for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. TRAFICANT. Mr. Speaker, in 1998, Congress reformed the IRS and included two of my provisions. The first transferred the burden of proof from the taxpayer to the IRS; the second required judicial consent before the IRS could seize our property, and the results are now staggering. Property seizures dropped from 10,037 to 161 in the entire country.

The IRS had a license to steal, and they were stealing 10,000 properties a year. And if that is not enough to tax our gallbladders, the IRS is now complaining the new law is too tough. Beam me up here. It is time to tell these crybaby IRS thieves that we are going to pass a 15 percent flat sales tax and abolish them altogether.

I yield back what should be the next endangered species in the United States of America: The Internal Rectal Service.

THE NEW ADMINISTRATION IS GOOD FOR EVERYONE

(Mr. GIBBONS asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. GIBBONS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to thank the current administration for its willingness, its simple willingness, to consider the economic consequences of previous executive regulations.

The Clinton administration promulgated new and somewhat draconian mining regulations in spite of the unforeseen economic hardships, especially in Nevada, that they would create, and in spite of the recommendations of the National Academy of Sciences study which stated that new Federal mining regulations were not necessary. Yet the previous administration went ahead, thinking it knew better than anyone else.

Well, finally, Nevadans and, may I say, all Americans can have faith that their Federal Government will not rush headlong into issuing new rules without listening to the public and to the experts.

It is nice to see the American people will once again have a say in their democracy, the way our Founding Fathers had envisioned it; the proper function of our Federal Government.

APPOINT U.S. ATTORNEY WITH D.C. ROOTS

(Ms. NORTON asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Speaker, Wilma Lewis, the first woman in the history of the Nation's capital to be U.S. attorney, is leaving the office she has served with great distinction. From prosecution of hard-core street crime to complex white-collar violations, U.S. Attorney Lewis has left an extraordinary record.

She and her predecessor, Eric Holder, who went on to become Deputy Attorney General, had more in common than their background as the first African Americans to be appointed. They were both longtime Washingtonians who were also very able lawyers.

Most of the jurisdiction of the U.S. attorney here is D.C. criminal and civil law that elsewhere lies with a local prosecutor. Mayor Williams, Council Chair Cropp, and I have written President Bush to ask that he appoint as U.S. attorney a distinguished lawyer with deep roots in the D.C. community, as Ms. Lewis and Mr. Holder had. That is the way to be sure that not only Federal law is carried out, but that crime keeps coming down, as U.S. Attorneys Lewis and Holder assured.

FAMILY CARE TAX CREDIT ACT WILL LESSEN TAX BURDEN

(Mr. RYUN of Kansas asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. RYUN of Kansas. Mr. Speaker, providing help to families is one of the biggest reasons that I ran for Congress. I look forward to voting this week and eliminating the unfair marriage tax penalty and doubling the per-child deduction, but I believe we should do more to help families with tax relief, and I go one step further.

Mr. Speaker, that is why I have introduced the Family Care Tax Credit Act, which would lessen the tax burden on families who care for children or loved ones. Currently we give tax credit to families who pay for day care and other services, but families who have a parent taking care of their children are left on their own. My plan gives a fair and balanced approach to child care tax credits by giving help to all middle-income families with children.

Mr. Speaker, I have spoken with parents in Kansas who tell me that they would like to stay home with their children, but they simply cannot overcome the economic barriers caused by the current Tax Code. My plan would simply remove one of those barriers. I am thankful that this week we will have the marriage penalty as a past memory, but believe that we can and should do more to help families.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, the Chair announces that he will postpone further proceedings today on each motion to suspend the rules on which a recorded vote or the yeas and nays are ordered, or on which the vote is objected to under clause 6 of rule XX.

Any record votes on postponed questions will be taken after debate has concluded on all motions to suspend the rules, but not before 6 p.m. today.

VETERANS OPPORTUNITIES ACT OF 2001

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 801) to amend title 38, United States Code, to improve programs of educational assistance, to expand programs of transition assistance and outreach to departing servicemembers, veterans, and dependents, to increase burial benefits, to provide for family coverage under Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 801

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE; TABLE OF CONTENTS.

(a) SHORT TITLE.—This Act may be cited as the ''Veterans Opportunities Act of 2001''.

(b) TABLE OF CONTENTS.—The table of contents for this Act is as follows:

Sec. 1. Short title; table of contents.
Sec. 2. References to title 38, United States Code.

TITLE I—EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE PROVISIONS

Sec. 101. Increase in maximum allowable annual Senior ROTC educational assistance for eligibility for benefits under the Montgomery GI Bill.
Sec. 102. Expansion of work-study opportunities.
Sec. 103. Inclusion of certain private technology entities in the definition of educational institution.
Sec. 104. Expansion of special restorative training benefit to certain disabled spouses or surviving spouses.
Sec. 105. Distance education.
Sec. 106. Technical amendments to the Montgomery GI Bill.

TITLE II—TRANSITION AND OUTREACH PROVISIONS

Sec. 201. Authority to establish overseas veterans assistance offices to expand transition assistance.
Sec. 202. Timing of preseparation counseling.
Sec. 203. Improvement in education and training outreach services for separating servicemembers and veterans.
Sec. 204. Expansion of outreach efforts to eligible dependents.
Sec. 205. Improvement of veterans outreach programs.

TITLE III—MEMORIAL AFFAIRS, INSURANCE, AND OTHER PROVISIONS

Sec. 301. Increase in burial benefits.
Sec. 302. Family coverage under Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance.
Sec. 303. Retroactive applicability of increase in maximum SGLI benefit for members dying in performance of duty on or after October 1, 2000.
Sec. 304. Increase in amount of assistance for automobile and adaptive equipment for certain disabled veterans.
Sec. 305. Increase in assistance amount for specially adapted housing.
Sec. 306. Revision of rules with respect to net worth limitation for eligibility for pensions for veterans who are permanently and totally disabled from a non-service-connected disability.
Sec. 307. Technical amendments.

SEC. 2. REFERENCES TO TITLE 38, UNITED STATES CODE.

Except as otherwise expressly provided, whenever in this Act an amendment or repeal is expressed in terms of an amendment to, or repeal of, a section or other provision, the reference shall be considered to be made to a section or other provision of title 38, United States Code.

TITLE I—EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE PROVISIONS

SEC. 101. INCREASE IN MAXIMUM ALLOWABLE ANNUAL SENIOR ROTC EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE FOR ELIGIBILITY FOR BENEFITS UNDER THE MONTGOMERY GI BILL.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Sections 3011(c)(3)(B) and 3012(d)(3)(B) are each amended by striking ''$2,000'' and inserting ''$3,400''.

(b) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendments made by subsection (a) shall take effect on the date of the enactment of this Act and shall apply with respect to educational assistance allowances paid under chapter 30 of title 38, United States Code, for months beginning after such date.

SEC. 102. EXPANSION OF WORK-STUDY OPPORTUNITIES.

(a) ASSISTING IN OUTREACH SERVICES.—The second sentence of section 3485(a)(1) is amended in clause (A) by inserting before the comma the following: ''or outreach services to servicemembers and veterans furnished by employees of State approving agencies''.

(b) WORKING IN MAJOR ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE.—Such sentence is further amended—

(1) by striking ''or (E)'' and inserting ''(E)''; and

(2) by inserting before the period the following: '', or (F) in the case of an individual who has declared a major academic discipline, activities within the department of that academic discipline approved by the Secretary that complement and reinforce the program of education pursued by that individual''.

(c) WORKING IN STATE VETERANS HOME.—Such sentence is amended in clause (C) by inserting after the comma ''including the provision of such care to veterans in a State home for which payment is made under section 1741 of this title,''.

(d) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendments made by this section shall apply with respect to agreements entered into under section 3485 of title 38, United States Code, on or after the date of the enactment of this Act.

SEC. 103. INCLUSION OF CERTAIN PRIVATE TECHNOLOGY ENTITIES IN THE DEFINITION OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Sections 3452(c) and 3501(a)(6) are each amended by adding at the end the following new sentence: ''Such term also includes any private entity (that meets such requirements as the Secretary may establish) that offers, either directly or under an agreement with another entity (that meets such requirements), a course or courses to fulfill requirements for the attainment of a license or certificate generally recognized as necessary to obtain, maintain, or advance in employment in a profession or vocation in a technological occupation (as determined by the Secretary).''.

(b) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendments made by subsection (a) shall apply to enrollments in courses occurring on or after the date of the enactment of this Act.

SEC. 104. EXPANSION OF SPECIAL RESTORATIVE TRAINING BENEFIT TO CERTAIN DISABLED SPOUSES OR SURVIVING SPOUSES.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Section 3540 is amended by striking ''section 3501(a)(1)(A) of this title'' and inserting ''subparagraphs (A), (B), and (D) of section 3501(a)(1) of this title''.

(b) CONFORMING AMENDMENTS.—(1) Section 3541(a) is amended in the matter preceding paragraph (1) by striking ''of the parent or guardian''.

(2) Section 3542(a) is amended—

(A) by striking ''the parent or guardian shall be entitled to receive on behalf of such person'' and inserting ''the eligible person shall be entitled to receive''; and

(B) by striking ''upon election by the parent or guardian of the eligible person'' and inserting ''upon election by the eligible person''.

(3) Section 3543(a) is amended by striking ''the parent or guardian for the training provided to an eligible person'' and inserting ''for the training provided to the eligible person''.

(4) Section 3543 is amended by adding at the end the following new subsection:

''(c) In a case in which the Secretary determines requires a parent or guardian to make a request under section 3541(a) of this title on behalf of an eligible person, the parent or guardian shall be entitled—

''(1) to receive on behalf of the eligible person the special training allowance provided for under section 3542(a) of this title;

''(2) to elect an increase in the basic monthly allowance provided for under such section; and

''(3) to agree with the Secretary on the fair and reasonable amounts which may be charged under subsection (a).''.

SEC. 105. DISTANCE EDUCATION.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Subsection (a)(4) of section 3680A is amended—

(1) by inserting ''(A)'' after ''leading''; and

(2) by inserting before the period the following: '', or (B) to a certificate that reflects educational attainment offered by an institution of higher learning''.

(b) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendments made by subsection (a) shall apply to enrollments in independent study courses beginning on or after the date of the enactment of this Act.

SEC. 106. TECHNICAL AMENDMENTS TO THE MONTGOMERY GI BILL.

(a) CLARIFICATION OF ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENT FOR MGIB BENEFITS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Clause (i) of section 3011(a)(1)(A) is amended to read as follows:

''(i) who (I) in the case of an individual whose obligated period of active duty is three years or more, serves at least three years of continuous active duty in the Armed Forces, or (II) in the case of an individual whose obligated period of active duty is less than three years, serves at least two years of continuous active duty in the Armed Forces; or''.

(2) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendment made by paragraph (1) shall take effect as if included in the enactment of the Veterans Benefits and Health Care Improvement Act of 2000 (Public Law 106–419).

