

in which Magellan was killed, Spain, for whom Magellan worked, colonized the Philippines and held power for nearly 400 years.

In 1896, Filipinos mustered the courage to bond together to overthrow the Spanish colonialists. Filipino revolutionaries, led by General Emilio Aguinaldo, took to the streets of his hometown of Kawit, Cavite, about 15 miles southwest of Manila and proclaimed an end to Spanish rule. The open resistance of the imperial power of Spain led to the Declaration of Independence 2 years later on June 12, 1898, and with it the birth of Asia's first independent nation.

But in real terms, just as Spain slipped out, came the colonizing power of the United States. Spain ceded the Philippines to the U.S., blatantly ignoring the Filipinos' own proclamation of freedom. So, practically, the century of independence is somewhat of an illusion, for the Philippines was a territory and then a Commonwealth of the United States until July 4, 1946. However, Independence Day is celebrated for good reason on June 12 because the victory in 1898 symbolizes to the Filipino people the triumph of political will and physical endurance by Filipinos against foreign control. Today, Filipinos are free and they have proven their quest for freedom in countless battles, most recently as part of the American army in World War II.

Mr. Speaker, it is time we award these brave heroes with the recognition they deserve. Let us pass the Filipino Veterans Equity Act this centennial year.

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

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

RECOGNIZING THE 150TH ANNIVERSARY OF MARLBORO TOWNSHIP

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

Mr. PAPPAS. Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege to congratulate the citizens of Marlboro Township as they commemorate the 105th anniversary of the incorporation of their community. This is a time of celebration and remembrance, a time to celebrate the growth and achievements of Marlboro Township, while remembering the efforts and sacrifices of the good men and women, past and present, who helped make Marlboro Township what it is today.

Beginning as a small group of small rural settlements in the 1600s, Marlboro has grown to be a center of activity and a place to call home for a community of over 30,000 people. Throughout this time of growth, Marlboro has

retained and contributed its own piece to our Nation's history, from being a Dutch and Scottish farming settlement to a battle site for revolutionary war skirmishes; from supporting New Jersey as a rural community to transforming it into a suburban center. In the wake of World War II, Marlboro has made its mark. Now, 150 years later, the township will celebrate its anniversary with rich new traditions, including a time capsule burial and ceremony to offer history to future generations, annual recreation events, concerts and festivities, as well as having speakers on Marlboro's history and other events.

It is fitting that, while remembering the past, they are looking to the future by having children participate in the celebration. A time capsule, as I mentioned earlier, will create a picture for later generations of what the township was like in 1998.

In the years to come, I sincerely hope that Marlboro Township will continue to build on the foundations of the past to ensure a happy and prosperous future for all its residents. I offer my congratulations and best wishes to Mayor Matthew Scanepiecco and the Township Council. It is my honor to have this municipality within the boundaries of my district and it is my good fortune to be able to participate in its very special anniversary.

THE MEDICARE VENIPUNCTURE FAIRNESS ACT OF 1997

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Texas (Ms. SHEILA JACKSON-LEE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, before I begin, I yield to my friend and colleague, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. BENTSEN).

SUPPORTING THE INCLUSION OF THE DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. BIRTHDAY IN THE U.S. FLAG CODE

Mr. BENTSEN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce legislation correcting an oversight that occurred in the 98th Congress during the establishment of the Federal holiday celebrating the birthday of our Nation's greatest civil rights leader, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

It is customary during the establishment of official Federal holidays to signify the importance of the date through recognition in the U.S. Flag Code. The U.S. Flag Code encourages all Americans to remember the significance of each Federal holiday through the display of our Nation's banner. The Flag Code reminds people that on certain days every year, displaying the flag will show respect for the people and events that have shaped our great Nation.

I believe the American people should be afforded the opportunity to pay their respects to the memory of Dr. King and all his achievements through the display of our flag on the day we honor him. Of the ten permanent Federal holidays, only the King birthday

lacks this honor, and I believe that as we celebrate Black History Month, it is appropriate to correct this omission.

