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ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

• Mr. SPECTER. Mr. President, I have sought recognition today to summarize for my colleagues, and for the public, the activities and accomplishments of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs during the 106th Congress. I am pleased to report, as chairman of the committee, that this Congress has been one of significant accomplishment.

When this Congress convened, it was determined that three veterans' priorities needed to be met. We had to increase the availability of Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)-provided health care services, particularly long-term care services, to World War II veterans. We had to improve educational assistance benefits—so-called Montgomery GI bill or MGIB benefits—made available by VA to veterans, principally young veterans, newly released from service. And we had to address and rectify vestigial elements of discrimination against women contained in veterans' statutes. With the assistance of the committee's ranking minority member, Senator JOHN D. ("JAY") ROCKEFELLER IV, and in bipartisan partnership with all of the committee's members, we have achieved all three of these goals—and more.

First, with the enactment of the Veterans Millennium Health Care and Benefits Act of 1999, Public Law 106-117 (Millennium Act), the Congress provided for the first time that the most deserving of veterans—those with severe service-connected disabilities—will be assured of receiving nursing home care should they need it—and so long as they need it. Under the terms of the Millennium Act, any veteran who needs nursing home care to treat a service-connected disability will get it. Similarly, any veteran who is rated as 70 percent disabled or higher by VA due to a service-connected cause will be provided with needed nursing home

care—even if the condition which causes the need for such care is not itself service-connected. Further, all veterans who are enrolled for VA care—even those who do not have service-connected disabilities—will, under the terms of the Millennium Act, receive any and all non-institutional alternatives to inpatient long-term care—services such as home health aide services, adult day health care services, and the like—as they might need to forestall the day on which they will have to resort to inpatient long-term care. Finally, the Millennium Act mandates that VA maintain the nursing home capacity that it now has, and that it initiate pilot programs to determine, first, the most cost-effective ways of providing more nursing home care to more veterans and, second, the feasibility of providing to veterans, and their spouses, assisted living services.

With enactment last month of the Veterans Benefits and Health Care Improvement Act of 2000, Public Law 106-419, the other two priorities which had been identified at the outset of the 106th Congress were also met. Under that statute, a veteran who has served a three-year enlistment and who returns to school after service will be eligible to receive as much as \$800 per month in assistance payments while he or she is in school. In January 1997, when I assumed the chairmanship of the committee, veteran-students could receive no more than \$427 per month in Montgomery GI bill assistance; thus, in four years, assistance to full time veteran students has been increased by 87 percent.

The Veterans Benefits and Health Care Improvement Act also addressed two issues of importance to women veterans: It provided that special compensation benefits—those provided to male veterans when they lose, due to a service-connected cause, a so-called creative organ—will also be afforded to

women veterans who sustain the service-connected loss of a breast. And it provided—based on sound scientific evidence—that children with birth defects of women Vietnam veterans will be provided compensation, health care, and job training benefits.

These three measures—addressing the disparate needs of older, younger, and women veterans—are not the only veterans-related legislative accomplishments of the 106th Congress. To the contrary, the list of other legislative achievements is long. In addition to providing the long-term care benefits I have already outlined, the Millennium Act also specifies that VA will itself provide, or reimburse the uninsured costs of, emergency care needed by any veteran enrolled for VA care. It mandates, further, that VA enhance the services it provides to homeless veterans, and to veterans with post-traumatic stress disorders, drug abuse disorders, and injuries from sexual trauma. It provides, in addition, that higher priority access to VA care will be provided to veterans who were wounded in combat and are, as a consequence, recipients of the Purple Heart. And, finally, it authorizes VA to provide enhanced care, as space is available, to active duty service personnel and military retirees (who normally receive care from their respective military services), and reauthorizes the provision of health care evaluations to the spouses and children of Persian Gulf war veterans.

Further in the area of health care benefits, the Millennium Act and the Veterans Benefits and Health Care Improvement Act jointly enhance services provided to veterans by improving VA assistance to State-run veterans' nursing home facilities; by authorizing 13 major hospital construction projects; by improving provisions of law relating to nurse, dentist, and pharmacist pay and the recruitment of

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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