(b) ENTITLEMENT CHARGE FOR OFF-DUTY TRAINING AND EDUCATION.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Section 3014(b)(2) is amended—

(A) in subparagraph (A), by striking ''(without regard to'' and all that follows through ''subsection''; and

(B) by adding at the end the following new subparagraph:

''(C) The number of months of entitlement charged under this chapter in the case of an individual who has been paid a basic educational assistance allowance under this subsection shall be equal to the number (including any fraction) determined by dividing the total amount of such educational assistance allowance paid the individual by the full-time monthly institutional rate of educational assistance which such individual would otherwise be paid under subsection (a)(1), (b)(1), (c)(1), or (e)(1) of section 3015 of this title, as the case may be.''.

(2) CONFORMING AMENDMENTS.—(A) Section 3015 is amended—

(i) in subsections (a)(1) and (b)(1), by inserting ''subsection (g)'' after ''from time to time under'';

(ii) by striking the first subsection (g), as inserted by section 1602(b)(3)(C) of the Floyd D. Spence National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2001 (enacted by Public Law 106–398; 114 Stat. 1654A–359); and

(iii) by redesignating subsection (h) as subsection (g).

(B) Section 3032(b) is amended by inserting before the period at the end the following: '', or (3) the amount of the charges of the educational institution elected by the individual under section 3014(b)(1) of this title''.

(3) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendments made by this subsection shall take effect as if enacted on November 1, 2000.

(c) INCREMENTAL MGIB INCREASES FOR CONTRIBUTING ACTIVE DUTY MEMBERS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Section 3011(e), as added by section 105(a)(1) of the Veterans Benefits and Health Care Improvement Act of 2000 (Public Law 106–419; 114 Stat. 1828), is amended—

(A) in paragraph (2), by inserting '', but not more frequently than monthly'' before the period;

(B) in paragraph (3), by striking ''$4'' and inserting ''$20''; and

(C) in paragraph (4)—

(i) by striking ''Secretary. The'' and inserting ''Secretary of the military department concerned. That''; and

(ii) by striking ''by the Secretary''.

(2) CONFORMING AMENDMENTS.—(A) Section 3012(f), as added by section 105(a)(2) of such Act, is amended—

(i) in paragraph (2), by inserting '', but not more frequently than monthly'' before the period;

(ii) in paragraph (3), by striking ''$4'' and inserting ''$20''; and

(iii) in paragraph (4)—

(I) by striking ''Secretary. The'' and inserting ''Secretary of the military department concerned. That''; and

(II) by striking ''by the Secretary''.

(B) Section 3015(g), as added by section 105(b)(3) of such Act, is amended—

(i) in the matter preceding paragraph (1), by inserting ''effective as of the first day of the enrollment period following receipt of such contribution by the Secretary concerned,'' after ''by section 3011(e) or 3012(f) of this title,''; and

(ii) in paragraph (1)—

(I) by striking ''$1'' and inserting ''$5'';

(II) by striking ''$4'' and inserting ''$20''; and

(III) by inserting ''of this title'' after ''section 3011(e) or 3012(f)''.

(3) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendments made by this subsection shall take effect as if included in the enactment of section 105 of the Veterans Benefits and Health Care Improvement Act of 2000 (Public Law 106–419; 114 Stat. 1828).

(d) CONFORMING AMENDMENT FOR DEATH BENEFIT.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Paragraph (1) of section 3017(b) is amended to read as follows:

''(1) the sum of (A) the total amount reduced from the individual's basic pay under section 3011(b), 3012(c), or 3018(c) of this title, and (B) the total amount of any contributions made by the individual under section 3011(e) or 3012(f) of this title, less''.

(2) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendment made by paragraph (1) shall take effect on May 1, 2001.

(e) CLARIFICATION OF TIME PERIOD FOR ELECTION OF BEGINNING OF CHAPTER 35 ELIGIBILITY FOR DEPENDENTS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—(A) Section 3512(a)(3)(B), as amended by section 112 of the Veterans Benefits and Health Care Improvement Act of 2000 (Public Law 106–419; 114 Stat. 1831), is amended to read as follows:

''(B) the eligible person elects that beginning date by not later than the end of the 60-day period beginning on the date on which the Secretary provides written notice to that person of that person's opportunity to make such election, such notice including a statement of the deadline for the election imposed under this subparagraph; and''.

(B) Section 3512(a)(3)(C), as so amended by such section, is amended by striking ''between the dates described in'' and inserting ''the date determined pursuant to''.

(2) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendments made by paragraph (1) shall take effect as if enacted on November 1, 2000.

TITLE II—TRANSITION AND OUTREACH PROVISIONS

SEC. 201. AUTHORITY TO ESTABLISH OVERSEAS VETERANS ASSISTANCE OFFICES TO EXPAND TRANSITION ASSISTANCE.

Section 7723(a) is amended by inserting after the first sentence the following new sentence: ''The Secretary may maintain such offices on such military installations located elsewhere as the Secretary, after consultation with the Secretary of Defense, determines to be necessary to carry out such purposes.''.

SEC. 202. TIMING OF PRESEPARATION COUNSELING.

(a) IN GENERAL.—(1) The first sentence of section 1142(a)(1) of title 10, United States Code, is amended to read as follows: ''Within the time periods specified in paragraph (3), the Secretary concerned shall (except as provided in paragraph (4)) provide for individual preseparation counseling of each member of the armed forces whose discharge or release from active duty is anticipated as of a specific date.''.

(2) Such section is further amended by adding at the end the following new paragraphs:

''(3)(A) In the case of an anticipated retirement, preseparation counseling shall commence as soon as possible during the 24-month period preceding the anticipated retirement date. In the case of a separation other than a retirement, preseparation counseling shall commence as soon as possible during the 12-month period preceding the anticipated date. Except as provided in subparagraph (B), in no event shall preseparation counseling commence later than 90 days before the date of discharge or release.

''(B) In the event that a retirement or other separation is unanticipated until there are 90 or fewer days before the anticipated retirement or separation date, preseparation counseling shall begin as soon as possible within the remaining period of service.

''(4)(A) Subject to subparagraph (B), the Secretary concerned shall not provide preseparation counseling to a member who is being discharged or released before the completion of that member's first 180 days of active duty.

''(B) Subparagraph (A) shall not apply in the case of a member who is being retired or separated for disability.''.

(b) CONFORMING AMENDMENT.—The second sentence of section 1144(a)(1) of title 10, United States Code, is amended by striking ''during the 180-day period'' and all that follows and inserting ''within the time periods provided under paragraph (3) of section 1142(a) of this title, except that the Secretary concerned shall not provide preseparation counseling to a member described in paragraph (4)(A) of such section.''.

SEC. 203. IMPROVEMENT IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING OUTREACH SERVICES FOR SEPARATING SERVICEMEMBERS AND VETERANS.

(a) PROVIDING OUTREACH THROUGH STATE APPROVING AGENCIES.—Section 3672(d) is amended by inserting ''and State approving agencies'' before ''shall actively promote the development of programs of training on the job''.

(b) ADDITIONAL DUTY.—Such section is further amended—

(1) by inserting ''(1)'' after ''(d)''; and

(2) by adding at the end the following new paragraph:

''(2) In conjunction with outreach services furnished by the Secretary for education and training benefits under chapter 77 of this title, each State approving agency shall conduct outreach programs and provide outreach services to eligible persons and veterans about education and training benefits available under applicable Federal and State law.''.

SEC. 204. EXPANSION OF OUTREACH EFFORTS TO ELIGIBLE DEPENDENTS.

(a) AVAILABILITY OF OUTREACH SERVICES FOR CHILDREN, SPOUSES, SURVIVING SPOUSES, AND DEPENDENT PARENTS.—Paragraph (2) of section 7721(b) is amended to read as follows:

''(2) the term 'eligible dependent' means a spouse, surviving spouse, child, or dependent parent of a person who served in the active military, naval, or air service.''.

(b) IMPROVED OUTREACH PROGRAM.—(1) Subchapter II of chapter 77 is amended by adding at the end the following new section:

''§ 7727. Outreach for eligible dependents

''(a) In carrying out this subchapter, the Secretary shall ensure that the needs of eligible dependents are fully addressed.

''(b) The Secretary shall ensure that the availability of outreach services and assistance for eligible dependents under this subchapter is made known through a variety of means, including the Internet, announcements in veterans publications, and announcements to the media.''.

(2) The table of sections at the beginning of such chapter is amended by inserting after the item relating to section 7726 the following new item:

''7727. Outreach for eligible dependents.''.

SEC. 205. IMPROVEMENT OF VETERANS OUTREACH PROGRAMS.

Section 7722(c) is amended—

(1) by inserting ''(1)'' after ''(c)''; and

(2) by adding at the end the following:

''(2) Whenever a veteran or dependent first applies for any benefit under laws administered by the Secretary (including a request for burial or related benefits or an application for life insurance proceeds), the Secretary shall provide to the veteran or dependent information concerning benefits and health care services under programs administered by the Secretary.''.

TITLE III—MEMORIAL AFFAIRS, INSURANCE, AND OTHER PROVISIONS

SEC. 301. INCREASE IN BURIAL BENEFITS.

(a) BURIAL AND FUNERAL EXPENSES.—(1) Section 2307 is amended by striking ''$1,500'' and inserting ''$2,000 (as increased from time to time under section 5312 of this title)''.

(2) Section 2302(a) is amended by striking ''$300'' and inserting ''$500 (as increased from time to time under section 5312 of this title)''.

(3) Section 2303(a)(1)(A) is amended by striking ''$300'' and inserting ''$500 (as increased from time to time under section 5312 of this title)''.

(b) PLOT ALLOWANCE.—Section 2303(b) is amended by striking ''$150'' each place it appears and inserting ''$300 (as increased from time to time under section 5312 of this title)''.

(c) INDEXING PAYMENT AMOUNTS.—Section 5312(a) is amended—

(1) by striking ''and each rate of monthly allowance'' and inserting ''each rate of monthly allowance''; and

(2) by inserting ''and each rate of allowance paid under sections 2302, 2303, and 2307 of this title,'' after ''under section 1805 of this title,''.

(d) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendments made by this section shall apply to deaths occurring on or after the date of the enactment of this Act.

SEC. 302. FAMILY COVERAGE UNDER SERVICEMEMBERS' GROUP LIFE INSURANCE.

(a) INSURABLE DEPENDENTS.—(1) Section 1965 is amended by adding at the end the following new paragraph:

''(10) The term 'insurable dependent', with respect to a member, means the following:

''(A) The member's spouse.

''(B) The member's child, as defined in the first sentence of section 101(4)(A) of this title.''.

(2) Section 101(4)(A) is amended in the matter preceding clause (i) by inserting ''(other than with respect to a child who is an insurable dependent under section 1965(10)(B) of such chapter)'' after ''except for purposes of chapter 19 of this title''.

(b) INSURANCE COVERAGE.—(1) Subsection (a) of section 1967 is amended to read as follows:

''(a)(1) Subject to an election under paragraph (2), any policy of insurance purchased by the Secretary under section 1966 of this title shall automatically insure the following persons against death:

''(A) In the case of any member of a uniformed service on active duty (other than active duty for training)—

''(i) the member; and

''(ii) each insurable dependent of the member.