I would like to offer my appreciation to Mr. Charles Spain, a resident of Houston, which the gentlewoman and I come from. Mr. Spain brought this very important matter to my attention and I am grateful for his diligence and assistance in helping my office to introduce this legislation to correct this error.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this measure. Let us continue to honor the legacy of Dr. King and continue to move forward with his dream.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman for yielding me this time.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I applaud the gentleman for his leadership on this issue, and I would join the gentleman in cosponsoring this legislation, which I think is an important correction for an honorable gentleman, Dr. Martin Luther King.

I would like to as well, Mr. Speaker, to raise several issues that really are in keeping with Black History Month, in recognition of many of our tried-and-true men and women who served in the Vietnam war. I am certainly a product of that era and I could not find a better time to take a moment to salute those who lost their lives and sacrificed in order that we might be free.

Many people had many things to say about the Vietnam war, but I have nothing to say other than for those who fought and those who lost limbs and were injured and those who lost lives and to their families and loved ones, I salute you, I applaud you, I honor you.

In my district I work extensively with homeless veterans, many of whom are from the Vietnam era. They are no less diminished because of the tragedy of their life, because of some misstep that might have brought them to this point, but they are certainly a part of the honor of those who have served, and my hat is off to them.

I salute those veterans of the 18th Congressional District who served in Vietnam. I certainly am grateful for the ending of that war, and I salute all of the veterans and all of the men and women all over this country who served in this Vietnam war.

It is for this reason, Mr. Speaker, that I applaud the President today highlighting for America the Patient's Bill of Rights. And I will be supporting that legislation, along with the Venipuncture Fairness Act of 1997. In fact, many of my constituents, many veterans, are in home care, and the home care agencies are now being precluded from going to the homes of homebound individuals and taking vital signs that are necessary for prescription drugs and other various medications and physical needs. This H.R.

2912 will correct an injustice by Medicare to prevent coverage for the venipuncture service that is needed.

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So, Mr. Speaker, let me again thank the veterans of the Vietnam War and thank the families who gave through their loved ones the ultimate sacrifice. Let us never forget.

And then as we proceed into this legislative agenda year, let us not forget those who need the patient bill of rights who now live with us today in America. Let us assure them of good health care and the rights of physicians and patients to make the decisions about life and death, not about good health care.

And, as well, I ask my colleagues to support H.R. 2912 to correct the injustice of eliminating the venipuncture visitation by home care agencies. Let us support the Venipuncture Fairness Act of 1997.

Mr. Speaker, I submit the following for the RECORD:

Mr. Speaker, I rise this afternoon to urge this Congress to remedy a wrong we perpetrated upon America's home-bound seniors and disabled people when we passed one of the Medicare provisions in the Balanced Budget Act of 1997. As of February 5, 1998—last Thursday—home venipuncture services for individuals who do not receive any other skilled home health services are no longer covered by Medicare. H.R. 2912, the Medicare Venipuncture Fairness Act of 1997, would reinstate Medicare coverage for this vital medical service.

Venipuncture is simply the drawing of blood. Thousands of home-bound individuals rely on this service to ensure that their doctors are able to monitor their medication levels, particularly with the most complicated drugs such as heart medications, blood thinners, and insulin. Section 4615 of the Balanced Budget Act removed venipuncture from the list of prescribed services that qualify a Medicare beneficiary for other home health services. Therefore, unless a patient has been prescribed another skilled service, he or she will no longer be reimbursed for the cost of having blood drawn at home.

There are several problems with this new approach. The reason most of these patients require their blood to be drawn at home is that they are unable to travel to their doctors' offices, either because they are located in a rural area, or because their health is such that leaving home is not feasible or safe. For those patients that are able to leave home, public transportation is often unavailable, and ambulance services to and from the doctor's office may cost up to \$250 a trip. For those patients who cannot leave home, their only option may be placement in a nursing home. We are all acutely and unfortunately aware of the exorbitant cost of those facilities.

In addition, this policy change may in fact be unnecessarily increasing the amount spent on skilled home health services. Essentially, we are forcing doctors to prescribe additional, costly services in order to ensure that their patients' medication levels are appropriately adjusted and safe.

