never saw the light in terms of subcommittee. It never had the opportunity of being heard in full committee. It never had the opportunity so that we could provide some amendments.

In fact, I presumed that when the leadership heard we had some amendments to try to improve the bill, they chose to bring it on the House floor without the process that this body has allowed through the ages to allow an opportunity for us to be able to influence. It is unfortunate. It is a good bill; yet we need to understand that we need to improve this bill.

Madam Speaker, tuition rates throughout this country have risen. The studies show that even the fees in a lot of universities are higher. We need to make sure that our veterans get what they deserve, not only a process but a service.

□ 1415

THE PRICE OF GAS

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

Mr. PENCE. Madam Speaker, I rise today because I am outraged. I am outraged that Americans are paying in some places in Indiana upwards to $2 a gallon for gasoline. Families across this country are being hurt by the fluctuating cost of fueling their cars. Stopping at the pump is no longer a routine function.

We have heard of sticker shock, Madam Speaker. Now we have been introduced this summer to pump sticker shock.

For years our colleagues in the other party have been actively working against opening new refineries and other methods of increasing the domestic supply of oil and gasoline. They have tried to demonize the oil industry of late and place the blame for rising costs squarely on the shoulders of executives and CEOs. Their political ploys have cost American drivers millions at the pump and have increased our reliance on foreign oil to such an extent that 60 percent of our oil comes from abroad.

Madam Speaker, I am happy to say that our President is leading on increased energy independence and the Republican majority in this body stands with him to end the day of pump shock in this summer and in the months ahead for American families.

CONGRESSIONAL ACTION NEEDED REGARDING OUT-OF-STATE WASTE

(Mrs. JO ANN DAVIS of Virginia asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Mrs. JO ANN DAVIS of Virginia. Madam Speaker, I rise today to note the recent decision of the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals upholding the district court opinion that Virginia cannot limit out-of-State waste coming into its borders because such restrictions violate the Commerce Clause of the Constitution. This court decision makes the necessity of Congress passing interstate waste legislation all the more urgent and compelling.

With the determination of the courts that State regulation of the interstate hauling of garbage violates the Commerce Clause, it is now time for Congress to specifically empower States to curb the amount of trash coming into landfills from outside the State.

The natural beauty of Virginia should not be degraded by out-of-State trash so that out-of-State haulers and trucking companies can reap benefits. Virginians have spoken on this issue and legislation was consequently passed and signed by the Governor that restricted the entrance of interstate waste into the Commonwealth, but then was struck down by the Federal courts.

Congress needs to act now to return this issue back to the States where the voices of the people can be heard.

APPOINTMENT OF MEMBERS TO CONGRESSIONAL-EXECUTIVE COMMISSION ON THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mrs. BIGGERT). Without objection, and pursuant to section 303(a) of Public Law 106–286, the Chair announces the Speaker's appointment of the following Members of the House to the Congressional-Executive Commission on the People's Republic of China:

Mr. BEREUTER, Nebraska, cochairman;
Mr. LEACH, Iowa;
Mr. DREIER, California;
Mr. WOLF, Virginia;
Mr. PITTS, Pennsylvania.

There was no objection.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, the Chair announces that she 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.

21ST CENTURY MONTGOMERY GI BILL ENHANCEMENT ACT

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 1291) to amend title 38, United States Code, to increase the amount of educational benefits for veterans under the Montgomery GI Bill.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 1291

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 ''21st Century Montgomery GI Bill Enhancement Act''.

SEC. 2. INCREASE IN RATES OF BASIC EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE UNDER MONTGOMERY GI BILL.

(a) IN GENERAL.—(1) Section 3015(a)(1) of title 38, United States Code, is amended to read as follows:

''(1) for an approved program of education pursued on a full-time basis, at the monthly rate of—

''(A) for months occurring during fiscal year 2002, $800,

''(B) for months occurring during fiscal year 2003, $950,

''(C) for months occurring during fiscal year 2004, $1,100, and

''(D) for months occurring during a subsequent fiscal year, the amount for months occurring during the previous fiscal year increased under subsection (h); or''.

(2) Section 3015(b)(1) of such title is amended to read as follows:

''(1) for an approved program of education pursued on a full-time basis, at the monthly rate of—

''(A) for months occurring during fiscal year 2002, $650,

''(B) for months occurring during fiscal year 2003, $772,

''(C) for months occurring during fiscal year 2004, $894, and

''(D) for months occurring during a subsequent fiscal year, the amount for months occurring during the previous fiscal year increased under subsection (h); or''.