''(B) Any member of a uniformed service on active duty for training or inactive duty training scheduled in advance by competent authority.

''(C) In the case of any member of the Ready Reserve of a uniformed service who meets the qualifications set forth in section 1965(5)(B) of this title—

''(i) the member; and

''(ii) each insurable dependent of the member.

''(2)(A) A member may elect in writing not to be insured under this subchapter.

''(B) A member may elect in writing not to insure the member's spouse under this subchapter.

''(3)(A) Subject to subparagraphs (B) and (C), the amount for which a person is insured under this subchapter is as follows:

''(i) In the case of a member, $250,000.

''(ii) In the case of a member's spouse, $100,000.

''(iii) In the case of a member's child, $10,000.

''(B) A member may elect in writing to be insured or to insure the member's spouse in an amount less than the amount provided for under subparagraph (A). The member may not elect to insure the member's child in an amount less than $10,000. The amount of insurance so elected shall, in the case of a member or spouse, be evenly divisible by $10,000.

''(C) In no case may the amount of insurance coverage under this subsection of a member's spouse exceed the amount of insurance coverage of the member.

''(4)(A) An insurable dependent of a member is not insured under this chapter unless the member is insured under this subchapter.

''(B) An insurable dependent who is a child may not be insured at any time by the insurance coverage under this chapter of more than one member. If an insurable dependent who is a child is otherwise eligible to be insured by the coverage of more than one member under this chapter, the child shall be insured by the coverage of the member whose eligibility for insurance under this subchapter occurred first, except that if that member does not have legal custody of the child, the child shall be insured by the coverage of the member who has legal custody of the child.

''(5) The insurance shall be effective with respect to a member and the insurable dependents of the member on the latest of the following dates:

''(A) The first day of active duty or active duty for training.

''(B) The beginning of a period of inactive duty training scheduled in advance by competent authority.

''(C) The first day a member of the Ready Reserve meets the qualifications set forth in section 1965(5)(B) of this title.

''(D) The date certified by the Secretary to the Secretary concerned as the date Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance under this subchapter for the class or group concerned takes effect.

''(E) In the case of an insurable dependent who is a spouse, the date of marriage of the spouse to the member.

''(F) In the case of an insurable dependent who is a child, the date of birth of such child or, if the child is not the natural child of the member, the date on which the child acquires status as an insurable dependent of the member.''.

(2) Subsection (c) of such section is amended by striking the first sentence and inserting the following: ''If a person eligible for insurance under this subchapter is not so insured, or is insured for less than the maximum amount provided for the person under subparagraph (A) of

subsection (a)(3), by reason of an election made by a member under subparagraph (B) of that subsection, the person may thereafter be insured under this subchapter in the maximum amount or any lesser amount elected as provided in such subparagraph (B) upon written application by the member, proof of good health of each person (other than a child) to be so insured, and compliance with such other terms and conditions as may be prescribed by the Secretary.''.

(c) TERMINATION OF COVERAGE.—(1) Subsection (a) of section 1968 is amended—

(A) in the matter preceding paragraph (1), by inserting ''and any insurance thereunder on any insurable dependent of such a member,'' after ''any insurance thereunder on any member of the uniformed services,''; and

(B) by adding at the end the following new paragraph:

''(5) With respect to an insurable dependent of the member, insurance under this subchapter shall cease—

''(A) 120 days after the date of an election made in writing by the member to terminate the coverage; or

''(B) on the earliest of—

''(i) 120 days after the date of the member's death;

''(ii) 120 days after the date of termination of the insurance on the member's life under this subchapter; or

''(iii) 120 days after the termination of the dependent's status as an insurable dependent of the member.''.

(2) Such subsection is further amended—

(A) in the matter preceding paragraph (1), by striking '', and such insurance shall cease—'' and inserting ''and such insurance shall cease as follows:'';

(B) by striking ''with'' after the paragraph designation in each of paragraphs (1), (2), (3), and (4) and inserting ''With'';

(C) in paragraph (1)—

(i) in the matter preceding subparagraph (A), by striking ''thirty-one days—'' and inserting ''31 days, insurance under this subchapter shall cease—'';

(ii) in subparagraph (A)—

(I) by striking ''one hundred and twenty days'' after ''(A)'' and inserting ''120 days''; and

(II) by striking ''prior to the expiration of one hundred and twenty days'' and inserting ''before the end of 120 days''; and

(iii) by striking the semicolon at the end of subparagraph (B) and inserting a period;

(D) in paragraph (2)—

(i) by striking ''thirty-one days'' and inserting ''31 days,'';

(ii) by striking ''one hundred and twenty days'' both places it appears and inserting ''120 days''; and

(iii) by striking the semicolon at the end and inserting a period;

(E) in paragraph (3)—

(i) by inserting a comma after ''competent authority''

(ii) by striking ''one hundred and twenty days'' both places it appears and inserting ''120 days''; and

(iii) by striking ''; and'' at the end and inserting a period; and

(F) in paragraph (4), by inserting ''insurance under this subchapter shall cease'' before ''120 days after '' the first place it appears.

(3) Subsection (b)(1)(A) of such section is amended by inserting ''(to insure against death of the member only)'' after ''converted to Veterans' Group Life Insurance''.

(d) PREMIUMS.—Section 1969 is amended by adding at the end the following new subsections:

''(g)(1)(A) During any period in which a spouse of a member is insured under this subchapter and the member is on active duty, there shall be deducted each month from the member's basic or other pay until separation or release from active duty an amount determined by the Secretary as the premium allocable to the pay period for providing that insurance coverage. No premium may be charged for providing insurance coverage for a child.

''(B) During any month in which a member is assigned to the Ready Reserve of a uniformed service under conditions which meet the qualifications set forth in section 1965(5)(B) of this title and the spouse of the member is insured under a policy of insurance purchased by the Secretary under section 1966 of this title, there shall be contributed from the appropriation made for active duty pay of the uniformed service concerned an amount determined by the Secretary (which shall be the same for all such members) as the share of the cost attributable to insuring the spouse of such member under this policy, less any costs traceable to the extra hazards of such duty in the uniformed services. Any amounts so contributed on behalf of any individual shall be collected by the Secretary concerned from such individual (by deduction from pay or otherwise) and shall be credited to the appropriation from which such contribution was made.

''(2)(A) The Secretary shall determine the premium amounts to be charged for life insurance coverage for spouses of members under this subchapter.

''(B) The premium amounts shall be determined on the basis of sound actuarial principles and shall include an amount necessary to cover the administrative costs to the insurer or insurers providing such insurance.

''(C) Each premium rate for the first policy year shall be continued for subsequent policy years, except that the rate may be adjusted for any such subsequent policy year on the basis of the experience under the policy, as determined by the Secretary in advance of that policy year.

''(h) Any overpayment of a premium for insurance coverage for an insurable dependent of a member that is terminated under section 1968(a)(5) of this title shall be refunded to the member.''.

(e) PAYMENTS OF INSURANCE PROCEEDS.—Section 1970 is amended by adding at the end the following new subsection:

''(i) Any amount of insurance in force on an insurable dependent of a member under this subchapter on the date of the dependent's death shall be paid, upon the establishment of a valid claim therefor, to the member or, in the event of the member's death before payment to the member can be made, then to the person or persons entitled to receive payment of the proceeds of insurance on the member's life under this subchapter.''.

(f) CONVERSION OF SGLI TO PRIVATE LIFE INSURANCE.—Section 1968(b) is amended by adding at the end the following new paragraph:

''(3)(A) In the case of a policy purchased under this subchapter for an insurable dependent who is a spouse, upon election of the spouse, the policy may be converted to an individual policy of insurance under the same conditions as described in section 1977(e) of this title (with respect to conversion of a Veterans' Group Life Insurance policy to such an individual policy) upon written application for conversion made to the participating company selected by the spouse and payment of the required premiums. Conversion of such policy to Veterans' Group Life Insurance is prohibited.

''(B) In the case of a policy purchased under this subchapter for an insurable dependent who is a child, such policy may not be converted under this subsection.''.

(g) EFFECTIVE DATE AND INITIAL IMPLEMENTATION.—(1) The amendments made by this section shall take effect on the first day of the first month that begins more than 120 days after the date of the enactment of this Act.

(2) Each Secretary concerned, acting in consultation with the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, shall take such action as is necessary to ensure that during the period between the date of the enactment of this Act and the effective date determined under paragraph (1) each eligible member—

(A) is furnished an explanation of the insurance benefits available for dependents under the amendments made by this section; and

(B) is afforded an opportunity before such effective date to make elections that are authorized under those amendments to be made with respect to dependents.

(3) For purposes of paragraph (2):

(A) The term ''Secretary concerned'' has the meaning given that term in section 101 of title 38, United States Code.

(B) The term ''eligible member'' means a member of the uniformed services described in subparagraph (A) or (C) of section 1967(a)(1) of title 38, United States Code, as amended by subsection (b)(1).

SEC. 303. RETROACTIVE APPLICABILITY OF INCREASE IN MAXIMUM SGLI BENEFIT FOR MEMBERS DYING IN PERFORMANCE OF DUTY ON OR AFTER OCTOBER 1, 2000.

(a) APPLICABILITY OF INCREASE IN BENEFIT.—Notwithstanding subsection (c) of section 312 of the Veterans Benefits and Health Care Improvement Act of 2000 (Public Law 106–419; 114 Stat. 1854), the amendments made by subsection (a) of that section shall take effect on October 1, 2000, with respect to any member of the Armed Forces who died in the performance of duty (as determined by the Secretary concerned) during the period beginning on October 1, 2000, and ending at the close of March 31, 2001, and who on the date of death was insured under the Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance program under subchapter III of chapter 19 of title 38, United States Code, for the maximum coverage available under that program.

(b) DEFINITION.—For purposes of this section, the term ''Secretary concerned'' has the meaning given that term in section 101(25) of title 38, United States Code.

SEC. 304. INCREASE IN AMOUNT OF ASSISTANCE FOR AUTOMOBILE AND ADAPTIVE EQUIPMENT FOR CERTAIN DISABLED VETERANS.

Section 3902(a) is amended by striking ''$8,000'' and inserting ''$9,000''.

SEC. 305. INCREASE IN ASSISTANCE AMOUNT FOR SPECIALLY ADAPTED HOUSING.

Section 2102 is amended—

(1) in the matter preceding paragraph (1) of subsection (a), by striking ''$43,000'' and inserting ''$48,000''; and

(2) in subsection (b)(2), by striking ''$8,250'' and inserting ''$9,250''.

SEC. 306. REVISION OF RULES WITH RESPECT TO NET WORTH LIMITATION FOR ELIGIBILITY FOR PENSIONS FOR VETERANS WHO ARE PERMANENTLY AND TOTALLY DISABLED FROM A NON-SERVICE-CONNECTED DISABILITY.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Section 1522(a) is amended by adding at the end the following new sentence: ''In determining the corpus of the estates of the veteran and the veteran's spouse, if any, the value of the real property of the veteran and the veteran's spouse and children shall be excluded if such property is used for farming, ranching, or similar agricultural purposes.''.

