urban center—struggle to fill health care positions. In 2009 I offered an amendment to the fiscal year 2010 funding bill that set aside \$3 million for incentive pay to help with recruitment and retention for medical personnel to serve in rural VA facilities. Raising salaries would help facilities such as these attract and keep topflight doctors and nurses.

The Veterans Health Administration is an important training ground for many medical students. At Hines VA medical center in Chicago, medical students from Loyola get much of their training in a clinical setting. The veterans benefit from the addition of these young doctors. And hopefully that experience leads to more doctors looking to the VA as a career choice. But no matter how appealing the VA is, medical school debt is a factor. The VA offers a loan repayment program that can help offset those worries, but offering pay that is more comparable to the private sector would make working for the VA health care system even more attractive to new graduates and would help retain current staff.

The VA cares for America's heroes, the men and women who have worked to keep our country safe and defend American ideals abroad. As recent investigations have brought to light, VA must improve recruitment and retention of medical personnel to keep pace with growing demand. I am happy Secretary McDonald is lifting the salary freeze on medical personnel and plans to increase compensation for the health care providers who work with our veterans. They deserve the best.

HUNGER ACTION MONTH

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, in honor of Hunger Action Month, I want to say a few words about the real and lingering problem of hunger and food insecurity. Hunger has no boundaries. In a Nation that prides itself as the land of plenty, more than 47 million people—

including more than 1 in 5 children—do not know how they will put food on their table.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, SNAP, formerly known as food stamps, is one of our most important antihunger programs. More than 80 percent of SNAP households have incomes below the poverty line, which is less than \$500 a week for a family of four. Seventy percent of SNAP participants are in families with children, and more than 25 percent are in households with seniors or people with disabilities. Basic sustenance ought to be a guarantee in a civilized society, not a gamble. If children or adults are hungry in America, that is a problem for all of us, and it is a problem we can do something about.

I have traveled across my State and met families and parents that rely on food assistance and heard their stories. They are our neighbors, they are hard-working people who lost their job or got sick. They are seniors living on a limited income.

They are people like Maureen, who works cleaning houses. Her husband fell ill and had to stop working due to a disability. Maureen struggles to put food on the table for her two daughters in high school. Her husband's doctor says he needs to eat more vegetables, but Maureen says they are just too expensive. The \$126 a month in SNAP benefits Maureen receives help, but she still struggles and relies on a food pantry to feed her family. Unfortunately, Maureen is just one of the more than 1.8 million Illinoisans who do not know where their next meal will come from.

The millions of Americans, like Maureen, who rely on safety net antihunger programs, may not have the loudest voice in the debate or big public relations firms, but we must protect these programs and work to improve the lives of vulnerable families, children, and seniors at their time of need.

Hunger in America is not something we can ignore. No family should have to wonder where their next meal will come from. As a co-chair of the Senate Hunger Caucus, I look forward to continuing to work with my colleagues and those in the antihunger community to shine a light on this important issue and eliminate domestic hunger.

TRIBUTE TO JOSUE ROBLES

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, today I would like to pay tribute to a great American veteran, businessman, and leader, MG Josue Robles, Retired, or, as he prefers to be called, Joe. Joe is stepping down at the end of this year as the CEO and president of USAA, a great American institution based in San Antonio. His retirement marks a milestone in an inspirational and remarkable American story and the conclusion of an impressive career. He will be sorely missed not only by the employees at USAA but by the greater San Antonio community and beyond.

The eldest of nine children, Joe was born in Rio Piedras, Puerto Rico, in 1946. His father was working as a waiter when he was approached by a group of Americans who were recruiting for steel mills in the United States. His dad went to work for U.S. Steel in Lorain, OH. Eighteen months later, when Joe was 3, his dad had saved enough money to send for the family. Their house in Ohio was six blocks from the steel mill, where his father worked for the next 35 years, in addition to part-time work as a carpenter and plumber to supplement his income.

Starting at age 11 and throughout high school, Joe worked a variety of jobs at a local grocery store and in the neighborhood doing yard work. He worked in the steel mill one summer and learned very quickly what a hot, dirty, dangerous place it was. One summer there was enough, and it motivated Joe to go to school and get a good education so he would never have to shovel slag again.

While in high school, Joe was awarded a medical school scholarship sponsored by the local medical society. They would pay for his education if he agreed to come back and practice medicine in his hometown. But first he had to earn an undergraduate degree. Joe graduated from high school in 1964 and worked that summer painting a house. The job paid enough to cover his first year of tuition at Lorain County Community College. Joe married that year and went to work full time at a nuclear plant, where he monitored radiation levels. Within 2 years, his long hours forced him to drop a few classes and switch his student status to part time. Then, in 1966, his country came calling, and Joe was drafted into the U.S. Army.

By any measure, Joe's military career was stellar. His awards and mission-critical positions and assignments are too numerous to fully recount, but let me share a few highlights. Joe completed his basic training at Fort Jackson, SC. While there, he earned a recommendation for the Artillery Officer Candidate School at Fort Sill, OK. Once commissioned as a second lieutenant, he was sent to Korea in 1967 and 1968, followed by assignment as an executive officer at Fort Knox, KY, and then 12 months as a battery commander in Vietnam.

In the latter part of his career, Joe served as the chief of the Program and Budget Office at the U.S. Army Headquarters, the division artillery commander of the 1st Infantry Division, Mechanized, at Fort Riley, KS; and the Army planner and director for operations and support at Department of the Army Headquarters. As assistant division commander of the 1st Cavalry Division in Fort Hood, TX, he prepared and deployed the division for Operations Desert Shield/Desert Storm. He then served as the director of the Army budget and as commanding general of the 1st Infantry Division, Mechanized, out of Fort Riley, KS—the legendary “Big Red One.”