I voted for the Balanced Budget Act of 1997. I believe it is important to combat waste

and fraud in the Medicare system. However, I have been presented with absolutely no evidence to support the contention that home venipuncture services were a source of either waste or fraud. There are no estimates as to either how much venipuncture services were costing the system before the Balanced Budget Act, or how much this dangerous change will save the Medicare system. In fact, the removal of coverage for home venipuncture may in fact end up increasing overall health costs by forcing seniors and disabled citizens into nursing homes when they otherwise could have stayed at home.

I have, therefore, not heard anything to convince me that there was abuse of home venipuncture services, such that the change made by section 4615 was warranted. I have, however, heard much to convince me that this change is endangering the health and well-being of senior citizens and disabled people throughout this country. I have heard from people in my district who do not know how they are going to provide their elderly relatives' doctors with blood samples now that this policy change has been instituted. I have heard from one family that, faced with the discontinuation of Medicare reimbursement for venipuncture, sought to have someone continue to come to their home to draw their elderly mother's blood. However, they were unable to find any agency or organization that could provide this vital service, even if they scraped together the funds to pay for the service privately.

What am I to tell these families, who are making personal sacrifices by caring for their loved ones at home? How can I tell them that we appreciate their devotion but that somebody had a suspicion, not apparently supported by any statistics, that this was a good service to discontinue so we did? I will not tell them that, without also telling them that we are trying to remedy this terrible error.

I urge this Congress to support those Americans who need our help the most, our home-bound senior and disabled citizens, by supporting H.R. 2912, the Medicare Venipuncture Fairness Act of 1997. We must, as representatives of the American people, be willing to admit when we have made a mistake and remedy it as soon as we possibly can.

SECOND ANNIVERSARY OF TELECOMMUNICATIONS ACT

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. PITTS). Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from North Carolina (Mrs. CLAYTON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mrs. CLAYTON. Mr. Speaker, it has been 2 years since we passed the Telecommunications Act of 1996. When we passed that act, we were all very encouraged that our communities would enjoy local telephone service that had not been available in the past at a competitive rate. Those of us from rural communities were particularly hopeful about the prospect of such service.

Unfortunately, I have yet to see one of those companies that lobbied us in any of the counties I represent in rural North Carolina. Instead, they have set up shops in Charlotte and in the Research Triangle serving big business and large corporations. That is not

what Congress intended. So it may be time to encourage regulators to help bring down the barriers to competition and all markets, including rural communities. At the same time, I want to invite companies interested in offering local services at affordable rates to come on down to eastern North Carolina and offer my constituents a choice. We are waiting for them.

Mr. Speaker, another issue I just want to raise is the issue indeed of the Afro-American farmer. We are now talking about Afro-American History Month, and this is the time not only to cite progress and to cite renewed hope for the future, but also to cite some of the opportunities we have to make corrections.

The black farmers known in North Carolina and known throughout the South have been suffering for many reasons. But one of the reasons they have been suffering is not to have access to capital, not to have opportunities to the resources of USDA in an nondiscriminatory manner. This issue has been highlighted recently because a number of farmers had really had foreclosures on their homes and a number of them have been in a struggle with their government to make sure they treat them fairly for the last 20 or 25 years. And yet, our government has not found an opportunity not only to address the agreed and admitted discrimination but not to make them whole, not to make sure that they get their land back, which was taken indiscriminately and they should make sure that the remedy they fashion and offer to black farmers are not empty gestures where there is no opportunity to make them whole where they can farm again and have a quality of life, which indeed all Americans want.

So I want to urge my colleagues, as they reflect with me on Black History Month, they also reflect on the small black farmer, which has been an intimate part of our struggle and our development in feeding our country. They simply want to farm. They simply want to have the opportunity as any other farmer to have the resources, have the technical assistance, to have the programs offered to other farmers offered to them.

There may come a time when this Congress has to step in and make those corrections to make sure our country lives up to the code and make sure that all farmers, all Americans, have the same equal right access to capital, access to American programs, and to make sure that our country honors, honors, their commitment, when they make a commitment they will not discriminate, and if they are found to be discriminatory, there will be a remedy that will be a remedy fashioned according to the damage done to them.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to consider that as they reflect.

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