(b) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendment made by subsection (a) shall apply to payment of pensions for months beginning on or after the date of the enactment of this Act.

SEC. 307. TECHNICAL AMENDMENTS.

(a) TITLE 38, UNITED STATES CODE.—Title 38, United States Code, is amended as follows:

(1) Effective as of November 1, 2000, section 107 is amended—

(A) in the second sentence of subsection (a), by inserting ''or (d)'' after ''subsection (c)'';

(B) by redesignating the second subsection (c) (added by section 332(a)(2) of the Veterans Benefits and Health Care Improvement Act of 2000 (Public Law 106–419)) as subsection (d); and

(C) in subsection (d), as so redesignated, by striking ''In'' in paragraph (1) and inserting

''With respect to benefits under chapter 23 of this title, in''.

(2) Section 3512 is amended—

(A) in subsection (a)(5), by striking ''clause (4) of this subsection'' and inserting ''paragraph (4)''; and

(B) in subsection (b)(2), by striking ''willfull'' and inserting ''willful''.

(3) Section 4303(13) is amended by striking the second period at the end.

(b) PUBLIC LAW 106–419.—Effective as of November 1, 2000, and as if included therein as originally enacted, the Veterans Benefits and Health Care Improvement Act of 2000 (Public Law 106–419) is amended as follows:

(1) Section 111(f)(3) (114 Stat. 1831) is amended by striking ''3654'' and inserting ''3564''.

(2) Section 323(a)(1) (114 Stat. 1855) is amended by inserting a comma in the second quoted matter therein after ''duty''.

(3) Section 401(e)(1) (114 Stat. 1860) is amended by striking ''this'' both places it appears in quoted matter and inserting ''This''.

(4) Section 402(b) (114 Stat. 1861) is amended by striking the close quotation marks and period at the end of the table in paragraph (2) of the matter inserted by the amendment made that section.

(c) PUBLIC LAW 102–590.—Section 3(a)(1) of the Homeless Veterans Comprehensive Service Programs Act of 1992 (38 U.S.C. 7721 note) is amended by striking '', during,''.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH) and the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH).

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, the 107th Congress is only a few months old, but it is already apparent that this is going to be one that works to keep America's promises to veterans and their families. Later today we will begin consideration of H. Con. Res. 83, the congressional budget resolution, which contains record levels of funding for veterans' programs. As a matter of fact, it contains a 12 percent boost for VA spending, both mandatory and discretionary, to bring it to $52.3 billion, a $5.6 billion increase over fiscal year 2001.

In the past month, Mr. Speaker, the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs has met 10 times to hear the views of the Department of Veterans Affairs as well as veterans' organizations. We have heard from organizations such as the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Gold Star Wives, the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs, the Retired Enlisted Association, Fleet Reserve Association, Air Force Sergeants Association, the Jewish War Veterans, Blinded Veterans Association, Noncommissioned Officers Association, Military Order of the Purple Heart, Paralyzed Veterans of America, Disabled American Veterans, Amvets, American Ex-Prisoners of War, Vietnam Veterans of America, and the Retired Officers Association, 16 organizations in all.

Mr. Speaker, we learned a great deal about what is taking place in the lives of veterans and their families. We also learned about government programs that are effective and making a difference in their lives, and about some that need to be revised and updated and reformed.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage Members and their constituents to visit the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Website to review the testimony presented at these hearings to learn more about these hearings and the testimony that we have received. For the RECORD, that is http://veterans.gov/. It is a font of information and a great resource on veterans legislation and hearings.

Mr. Speaker, we also heard during the course of those hearings from our distinguished VA Secretary Anthony Principi on two of those occasions. We heard about his determination to make the VA a more responsive and a more effective organization. Members of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs also told the Secretary that it is not enough that a grateful Nation remember its veterans and their sacrifice. The Nation that provides in excess of $47 billion, and as I said, that is likely to jump to $52.3 billion for veterans' programs, expects the VA to be held accountable.

We need accountability to make sure that that which we pass is faithfully implemented. We hope that in the future Secretary Principi will share this message with all of his employees. We really want the best bang for the buck. We want our veterans to be well served.

Today the House is considering two measures reported by the Committee on Veterans' Affairs last week. I would like to briefly summarize the purposes of the Veterans Opportunities Act of 2001. The gentleman from Arizona (Mr. HAYWORTH), the very distinguished chairman of our Subcommittee on Benefits, will provide a more detailed explanation of the bill momentarily.

Mr. Speaker, the Veterans Opportunities Act of 2001 is designed to enhance nonhealth programs serving veterans and their families. Many of the ideas contained in this bill were favorably mentioned in the testimony we received from the veterans' service organizations during the 107th Congress. One of this bill's provisions updates the law governing the type of training veterans can pursue under the Montgomery GI bill. We see more and more education and training opportunities offered outside of the traditional classroom setting. Veterans pursuing a good job should be able to use their GI benefits to offset the cost of these courses, and this bill will make those types of training more affordable to veterans eligible for the Montgomery GI bill.

The life insurance program available to all active duty servicemembers and many reservists does not provide coverage to members of the servicemember's family. Since so many persons on active duty today desire coverage for family members at an affordable premium, this bill would authorize that coverage.

□ 1415

The bill also includes a provision to make the increase in life insurance coverage, which is scheduled to go into effect next Sunday, April 1, retroactive to cover the deaths of many of the service members who have tragically lost their lives since October 1 of last year.

I want to salute the gentleman from Texas (Mr. REYES), the ranking Democrat of the Subcommittee on Benefits, and the gentlewoman from Virginia (Mrs. JO ANN DAVIS), a new member, for suggesting this provision in the bill.

H.R. 801 also authorizes increases in payments to families of deceased veterans for burial expenses and in amounts provided to assist seriously disabled veterans purchase cars and to fix up their homes with specially adapted devices. It also requires the VA to improve its outreach efforts so that more veterans and their families are informed about the benefits for which they qualify.

Another provision is designed to ensure that service members are fully briefed on benefits that they may qualify for before they leave the service.

Before yielding to the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS), I want to express my very deep appreciation for his hard work and that of our staff and his staff and many, many Members on the bills that we are discussing today.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. EVANS. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

(Mr. EVANS asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. EVANS. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 801. I commend and thank the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH), the distinguished chairman of the committee, for his leadership on this measure. The Veterans Opportunities Act of 2001 provides many improvements to veterans benefits and I am pleased to be an original cosponsor of this bill.

I also want to recognize several other Members who have contributed to this legislation, the chairman of the Subcommittee on Benefits, the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. HAYWORTH); the ranking member of the Subcommittee on Benefits, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. DOYLE); and the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PASCRELL), two outstanding and effective advocates for our veterans. This is a better bill because of their efforts.

Mr. Speaker, last September I introduced H.R. 5271, the Veterans' Family Farm Protection Act. That bill made it possible for more wartime veterans and their survivors to qualify for VA pension benefits without being forced to sell their family homes and ranches. I thank the chairman for including these provisions as section 306 of H.R. 801. This legislation will also benefit low-income veterans who seek to obtain health care from the VA.

I especially applaud the gentleman from Texas (Mr. REYES) for his leadership in first proposing an October 1,

2000, retroactive effective date for the $250,000 maximum benefit in the Servicemembers Group Life Insurance. The Reyes proposal would permit increased benefits to be paid under certain conditions to beneficiaries of those servicemembers who lost their lives in the performance of duty.

The gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. DOYLE) and the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PASCRELL) have been strong advocates for improved VA outreach to veterans, their dependents and survivors. Each has authored important legislation to improve VA outreach. I am pleased that this legislation includes many of those outreach provisions.

H.R. 801 includes many other provisions important to veterans. Among them are improvements in veterans' health care benefits, improving veterans' access to transition assistance, increases in grants for adaptive housing, and increases in burial and funeral expenses, and the burial plot allowance.

I urge my colleagues to approve this measure and include a summary of H.R. 801 for the RECORD.

VETERANS OPPORTUNITIES ACT OF 2001, H.R. 801, AS AMENDED

Title: To amend title 38, United States Code, to improve programs of educational assistance, to expand programs of transition assistance and outreach to departing servicemembers, veterans, and dependents, to increase burial benefits, to provide for family coverage under Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance, and for other purposes.

Mr. Smith (for himself, Mr. Evans, Mr. Hayworth, and Mr. Reyes) introduced H.R. 801 on February 28, 2001; which was referred to the Committee on Veterans' Afairs.

Additional Cosponsors: Mr. Abercrombie, Mr. Baldacci, Ms. Berkley, Mr. Berry, Mr. Bilirakis, Ms. Brown of Florida, Mr. Brown of South Carolina, Mr. Buyer, Ms. Carson, Mr. Crenshaw, Mrs. Davis of Virginia, Mr. Doyle, Mr. Edwards, Mr. Ehrlich, Mr. Filner, Mr. Gonzalez, Mr. Goode, Mr. Gutierrez, Mr. Hansen, Mr. Honda, Mrs. Kelly, Ms. Lee, Mrs. McCarthy of New York, Mr. Owens, Mr. Pascrell, Mr. Peterson, Mr. Putnam, Mr. Roukema, Mr. Shows, Mr. Simmons, Mr. Simpson, Mr. Snyder, Ms. Solis, Mr. Spence, Mr. Stump, Mr. Udall of New Mexico, and Ms. Waters.

H.R. 801, as amended, would:

TITLE I—EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE PROVISIONS

1. Increase from $2,000 to $3,400 the maximum allowable annual SROTC award for benefits under the Montgomery GI Bill.

2. Expand VA's work-study program for veterans to include working in their major academic discipline, working in state veterans homes, and helping State Approving Agencies with outreach efforts.

3. Provide for inclusion of certain private technology entities in the definition of educational institution.

4. Allow the disabled spouse or surviving spouse of a severely disabled service connected veteran to receive special restorative training.

5. Permit veterans to use VA educational assistance benefits for a certificate program offered by an accredited institution of higher learning by way of independent study.

TITLE II—TRANSITION AND OUTREACH PROVISIONS.

1. Provide VA the authority to maintain transition assistance offices overseas.

2. Extend the time that preparation counseling is available to servicemembers leaving the service to as early as 12 months before discharge, and 24 months prior to discharge for military retirees.

3. Improve education and training outreach services by requiring each State Approving Agency to conduct outreach programs and provide services to eligible veterans and dependents about state and federal education and training benefits.

4. For purposes of VA's outreach program, defines an eligible dependent as the spouse, surviving spouse, child or dependent parent of a servicemember/veteran. Require VA to ensure that eligible dependents are made aware of VA's services through media and veterans publications.

5. Require VA to provide to the veteran or eligible dependent information concerning VA benefits and services whenever that person first applies for any benefit.

TITLE III—MEMORIAL AFFAIRS, INSURANCE, AND OTHER PROVISIONS

1. Increase the burial and funeral expense for a service connected veteran from $1,500 to $2,000, increase the burial and funeral expense for a nonservice connected veteran from $300 to $500, and increase the burial plot allowance from $150 to $300.

