Mr. Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge the thousands of dentists and volunteers who participate in the “Give Kids A Smile Day.” Each February, Illinois dentists donate more than $1 million in much-needed dental care to children. Many families cannot afford to provide their children with regular dental care, this can not only result in potentially serious health problems but is also likely to serve as an impediment to economic success. The unfortunate truth is that individuals with unhealthy looking teeth are less likely to be hired than those with better oral health. Furthermore, an inability to obtain dental care can adversely affect children before they even enter the job market - dental pain can affect both sleep patterns and school performance. Inadequate dental care is not a cosmetic concern; it has a real impact on a person’s economic mobility and success.

I commend the American Dental Association for its tireless efforts to raise awareness and develop solutions so more people can receive dental care. Since the ADA’s “Give Kids A Smile” program was founded twelve years ago in St. Louis, it has grown to become the world’s largest oral health charitable program - encouraging parents, health professionals and policymakers to address the year-round need for oral health care for all children. Each year, thousands of the nation’s dentists, dental team members and community volunteers provide free oral health care services to children from low-income families.

This February in Illinois, over 2,000 dental care professionals volunteered for “Give Kids A Smile Day,” reaching upwards of 17,000 kids. Dentists in Illinois have demonstrated their commitment to giving back to the community. In June 2014, the Illinois State Dental Society and its Foundation will hold the third “Illinois Mission of Mercy” in Peoria, Illinois. The Mission of Mercy is a free, two-day dental clinic during which over 950 volunteers see 1,000 patients each day and provide over $1 million in much-needed oral health care.

I would like to thank all the dental professionals who have volunteered their time this year to provide screenings, treatments and education to children throughout the United States. I urge my colleagues to support the ADA’s efforts to improve the lives and expand opportunities for our nation’s children.

Thank you, and I yield back the balance of my time.

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