involved in the CASS program. The college focuses on training rural health workers to deliver desperately needed services to some of the most poor and remote areas in the hemisphere. The program provides training and internships in a variety of areas such as infectious diseases, maternal and child health, environmental health, and community outreach. Students also spend time volunteering in the local community at health clinics and other social service and youth agencies. Upon their return home, they work with other rural healthcare professionals to improve and expand services in their communities.

I would like to take a moment to share some specific success stories coming out of the CASS program at El Paso Community College.

Ramona Caceres from the Dominican Republic and a CASS scholar at El Paso Community College during 2001–2002, has returned to her home country and is presently actively working in her community teaching first aid in a local school and has trained some of the teachers to perform eye exams. The program is known as ''Agudeza Visual''. Further, Ms. Caceres will soon be presenting her thesis and graduating.

Mr. Carlos Sanchez, also a CASS scholar for 2001–2002 at El Paso Community College, is a Septima Clark award recipient and since returning to his home country of Honduras, has been working as a health promoter and within a year of assuming his job has been advanced to the position of regional supervisor.

During this year's internship at El Paso Community College, four students worked on a joint project between the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and the El Paso City-County Health & Environmental Health District to prevent rabies in dogs in the county.

These stories are just a few examples of the way which the CASS program is making a difference not only in Central America and the Caribbean but also within the United States.

Unfortunately, this bill did not provide as much good news for the Inter-American Foundation (IAF) as it did for CASS. I am disappointed that this bill cuts appropriations to the Inter-American Foundation by about $1 million, to $15,185,000 for fiscal year 2004. I understand that the chairman of the Foreign Operations Appropriations Subcommittee is a supporter of the IAF and did the best he could within the constraints of a low budget allocation.

Established under the 1969 Foreign Assistance Act, the Inter-American Foundation (IAF) promotes entrepreneurship, self-reliance and democratic principles as well as economic progress for the poor in Latin America and the Caribbean. The IAF is one of the many tools we have to help our neighbors in the Western Hemisphere work their own way out of poverty. I hope that as this bill moves through the conference committee, funding for the IAF will be restored to its fiscal year 2003 level.

Mr. Chairman, the economic and social development of countries in the Western Hemisphere benefits us here at home. Programs such as CASS and IAF help our neighbors become stable, free, and prosperous. I therefore urge my colleagues to support these and other such programs in this bill and in the years to come.

Mr. PAUL. Mr. Chairman, I was planning to offer an amendment to the Foreign Operations Appropriations Bill preventing tax dollars from going to the domestic shrimping industry's major foreign competitors. However, I have been informed that this amendment would be ruled out of order by the parliamentarian as legislating on an appropriations bill. While I am disappointed the House will not consider my amendment, I do wish to take this opportunity to comment on the merits of my amendment, which is based on language contained in my Shrimp Importation Financing Fairness Act.

The United States domestic shrimping industry is a vital social and economic force in many coastal communities across the United States, including several in my congressional district. A thriving shrimping industry benefits not only those who own and operate shrimp boats, but, also, food processors, hotels and restaurants, grocery stores, and all those who work in and service these industries. Shrimping also serves as a key source of safe domestic food at a time when the nation is engaged in hostilities abroad.

However, the Federal Government is strangling this vital industry with excessive regulations. For example, the Federal Government has imposed costly regulations, dealing with usage of items such as by catch reduction devices and turtle excluder devices (TEDS), on the industry. The mandatory use of these devices results in a significant reduction in the amount of shrimp caught by domestic shrimpers, thus damaging their competitive position and market share.

Seven foreign countries—Thailand, Vietnam, India, China, Ecuador, Indonesia, and Brazil—have taken advantage of the domestic shrimping industry's government-created vulnerabilities. These countries have each exported in excess of 20,000,000 pounds of shrimp to the United States in the first 6 months of 2002. These seven countries supplied nearly 70 percent of all shrimp consumed in the United States in the first 6 months of 2002 and nearly 80 percent of all shrimp imported to this country in the same period.

Adding insult to injury the Federal Government is forcing American shrimpers to subsidize their competitors. From 1999–2002, the U.S. Government provided approximately $2,172,220,000 in financing and insurance for these foreign countries through the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC). Furthermore, the United States' current exposure relative to these countries through the Export-Import Bank totals approximately $14,800,000,000. Thus, the United States taxpayer is providing a subsidy of at least $16,972,220,000 to the home countries of the leading foreign competitors of American shrimpers!

Many of the countries in question do not have free-market economies. Thus, the participation of these countries in U.S.-supported international financial regimes amounts to American shrimpers directly subsidizing their international competitors. In any case, providing aid to any of these countries indirectly benefits foreign shrimpers because of the fungibility of money.

In order to ensure that American shrimpers are not forced to subsidize their competitors, my amendment forbids taxpayer dollars from being used to support Export-Import and OPIC subsidies to the countries that imported more than 20 million pounds of shrimp in the first 6 months of 2002.

Mr. Chairman, it is time for Congress to stop subsidizing the domestic shrimping industry's leading competitors. Otherwise, the government-manufactured depression in the price of shrimp will decimate the domestic shrimping industry and the communities whose economies depend on this industry. I therefore hope that Congress will soon stand up for American shrimpers by passing my Shrimp Importation Financing Fairness Act.

Ms. WATERS. Mr. Chairman, I rise to support section 568 of H.R. 2800, the Foreign Operations Appropriations bill for fiscal year 2004. Section 568 gives the President the authority to reduce the debts that poor countries owe the United States as a result of prior loans under various foreign assistance programs. This authority is included routinely in foreign operations appropriations bills. The rules governing the debates on prior foreign operations appropriations bills always have protected this language from points of order.

Unfortunately, this year, the Rules Committee reported and the House passed a rule that fails to protect subsection (a) paragraph (3) of section 568 from points of order against the inclusion of authorizing language in an appropriations bill. Section 568(a)(3) specifically gives the President the authority to reduce debts resulting from prior loans under agricultural programs and food assistance programs. The rest of section 568 is protected from all points of order, as it should be.

As a Member of Congress who has been working on the issue of debt relief for poor countries for many years, I am especially disappointed that the Rules Committee did not protect section 568 in its entirety from all points of order. Section 568 is critical to enable the President to reduce and reschedule poor countries debts. Section 568 is especially important for poor countries that do not currently qualify for other debt relief programs, such as the Enhanced HIPC Initiative.

The President recently reduced the Congo's debts using the authority included in section 568. The Congo is an extremely impoverished country that is emerging from years of violent conflict. The Congo lacks the political institutions necessary to develop the detailed economic plans and poverty reduction strategies, which countries must develop to qualify for participation in the Enhanced HIPC Initiative. The debt reduction provided under section 568 will free the Congo from the burden of substantial debt payments and assist the Congo in developing the political institutions necessary to qualify for other debt relief and foreign assistance programs.

If section 568(a)(3) is stricken on a point of order, we will narrow the President's authority to reduce poor countries' debts significantly and needlessly. Striking section 568(a)(3) would force poor countries that receive debt reduction to continue making substantial debt payments on debts that arise under certain foreign assistance programs while debts that arise under other foreign assistance programs are reduced. The President's authority to reduce debts should not depend upon whether a loan was issued under one foreign assistance program rather than another.

The President must have the authority to reduce the debts of poor countries whenever it is appropriate. I urge my colleagues not to insist on a point of order against section 568(a)(3) and to support section 568 in its entirety.