2. Expand the Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance (SGLI) program to include spouses and children. Spousal coverage will not exceed $100,000; child coverage would be $10,000. Upon termination of SGLI, the spouse's policy could be converted to a private life insurance policy.

3. Make the effective date of an increase from $200,000 to $250,000 in the maximum SGLI benefit provided for in Public Law 106–419 retroactive to October 1, 2000, for a servicemember who died in the performance of duty and had the maximum amount of insurance in force.

4. Increase the automobile and adaptive equipment grant for severely disabled veterans from $8,000 to $9,000.

5. Increase the grant for specially adapted housing for severely disabled veterans from $43,000 to $48,000, and increase the amount for less severely disabled veterans from $8,250 to $9,250.

6. Revise the rule with respect to the net worth limitation for VA's means-tested pension program by excluding the value of property used for farming, ranching or similar agricultural purposes.

Effective Date: Date of enactment except the following sections

Sec. 106(a): Shall take effect as if included in the enactment of the Veterans Benefits and Health Care Improvement Act of 2000 enacted on November 1, 2000 (Public Law 106–419).

Sec. 106(b): Shall take effect as if enacted on November 1, 2000.

Sec. 106(c): Shall take effect as if enacted on November 1, 2000.

Sec. 106(d): May 1, 2001.

Sec. 106(e): Shall take effect as if enacted on November 1, 2000.

Sec. 302: The first day of the first month that begins more than 120 days after date of enactment.

Cost: The Congressional Budget Office estimates that H.R. 801, as amended, would increase direct spending by $46 million in 2002, $290 million over the 2002–2006 period, and about $700 million over the 2002–2011 period. Direct spending would also increase in fiscal year 2001 should the bill be enacted before the end of this fiscal year. If addition, implementing the bill would increase spending subject to appropriation by less than $500,000 a year.

Legislative History:

Mar. 21, 2001: H.R. 801 ordered reported favorably, as amended, by the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

Mar. 26, 2001: H.R. 801 reported, as amended, by the Committee on Veterans' Affairs. H. Rept. 107–27.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. HAYWORTH), the chairman of our Subcommittee on Benefits.

(Mr. HAYWORTH asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. HAYWORTH. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH), the chairman of the full committee, for yielding me this time.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today in support of H.R. 801, the Veterans Opportunities Act of 2001.

H.R. 801 makes a number of improvements and expansions to VA's benefits and services, some of which I would like to take this opportunity to briefly highlight.

With respect to educational assistance, this bill increases from $2,000 to $3,400 the maximum allowable annual Senior ROTC award for benefits under the Montgomery GI bill; expands VA's work-study program for veteran students; provides the inclusion of certain private technology entities, such as Microsoft and Novell, in the definition of educational institution; and permits veterans to use VA educational assistance benefits for a certificate program offered by an institution of higher learning by way of independent study.

H.R. 801 also enhances and clarifies VA's outreach services to separating servicemembers, as well as the spouse, surviving spouse, children and dependent parent of a veteran, and requires VA to provide full benefits and health care eligibility information to a veteran and dependent whenever that person first applies for any benefit.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PASCRELL) and the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. DOYLE) for working with the subcommittee on those aforementioned outreach provisions.

We also make a number of program increases, including raising the burial and funeral expenses for service and nonservice connected veterans and increasing the plot allowance.

The automobile and adaptive grant for severely disabled veterans is increased from $8,000 to $9,000, and the specially adapted housing grant is increased from $43,000 to $48,000.

We also propose to expand the Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance program to include coverage for the spouse and children of a servicemember enrolled in the insurance program.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, as we all know, within the last few months, we have lost far too many servicemembers to plane crashes, training accidents and, of course, an act of terrorism at sea. Just yesterday, it appears we lost two pilots in a U.S. Army plane crash in Germany. Two F–15s are missing after taking off yesterday from Lakenheath Air Base in the Scottish Highlands.

Mr. Speaker, sadly, I was informed this morning that one of the missing pilots could very well be from my home State of Arizona.

Last year, Congress approved legislation to increase the maximum amount of Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance from $200,000 to a quarter of a million dollars, $250,000. Even though the bill was signed into law on November 1 of 2000, this particular provision would not have gone into effect until April 1 of this year. So the bill we are discussing today would change the effective date to October 1, 2000, for those servicemembers who died during the performance of their military duties and had previously elected the maximum insurance amount.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take time to thank my friend, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. REYES), the ranking member of the Subcommittee on Benefits, a Vietnam combat veteran, for helping us bring this provision to the table. Credit should also be given by this House to a newcomer to this institution, the gentlewoman from Virginia (Mrs. JO ANN DAVIS), for working with the full committee on this issue. Both of these Members deserve acknowledgment for their steadfast support to this issue and the bipartisan way in which we have worked.

Mr. Speaker, I would just note for the record we hear so much on the cable gab fests and on the Sunday shows about the need for bipartisanship. Mr. Speaker, at this time, in this place, we reaffirm the notion that those who sign on in our all-volunteer force do not check a box for partisan preference. They go not as Republicans or as Democrats but as Americans to serve our country, and today we reaffirm that.

Let me thank the ranking member of the subcommittee, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. REYES), for working with me on crafting this legislation in a bipartisan fashion, legislation which will benefit many active duty servicemembers, veterans, and dependents.

I also want to thank the gentleman from California (Mr. THOMAS) and the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS), the ranking member of our full committee, for their leadership.

Mr. Speaker, once again, for the reasons outlined in the aforementioned comments, I would urge my colleagues to support the Veterans Opportunity Act of 2001.

Mr. EVANS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 4 minutes to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. REYES).

Mr. REYES. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS), for yielding me this time.

Mr. Speaker, as an original cosponsor and strong supporter of H.R. 801, the Veterans Opportunities Act of 2001, I am pleased that we are considering this bill today. H.R. 801 contains a number of important provisions advanced by Members from both sides of the aisle, as the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. HAYWORTH) stated a few minutes ago.

I want to acknowledge, first and foremost, the cooperation of the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH) and the ranking member, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS), as well as the subcommittee chairman, the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. HAYWORTH), in bringing this bill to the floor in its present form.

The bill will improve educational benefits, transitional assistance for separating servicemembers, and outreach to veterans and their families.

I thank the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. DOYLE) and the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PASCRELL), my colleagues, for their tireless advocacy for improved outreach to veterans and their families.

The bill also provides benefits for the increased cost of funerals, automobile and housing adaptations for severely disabled veterans, and it will stop eroding these benefits as the costs they are intended to cover increase year by year. The burial-related benefits increases proposed by this bill were last changed, Mr. Speaker, in 1973.

Because when benefit levels are not indexed to reflect the increased cost of the items that they are intended to pay for, veterans receive less value as each year goes by. The longer the time, the greatest the loss. By indexing these benefits to changes in the cost of living, their purchasing power will be retained.

I particularly want to discuss the insurance provisions of this bill. I am very pleased that the bill incorporates my request to make the beginning of fiscal year 2001 the effective date for the increase in the maximum amount of Servicemembers Group Life Insurance from $200,000 to $250,000 for those who lose their lives during the performance of military duties.

As a Vietnam veteran, I know the dangers of combat. Recent events have shown that even military training exercises and more routine duty can result in the loss of life to our servicemembers. As I stated during the subcommittee hearing, I was particularly concerned that those who lost their lives in the terrorist attack on the USS *Cole* as well as those such as Specialist Rafael Olvera Rodriguez, an El Paso native who died in the Blackhawk helicopter crash over Hawaii, ensure that they all qualify for increased maximum benefits.

Since the *Cole* attack, others performing official duties have died in North Carolina, Georgia, and Kuwait. Two National Coast Guardsmen died after an accident while on patrol just this past weekend, and just yesterday two pilots died when their Army plane crashed in Germany and two Air Force planes disappeared over Scotland with apparent loss of life.

The effective date of October 1, 2000 is intended to provide the maximum benefit of $250,000 for SGLI insured members, such as those who have lost their lives in performance of duty and who were insured for the maximum benefit at the time of their deaths. I know that the families of these military-insured members will appreciate this benefit.

I also support the provision allowing family members to be covered under the SGLI program. This is a needed improvement.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I support the provision of excluding family farms and ranches from net worth determination for pension purposes.

Mr. Speaker, I was born on a family farm and I know the value of family farms. There are a number of small family farms today in my district. We should not ask veterans to give up their family farms in order to receive veterans' benefits that they have earned.

I today want to urge all Members to support this bill. It is a generous bill that pays back the debt that this country owes its men and women in uniform.

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from Florida (Mr. BILIRAKIS), the very distinguished vice chairman of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I thank my chairman, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH), for yielding me this time.

Mr. Speaker, I too support H.R. 801. This legislation makes important improvements to veterans' benefits such as increasing the burial and funeral allowance from $1,500 to $2,000 for service-connected veterans and from $300 to $500 for nonservice-connected veterans. The bill also raises the burial plot allowance from $150 to $300.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, the legislation increases the automobile and adaptive equipment grants for severely disabled veterans from $8,000 to $9,000. Under the bill, specially adapted housing grants are increased from $43,000 to $48,000, and the amount for additional adaptations to the home that may be needed later in life is raised from $8,250 to $9,250.

□ 1430

The bill expands, as has already been indicated, the Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance Program to cover spouses up to a maximum of $100,000 and children to $10,000; and the bill also makes another important change to the sick-leave program. It increases the amount of servicemembers group life insurance paid to the survivors of members of the Armed Forces who died in the performance of duty between October 1, 2000, and March 31 of this year. Specifically, it directs the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to increase sick-leave payments to the maximum amount of $250,000 for those who previously contracted for the maximum benefit.

This increase was originally signed into law in November of 2000 as part of Public Law 106–419, but the implementation was delayed, unfortunately, until April 1, 2001; and unfortunately, a

number of military personnel have been killed. As also has been raised by the gentleman from Texas (Mr. REYES) and others, a number of other military personnel have been killed in the line of duty since October 2000, including one of my constituents, Erik Larson, who was killed in a National Guard airplane crash earlier this month. While this bill will not ease the pain of losing a loved one, it will lessen the financial hardship.

And as a cosponsor of H.R. 801, Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support the Veterans Opportunities Act of 2001.

Mr. EVANS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. RODRIGUEZ).

Mr. RODRIGUEZ. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak on the important bipartisan piece of legislation that we have before us. I want to take this opportunity to thank the chairman of the full committee and the chairman of the subcommittee for their leadership, as well as the minority leader, as well as the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS) for his efforts, and the gentleman from Texas (Mr. REYES) also.

At a time when drastic tax cuts seem to overshadow our Nation's priorities, it is refreshing that the House should take up the legislation that addresses our commitment to improving services to those that have made the ultimate sacrifice, our veterans.

The Veterans Opportunities Act makes improvement to key veterans' programs. In particular, the measure makes enhancements to the veterans educational and the burial benefits that are long overdue. For those seeking assistance in pursuing higher education, the bill increases benefits under the Montgomery GI Bill. It expands the work-study opportunities for veteran students and extends benefits to cover independent study for qualified institutions. Without doubt, the educational benefits are instrumental in assisting the military in recruitment efforts. Those men and women who have chosen to serve our country in uniform deserve better access to higher education; and we all recognize the importance of how the cost of education has continued to grow and continued to move forward, so it is important for us to keep pace with that.

We have come a step forward; we still have a long way to go. But I am very pleased that we are beginning to address and increase the amounts of the Montgomery GI Bill.

Finally, the families who face financial challenges for burying our veterans will receive some relief under H.R. 801. Burial funeral allowances will be increased from $1,500 to $2,000 for service-connected veterans and $300 to $500 for nonservice-connected veterans.

As Congress prepares to take up the budget resolution, we should remind ourselves that our peace is a blessing. However, peace does not diminish our obligation to American veterans. It is time to take care of those and move forward. This bill begins to do that, and I want to thank the leadership on both sides for their efforts on this piece of legislation.

Once again, I want to congratulate the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS) and the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH), the chairman of the committee, and the gentleman from Texas (Mr. REYES) for their efforts.

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I yield 4 minutes to the distinguished gentlewoman from Virginia (Mrs. JO ANN DAVIS).

(Mrs. JO ANN DAVIS of Virginia asked and was given permission to revise and extend her remarks, and include extraneous material.)

Mrs. JO ANN DAVIS of Virginia. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 801, the Veterans' Opportunity Act of 2001. As a cosponsor of this legislation, I am proud to be able to say that the committee referred a bill that has practical and immediate effects for many veterans and their loved ones. This legislation comprehensively addresses many issues associated with veterans and their dependents. However, Mr. Speaker, I will not delve into the details of this legislation. Suffice it to say our veterans have earned their benefits, often purchasing them with their own blood.

What I would like to speak about today is one section of the legislation that I believe will have an immediate and practical effect for the surviving families of many of our recently deceased veterans. As my colleagues may know, I recently introduced a bill, H.R. 115, the SGLI Adjustment Act. The substantive language of this bill was incorporated by the committee directly into H.R. 801. This legislation will directly and immediately help many of the families and beneficiaries of those killed since October 1, 2000.

Mr. Speaker, as I am sure my colleagues are aware, our military has recently suffered numerous tragedies. The bombing of the U.S.S. *Cole*, the crash of an Osprey, a Blackhawk, a National Guard airplane, and the accidental bombing of our own troops in Kuwait. All of these accidents were unforeseen, and all of these accidents resulted in the tragic loss of life.

Mr. Speaker, thankfully, our Nation has seen fit to provide our servicemen with a program of insurance to allow the families and beneficiaries to have some protection in the event of untimely death. This insurance, Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance, otherwise known as SGLI, can be purchased at a low rate for a maximum benefit of up to $200,000. Recently, on November 1 of last year, the President signed a bill increasing this maximum benefit to $250,000. Unfortunately, for those recently affected families, this increase in coverage does not take effect until April 1 of this year. By incorporating the substantive language of my bill, we will retroactively grant this increase to those families who had opted for the maximum benefit and subsequently lost a loved one in the performance of their duty.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to note that this provision is revenue-neutral and is funded from the SGLI Reserve Fund. It follows similar legislative precedent dating from the Gander, Newfoundland, crash and the death indemnity granted after the Gulf War.

Additionally, this provision has the direct support and endorsement of several veterans' and servicemen's organizations.

Mr. Speaker, just a few weeks ago, tragedy struck locally in my own district in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Several constituents of mine perished in the Air National Guard crash. I attended their memorial service. However, that was the hardest thing I had to face. The families of these servicemen face much harder days ahead.

Mr. Speaker, by passing the Veterans Opportunity Act of 2001, we will show the families and beneficiaries of these servicemen that we do, indeed, care. We take care of our own. Never let it be said that we do not.

I ask that the other Members of the House support H.R. 801. In the long term, this is the only way in which we will be able to assist the families of those recently perished.

Mr. Speaker, I would be remiss if I did not thank the committee and its staff for their hard work and dedication in seeing this bill brought to the floor. In particular, I would like to thank the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH), the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. HAYWORTH), and the gentleman from Florida (Mr. CRENSHAW) for ensuring that my legislation was attached to this bill in the form of a friendly amendment.

Mr. Speaker, now is the time. Now is the time for the other Members of the people's House to stand and support the families of our servicemen. Vote in support of passage of H.R. 801.

Mr. Speaker, I include the following material for the RECORD:

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
March 20, 2001.

Hon. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH,
Chairman, House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Cannon House Office Building, Washington, DC.

DEAR CHAIRMAN SMITH: It is my understanding that you recently received a letter from several of our colleagues asking for your support for amending H.R. 801, the Veterans' Opportunities Act, to include the language of H.R. 1015. As a cosponsor of both H.R. 801 and H.R. 1015, and as a member of your Committee, I am writing to add my support for this proposal.

As you know, Congress last year approved a $50,000 increase, to $250,000, in the maximum death benefits for families of military personnel through the Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance (SGLI). Though the legislation was signed into law on November 1, 2000, the effective date of this increase is not until April 1, 2001. Regrettably, for many of our servicemembers and their families—most notably, the 21 National Guard members killed in a plane crash earlier this

month and the 17 sailors killed in the terrorist bombing of the USS Cole—this is too late.

H.R. 1015 would make a modest change in law that would bring comfort and security to the families of these brave servicemembers by making the annuity increase retroactive to October 1, 2001. The Administration has announced its support for this legislation, and I know that you have voiced your support for it as well.

I am hopeful that you will make it a part of your mark for tomorrow's mark-up session of H.R. 801. In the alternative, if offered as amendment, I am hopeful that you will support its adoption.

I look forward to working with you on this and other measures to improve the lives of our veterans and servicemembers.

Sincerely,

ANDER CRENSHAW,
Member of Congress.

CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES
Washington, DC, March 20, 2001.

Congressman CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH, Chairman,
House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, U.S. House of Representatives, Cannon House Office Building, Washington, DC.

DEAR CHAIRMAN SMITH: This letter is to request that the Committee on Veterans' Affairs consider attaching H.R. 1015 as an amendment to H.R. 801, The Veterans' Opportunities Act of 2001.

As we know you are aware, America has recently suffered numerous military tragedies that have resulted in the unfortunate deaths of many of our servicemen and women. In particular, we have recently faced the crash of an Osprey, a Blackhawk, a Air National Guard airplane, and an accidental bombing of our own servicemen.

On November 1 of last year, the President signed legislation (c.f. P.L. 106–419) to increase the maximum SGLI benefit from $200,000 to $250,000. However, the effective date of this increase was delayed until April 1, 2001. H.R. 1015 would retroactively authorize the increased benefit for those who died after November 1, 2000 and were to receive the maximum SGLI benefit.

We would ask that the Committee incorporate the Davis language of H.R. 1015, while changing the effective date of retroactive coverage to October 1, 2001. This would pair the date of retroactivity with the beginning of the Fiscal Year and would assist the families and beneficiaries of the USS Cole tragedy.

Again, thank you for your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,

JO ANN DAVIS,
ERIC CANTOR,
ED SCHROCK,
ADAM PUTNAM.

AIR FORCE ASSOCIATION,
Arlington, VA, March 14, 2001.

Hon. JO ANN DAVIS,
Longworth House Office Building, Washington, DC.

DEAR MS. DAVIS: The Air Force Association applauds your efforts to include those service members killed in the line of duty and covered at the maximum limit of the Servicemembers Group Life Insurance (SGLI) Program since November 1, 2000 under the proposed increased limits for SGLI.

Your initiative will ensure that service-families mourning these tragic losses will receive the same benefits as those affected after the passage of the legislation.

We look forward to working with you to enact this legislation into law.

Sincerely,

JOHN A. SHAUD,
General, USAF (Ret).

NATIONAL GUARD ASSOCIATION OF THE UNITED STATES,
Washington, DC, March 14, 2001.

Hon. JO ANN DAVIS,
U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, DC.

DEAR REPRESENTATIVE DAVIS: On behalf of the members of the National Guard Association of the United States (NGAUS), I wish to extend our support for H.R. 1015, legislation that will provide for an increase in the amount of Servicemember's Group Life Insurance (SGLI) paid to survivors of members who died in the line of duty.

With the increased level of operations for all members of the Armed Services, there have been an unfortunate increasing number of training accidents. This was all too evident when 21 members of the National Guard tragically lost their lives on March 3rd, in a military airplane crash. These good men died while serving their country, their state and their community. The severity of this accident is a grim reminder of the risks we ask of the members of the National Guard, along with all men and women who serve in uniform.

On November 1, 2001, the President signed into law S. 1402 that increased the maximum benefit for the SGLI from $200,000 to $250,000. However, implementation of the increase was delayed until April 1, 2001. The legislation you introduced will provide those service members who previously contracted for the maximum benefit of SGLI and died in the line of duty to receive the increased maximum amount of $250,000.

The National Guard Association of the United States fully supports your efforts and therefore I am proud to offer the endorsement of the NGAUS for H.R. 1015.

Respectfully,

RICHARD C. ALEXANDER,
Major General, OHARNG (Ret),
Executive Director.

NON COMMISSIONED OFFICERS ASSOCIATION OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,
Alexandria, VA, March 16, 2001.

Hon. JO ANN DAVIS,
U.S. House of Representatives, Longworth House Office Building, Washington, DC.

DEAR REPRESENTATIVE DAVIS: Thank you for introducing legislation to provide an increase in the amount of Servicemember's Group Life Insurance (SGLI) paid to survivors of members of the Armed Forces who died in the performance of duty between November 1, 2000, and April 1, 2001.

Recognizing those men and women whom made the ultimate sacrifice, and ensuring that their family members are cared for is of utmost importance to the NCOA.

The NCOA strongly supports your proposed piece of legislation. Accordingly, it will be our privilege to provide testimony on behalf of H.R. 1015, or whatever assistance you may require.

Sincerely,

ALEX J. HARRINGTON,
Director of Legislative Affairs.

THE RETIRED OFFICERS ASSOCIATION,
Alexandria, VA, March 16, 2001.

Hon. JO ANN DAVIS,
U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, DC.

DEAR REPRESENTATIVE DAVIS: On behalf of the 390,000 members of The Retired Officers Association (TROA), I wish to extend our support for H.R. 1015, a bill to provide for an increase in the amount of Servicemember's Group Life Insurance (SGLI) paid to survivors of members of the Armed Forces who died in the performance of duty between November 1, 2000, and April 1, 2001.

Your legislation provides an important and timely correction in the implementation of the recent increase in SGLI coverage from $200,000 to $250,000. The legislation is also consistent with action taken to increase SGLI after operational accidents such as the Gander, Newfoundland disaster. H.R. 1015 will ensure that those not covered at the higher SGLI level during the period between passage and implementation of the increase authorized under P.L. 106–419 will now be covered.

With the increased level of operations for all members of the Armed Services, tragic accidents are occurring more frequently. From the U.S.S. *Cole* to the most recent crash of an Air National Guard plane, our servicemen and women risk their lives on a daily basis. The severity of these accidents serve as a reminder that liberty is not procured without the constant vigilance of those who freely give up theirs to protect us.

TROA greatly appreciates your leadership on this issue and we offer our full endorsement of H.R. 1015, a bill that will help surviving family members to meet critical family needs following the tragic loss of their servicemembers in recent terrorist attacks or training accidents.

Sincerely,

MICHAEL A. NELSON.

GOLD STAR WIVES OF AMERICA, INC.,
Vincent, AL, March 16, 2001.

Hon. JO ANN DAVIS,
U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, DC.

DEAR CONGRESSWOMAN DAVIS: On behalf of the 13,000 members of Gold Star Wives of America, Inc., I wish to extend our support for H.R. 1015, a bill to provide for an increase in the amount of Servicemember's Group Life Insurance (SGLI) paid to survivors of members of the Armed Forces who died in the performance of duty between November 1, 2000, and April 1, 2001. However, we would like to see this amended to read October 1, 2000 and April 1, 2001 to include the surviving family members of servicemembers lost on the U.S.S. *Cole*.

Your legislation provides an important and timely correction in the implementation of the recent increase in SGLI coverage from $200,000 to $250,000. The legislation is also consistent with action taken to increase SGLI after operational accidents such as the Gander, Newfoundland disaster. H.R. 1015 will ensure that those not covered at the higher SGLI level during the period between passage and implementation of the increase authorized under P.L. 106–419 will now be covered.

With the increased level of operations for all members of the Armed Services, tragic accidents are occurring more frequently. From the U.S.S. *Cole* to the most recent crash of an Air National Guard plane, our servicemen and women risk their lives on a daily basis. The severity of these accidents serve as a reminder that liberty is not procured without the constant vigilance of those who freely give up theirs to protect us.

Gold Star Wives of America Inc. greatly appreciates your leadership on this issue and we offer our full endorsement of H.R. 1015, a bill that will help surviving family members to meet critical family needs following the tragic loss of their servicemembers in recent terrorist attacks or training accidents.

Sincerely,

RACHEL A. CLINKSCALE,
Board Chairwoman.

RESERVE OFFICERS ASSOCIATION OF THE UNITED STATES,
Washington, DC, March 16, 2001.

Hon. JO ANN DAVIS,
U.S. House of Representatives,
Washington, DC.

DEAR REPRESENTATIVE DAVIS: On behalf of the 75,000 members of the Reserve Officers Association of the United States, chartered by Congress in 1922 to support the development and implementation of a military policy that will provide adequate national defense for the United States, I want to congratulate you for introducing HR 1015, legislation that would provide for an increase in the amount of Servicemembers Group Life Insurance (SIGLI) paid to the survivors of service members who die in the line of duty. I want you to know that the Reserve Officers Association fully supports your efforts in this regard.

Since the end of the Cold War we have witnessed a three-fold increase in the level of deployments of our Armed Forces. Our men and women in uniform are increasingly called upon to support contingency operations around the world, operations that expose them to danger on a continual basis, as the headlines daily remind us. Over the past several years, members of the Reserve components have annually provided more than 12,500,000 workdays of contributory support to our Active component forces. Truly the level of our military operations is remarkable. So, too, are our men and women of the uniformed services. Your bill will help recognize the value of these contributions and of the men and women who make them.

Again, let me thank you for sponsoring HR 1015. ROA appreciates your efforts and is pleased to offer our full support.

Sincerely,

JAYSON L. SPIEGEL,
Executive Director.

ENLISTED ASSOCIATION OF THE NATIONAL GUARD OF THE UNITED STATES,
Alexandria, VA, March 19, 2001.

Hon. JO ANN DAVIS,
Longworth House Office Building, Washington, DC.

DEAR REPRESENTATIVE DAVIS: On behalf of the enlisted men and women of the Army and Air National Guard, the Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States (EANGUS) wishes to thank you for introducing H.R. 1015, a bill to increase the amount of Servicemember's Group Life Insurance paid to survivors of servicemembers who died in the performance of duty recently.

Although an increase was signed into law last November, the increase doesn't go into effect until April 1. Your bill would cover those who died in the recent tragedies and ensure that their survivors will receive the new maximum benefit.

EANGUS fully supports this bill. Thank you for your efforts on behalf of our uniformed men and women who serve their country and sometimes pay the ultimate price in that service.

Working for America's Best!

MSG MICHAEL P. CLINE (RET),
Executive Director.

MARCH 16, 2001.

Hon. JO ANN DAVIS,
U.S. House of Representatives,
Washington, DC.

DEAR REPRESENTATIVE DAVIS: On behalf of the members of the National Order of Battlefield Commissions, I wish to extend our support for H.R. 1015, a bill to provide for an increase in the amount of Servicemember's Group Life Insurance (SGLI) paid to survivors of members of the Armed Forces who died in the performance of duty between October 1, 2000, and April 1, 2001.

Your legislation provides an important and timely correction in the implementation of the recent increase in SGLI coverage from $200,000 to $250,000. The legislation is also consistent with action taken to increase SGLI after operational accidents such as the Gander, Newfoundland disaster. H.R. 1015 will ensure that those not covered at the higher SGLI level during the period between passage and implementation of the increase authorized under P.L. 106–416 will now be covered.

With the increased level of operations for all members of the Armed Services, tragic accidents are occurring more frequently. From the U.S.S. *Cole* to the most recent crash of an Air National Guard plane, our servicemen and women risk their lives on a daily basis. The severity of these incidents serve as a reminder that liberty is not procured without the constant vigilance of our servicemembers.

The members of the National Order of Battlefield Commissions greatly appreciate your leadership on this issue. We offer our full endorsement of H.R. 1015, a bill that will help surviving family members meet critical needs following the tragic losses of their loved ones to recent terrorist attacks or training accidents.

Sincerely,

ROBERT C. EVANS,
Washington Representative.

Mr. EVANS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 5½ minutes to the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PASCRELL).

Mr. PASCRELL. Mr. Speaker, let me begin by thanking the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH), for including part of the Veterans Right to Know Act in the legislation we are considering today. The leadership and dedication of the chairman of the committee to our veterans over the last 20 years has improved the lives of veterans across the United States.

Let me also extend my gratitude to the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS), our ranking member, for his support of my legislation. These two gentlemen set the proper tone for bipartisanship, which should be recognized, along with the subcommittee folks, the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. HAYWORTH) and the gentleman from Texas (Mr. REYES), and also thank them for inviting us to testify before the subcommittee.

This legislation I am so proud to be a part of, the first piece of veterans legislation to reach the House floor, Mr. Speaker. I would like to speak in support of that portion which both the chairman and ranking member spoke of before, part of the Veterans Right to Know. This legislation makes great strides in improving benefits and outreach to our veterans and their dependents. I would also like to acknowledge important provisions in the legislation that were based on the gentleman from Pennsylvania's (Mr. DOYLE) veterans' outreach legislation. We worked together to ensure that every veteran has the benefits they deserve, and we will continue this work in the future.

To be quite frank, the lack of information available to veterans and their families about their benefits and services that they are eligible for has reached crisis proportions. In a recent national survey conducted by the Department of Veterans Affairs, it was indicated that less than half of the veterans contacted were aware of what benefits they were eligible for. We cannot accept that on the floor of the House, in the House of the people.

A survey that I did in my own district, the 8th Congressional District of New Jersey, showed that over half of those answering had no understanding of their benefits, no one had ever reached out to them, no confidence in the VA to deliver the information in the first place. These veterans signed a contract when they went into the service to defend us; and as a veteran I say this, and I know the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH) and the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS) feel the same way. Well, what happened to this contract when they left the service? What happened to the people and their families who now many times after death are going to the VA and saying gee, we did not know this, we did not know this.

This is a sacred covenant America has with its veterans, one that we must keep. Too often our Nation's heroes are not adequately informed as to what benefits they are entitled to receive or how to obtain those benefits. Everyone in this Congress would agree that this is simply unacceptable. Veterans across America and I are grateful to the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH) for his Veterans' Opportunities Act. It includes a portion of legislation, title II, section 205, which will inform veterans about benefits and health care services. We are not doing veterans any favor, Mr. Speaker. This is our obligation.

The gentleman from New Jersey's measure also includes the portion of legislation that would require the VA to assist widows and survivors of veterans by informing them at the time of a burial request or application for life insurance proceeds about the full array of dependent benefits.

Today is a victory for veterans everywhere, but it is just the beginning. The plan that I have asked for, and hopefully will finally be enacted, would specify how the VA will identify veterans who are not enrolled or registered with the VA for benefits or services and require that the VA consult with the veterans services. How can we talk to the veterans about what they are eligible for if we do not start at the grass-roots of the organization that the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH) spoke of before? All of those organizations, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, American Legion, the Disabled American Veterans, the Jewish War Veterans, et cetera, Vietnam Veterans, Disabled Veterans, if we do not turn to them, how can we really fulfill this covenant that we are talking about here?

Abraham Lincoln spoke of his responsibility in his second inaugural address saying, ''We must care for him

who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and for his orphan.''

Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH) and the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS) for doing America proud.

Mr. EVANS. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I again want to thank the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PASCRELL) for his very kind remarks and for his donation to the bill, particularly as it relates to informing our servicemen prior to discharge.

Mr. Speaker, I yield the remaining 2 minutes to the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. KIRK), my good friend and colleague.

□ 1445

Mr. KIRK. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding time to me.

Mr. Speaker, I would say, first of all, talk about hitting the ground running, as the new chairman of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, the gentleman is bringing this legislation so quickly to the House floor. When I described this legislation at my recent veterans' town hall meeting in north Chicago, Illinois, it got a standing ovation and is strongly supported. For us, hitting the ground running on veterans' issues is, I think, a crucial in paying our debt to the greatest generation for what they gave to our country.

Mr. Speaker, if there was a veterans caucus here in the Congress, including the veterans of Bosnia, Kosovo, and Operation Northern Watch in Iraq, I would be it. As a veteran of the most recent conflicts, we pay homage to those who served before us in much more difficult and arduous conflicts.

I have to really give my thanks to those men and women who introduced me and educated me on the importance of veterans' care: Larry Jenkins of the AFGE, shop steward in north Chicago; Johnny Allen, our Lake County Veterans Assistance Commission member; Al Pate, our very able director of the north Chicago VA Medical Center.

I want to say how strongly I feel about the need for bipartisan cooperation, and really hail the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS) for his leadership on this issue. For us in the north Chicago VA medical system, we really need this health care. We really need to expand benefits in the way that H.R. 801 outlines, in order to pay a debt that is owed for all of the freedoms that we enjoy.

We know, and the current data shows, that the children of military families overwhelmingly are those who sign up to provide the new duty, so the children of the men and women who protect us now will be those who protect us in the future. Making sure that we honor the debt and promise that we gave to them under President Lincoln's mandate is a crucial thing for me in my service here.

I want to salute the gentleman from New Jersey (Chairman SMITH), and urge all Members to support this legislation.

Mr. LANGEVIN. Mr. Speaker, today I rise in strong support of the Veterans' Opportunities Act. I commend our veterans who have made such significant sacrifices to preserve this Nation and protect the freedoms we cherish.

Many people do not realize just how many veterans are among us: 19,520 war veterans, 1,854 Persian Gulf veterans, 8,177 Vietnam Era veterans, 4,257 Korean Era veterans, and 6,002 World War II veterans. In supporting the Veterans' Opportunities Act today, I pay homage to the more than 25,000 veterans in this nation.

I am particularly proud to vote for this legislation because it takes critical steps toward strengthening the Veterans Affairs Department. It expands payout amounts for several VA death and retirement benefits and extends coverage under the Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance program to dependent spouses and children. It also increases the maximum allowable annual ROTC award for benefits under the Montgomery GI Bill and expands the VA's work-study program for veterans who are students. Moreover, the Veterans' Opportunities Act increases funding for the automobile and adaptive equipment grant for severely disabled veterans and allows the disabled spouse or surviving spouse of a severely disabled service-connected veteran to receive special restorative training—both of these provisions are vital to many of my constituents. Finally, this legislation makes these much-needed changes retroactive to October 1, 2000, for service members killed in the line of duty. This language ensures that the service members killed in the terrorist attack on the USS *Cole* last October are covered.

I applaud the tireless efforts of the Chairman and Ranking Member on behalf of America's veterans over the years. They have succeeded in producing valuable legislation that will help those who need and deserve these services the most. I urge my colleagues to join me in voting for our veterans by voting for the Veterans' Opportunities Act.

Mr. DOYLE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 801, The Veterans Opportunities Act of 2001. I want to acknowledge Chairman SMITH, Ranking Member EVANS, Representative HAYWORTH, and Representative REYES for their steadfast commitment to fulfilling the promises we have made to our veterans and their families, and extend my sincere thanks for including portions of H.R. 336 as part of H.R. 801.

Throughout my six years on the Veterans Affairs Committee, I have been a strong supporter for protecting the viability, and ensuring the longevity of, the Department of Veterans Affairs. My primary concern has always been to improve veterans access to quality health care services and to insure they are delivered in a timely manner. But my focus on the need to provide appropriate support for the veterans health care programs has never clouded my awareness about the important roles that adequate support for VA construction projects and medical research play in addressing this concern in a serious, thoughtful, and effective manner. This is to say that we should always be mindful of how the Department works as a whole and be cautious about characterizing an issue as having just one facet or affecting just one type of individual. In my view, only if we remain sensitive to, and forthcoming about, how we can best implement changes to current practices to better serve the veterans community can we truly fulfill the mission of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

That is why I took great note of the first hand experiences relayed to me by members of the Veterans' Widows International Network (VWIN) when they visited my office a few years ago. At that time, members of the Network detailed personal difficulties they had endured and strongly advocated for the establishment of dedicated informational outreach services for surviving spouses and dependents of deceased veterans within the Department of Veterans Affairs. For those of you who are unfamiliar with this organization, VWIN was established in 1995 and has dedicated itself to reaching out to veterans' widows to inform them of benefits for which they might qualify, to provide them with a point of contact for processing their claims, and to keep them abreast of changes. The Network has done an admirable job in this respect, but if you are like me you are probably wondering why the Department isn't providing these services. There are a whole host of challenges that the Department could argue that preclude them from improving adequate access to, and the timely processing of, such information, including the assertion that they are already doing a good enough job in this respect. But that just isn't good enough and that is why Congress should make it a priority to pass H.R. 801, as well as both H.R. 336 and H.R. 511 in their entirety.

The heart of both H.R. 336, The Surviving Spouses and Dependents Outreach Enhancement and Veterans Casework Improvement Act, and H.R. 511, The Veterans Right to Know Act, is a belief grounded in the idea that one of our most basic responsibilities is to provide veterans and their family members with information about benefits to which they might be entitled. Indeed, the success of any initiative embarked upon sound levels of awareness and prudent oversight measures.

I want to sincerely thank Representative PASCRELL for being responsive to my concerns regarding the informational needs of surviving spouses and dependents when drafting the Veterans Right to Know Act. Their specific informational needs were initially addressed by language which would require the Department to provide information to dependents concerning benefits and health care services whenever a dependent first applies for any benefit under laws administered by the Secretary. This trigger mechanism is definitely a step in the right direction and I am pleased that it has been included in Section 205 of H.R. 801.

But what about the informational needs of all the surviving spouses and dependents of deceased veterans who would not retroactively be affected by this effort? My bill, H.R. 336, addresses this dilemma in a very straight forward and reasonable way. Specifically, it would (1) establish as a national goal to fully inform surviving spouses and dependents regarding their eligibility for benefits and health care services under laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, (2) institute a legislative mandate that surviving spouses and dependents be included in the subset of populations targeted by the Department for outreach efforts, (3) require a full range of outreach efforts for surviving spouses and require dedicated staff at regional offices to assist with

their needs, and (4) require periodic evaluation of the Department's efforts to address the needs of eligible dependents. Given the concerns that spurred me to author H.R. 336, I am most appreciative that aspects of my legislation involving the expanded and clarified term of eligible dependent and the specific means by which the Department can meet their informational needs are identified in Section 204 of H.R. 801.

I would, however, have preferred to also see included the cooperative effort text of H.R. 336 which speaks to the importance of encouraging all elements within the Department to work with private and public sector entities—most notably veterans service organizations and veterans widows organizations—to inform surviving spouses and dependents of deceased veterans regarding their eligibility. I would also have liked to see language speaking to the need to have staff at the local level available to assist these individuals with filing a claim, reconstructing incomplete records, and bridging language barriers included. These represent follow-up efforts designed to ensure that individuals fully understand and properly utilize the information they receive.

In closing, I believe there are shortcomings in current outreach efforts conducted by the Department, and thus I support the related improving language contained in H.R. 801. I am pleased that members of the Committee have paid attention to the need to bolster the Department's outreach efforts and hope that H.R. 801 will be expeditiously signed into law.

Mr. BUYER. Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank you and Ranking Member EVANS for agreeing to ''Fast-Track'' H.R. 801, the Veterans Opportunities Act.

I am especially pleased because I represent a district that is rural, with a large agricultural base.

As such, I fully support the Veterans Opportunities Act, because it finally addresses the issue of ''means testing'' veterans' agricultural possessions.

In my district, many farmers are land rich, but lack liquid assets to readily pay for health care services at the Department of Veterans Affairs.

H.R. 801 will greatly assist in remedying this problem, and allow them the opportunity to access the VA Health Care system without being penalized.

In addition, I am pleased that this bill finally addresses the issue of allowing veterans to use their GI Bill education benefits for certain private technology entities.

This expansion of benefits will allow veterans to receive benefits for various certification type courses that have previously not been recognized.

As a result, veterans can now pursue nontraditional educational programs that usually require intense study and certification.

This will ultimately level the playing field for veterans by allowing to compete in the high-tech environment.

Lastly, this bill will increase the burial benefits for both service-connected and non-service-connected veterans.

This is truly important!

World War II veterans are dying at a rate of a thousand a day.

Many of these World War II veterans are living on fixed incomes, and the high costs of burying these veterans places a financial burden on their surviving spouses and families.

Mr. Speaker, this bill and its provisions are long overdue.

Again, I thank the Chairman and the Ranking Member for giving this bill such quick consideration early in the 107th Congress.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 801, The Veterans Opportunity Act. The bill provides for essential benefits related to retirement privileges that our veterans desperately need. I am pleased that the legislation has swiftly come before the House for consideration.

H.R. 801 expands and increases payout amounts for several Veterans Affairs Department (VA) death and retirement benefits and extends coverage under the Service Members' Group Life Insurance program to dependent spouses and children.

The bill reflects a strong consensus in America that our veterans simply need to be taken care of. The legislation increases from $2,000 to $3,400 the maximum allowable annual ROTC award for benefits under the Montgomery GI bill; expands the VA's work-study program for veterans who are students; includes certain private technology entities as education institutions; allows a disabled spouse or surviving spouse of a severely disabled service-connected veteran to receive special restorative training; permits a veteran to use VA educational assistance benefits for a certificate program offered by an institution of higher learning by way of independent study; and provides for other needed necessities.

The measure contains other much-needed reforms. For instance, the bill expands the Service Members' Group Life Insurance (SGLI) program to include spouses and children. Upon termination of the SGLI, the policy could be converted to a private life insurance policy. Finally, the bill makes such changes retroactive to October 1, 2000, for service members killed in the line of duty.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this important measure for our veterans.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BASS). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 801, as amended.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds of those present have voted in the affirmative.

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX and the Chair's prior announcement, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 801, as amended.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from New Jersey?

There was no objection.

VETERANS HOSPITAL EMERGENCY REPAIR ACT

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 811) to authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out construction projects for the purpose of improving, renovating, and updating patient care facilities at Department of Veterans Affairs medical centers, as amended.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 811

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the ''Veterans Hospital Emergency Repair Act''.

SEC. 2. AUTHORIZATION OF MAJOR MEDICAL FACILITY PROJECTS FOR PATIENT CARE IMPROVEMENTS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—(1) The Secretary of Veterans Affairs is authorized to carry out major medical facility projects in accordance with this section, using funds appropriated for fiscal year 2002 or fiscal year 2003 pursuant to section 3. The cost of any such project may not exceed $25,000,000, except that up to two projects per year may be carried out at a cost not to exceed $30,000,000 for the purpose stated in subsection (c)(1).

(2) Projects carried out under this section are not subject to section 8104(a)(2) of title 38, United States Code.

(b) TYPE OF PROJECTS.—A project carried out under subsection (a) may be carried out only at a Department of Veterans Affairs medical center and only for the purpose of—

(1) improving a patient care facility;

(2) replacing a patient care facility;

(3) renovating a patient care facility;

(4) updating a patient care facility to contemporary standards; or

(5) improving, replacing, or renovating a research facility or updating such a facility to contemporary standards.

(c) PURPOSE OF PROJECTS.—In selecting medical centers for projects under subsection (a), the Secretary shall select projects to improve, replace, renovate, or update facilities to achieve one or more of the following:

(1) Seismic protection improvements related to patient safety (or, in the case of a research facility, patient or employee safety).

(2) Fire safety improvements.

(3) Improvements to utility systems and ancillary patient care facilities (including such systems and facilities that may be exclusively associated with research facilities).

(4) Improved accommodation for persons with disabilities, including barrier-free access.

(5) Improvements at patient care facilities to specialized programs of the Department, including the following:

(A) Blind rehabilitation centers.

(B) Inpatient and residential programs for seriously mentally ill veterans, including mental illness research, education, and clinical centers.

(C) Residential and rehabilitation programs for veterans with substance-use disorders.

(D) Physical medicine and rehabilitation activities.

(E) Long-term care, including geriatric research, education, and clinical centers, adult day care centers, and nursing home care facilities.

(F) Amputation care, including facilities for prosthetics, orthotics programs, and sensory aids.

(G) Spinal cord injury centers.

(H) Traumatic brain injury programs.