(b) CPI ADJUSTMENT.—No adjustment in rates of educational assistance shall be made under section 3015(h) of title 38, United States Code, for fiscal years 2002, 2003, and 2004.

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. Madam Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Madam Speaker, today the House of Representatives has an historic opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to veterans, promote higher education, boost military recruitment and retention and strengthen the ladder of opportunity by passing H.R. 1291, the 21st Century Montgomery GI Bill Enhancement Act.

This legislation, which I introduced on March 29 with 57 cosponsors, including my good friend and colleague the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS), now has over 100 cosponsors and is supported by almost two dozen veterans service, military and higher education organizations as well as Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony Principi. The bill responds to the rising costs of college education by providing a 70 percent increase in total benefits to eligible veterans in less than 3 years.

Not since the enactment of the Montgomery GI Bill in 1985 have we had the opportunity to vote for such a dramatic increase in veterans educational

benefits. I hope that all of my colleagues will support this legislation.

Madam Speaker, since the enactment of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, commonly called the GI Bill, we have continuously provided educational support for our Nation's veterans. The original GI Bill is universally recognized as one of the most successful pieces of legislation ever approved by the Congress.

In the decade following World War II, more than 2 million eligible men and women went to college using these educational benefits. The result was an American workforce enriched by 450,000 engineers, 238,000 teachers, 91,000 scientists, 67,000 doctors, 22,000 dentists, and another million college-educated men and women. It is estimated that another 5 million men and women received other schooling or job training using the GI Bill. All told, approximately 7.8 million men and women were educated or trained by the GI Bill, helping to create what we know as the modern middle class.

The original GI Bill exceeded all expectations and had enormous benefits beyond the immediate benefits given to our deserving war veterans. College enrollment grew dramatically. In 1947, GI Bill enrollees accounted for almost half of all the total college population, resulting in the need for more and larger colleges and universities. In my home State of New Jersey, for example, Rutgers University saw its admissions grow from a pre-war high of 7,000 to almost 16,000.

A Veterans' Administration study in 1965, Madam Speaker, showed that due to the increased earning power of GI Bill college graduates, Federal Government income tax revenues rose by more than $1 billion annually. And in less than 20 years, the $14 billion cost of the original program had been recouped.

Madam Speaker, there is widespread agreement on the effect and effectiveness of veterans' educational programs. Building upon the success of the GI Bill, Congress approved a second bill, the Veterans Readjustment Assistance Act of 1952, during the Korean War; then a third bill, the Veterans Readjustment Benefits Act of 1966, during the Vietnam War; and a fourth bill, the Veterans Educational Assistance Act, for the post-Vietnam War era.

Finally, in 1985, Congress approved today's Montgomery GI Bill, or MGIB, which was designed not only to help veterans make a transition into the workforce through additional education and training, but also to support the concept of an all-volunteer Armed Forces. The use of educational benefits as a recruitment tool has been one of the most spectacularly successful of all the tools given to our Nation's military recruiters.

However, Madam Speaker, as we all know, the skyrocketing costs of a college education have seriously eroded the buying power of the MGIB benefits. The Congressional Research Service stated in its testimony to the committee, and I want to thank our distinguished chair of the Subcommittee on Benefits, the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. HAYWORTH), for the two outstanding hearings that he chaired, that between academic years 1980–1981 and 2000–2001, average tuition and fees at 4-year public and 2-year public colleges rose 336 percent. For private colleges it rose by 352 percent.

Under current law, a full-time veteran student receives $650 monthly under the Montgomery GI Bill from which the veteran student pays tuition, books, supplies, fees and subsistence allowance, including housing, food and transportation. However, according to data furnished by the College Board, the current $650 per month would have to be raised to $1,025 for a veteran student to attend a 4-year public college as a commuter student at an average cost of $9,229 per year.

That is just what our legislation does, I say to my colleagues. H.R. 1291 increases the $650 monthly amount to $800 per month effective this October 1, then to $950 per month effective October 1, 2002, and then finally to $1,100 per month effective October 1, 2003. This represents, a 70 percent increase in the monthly educational benefit in 3 years. As we point out in this chart, it goes from $23,400 to $39,600 after being fully phased in.

Madam Speaker, in this era of investing our scarce resources in areas that produce positive results, let me briefly share with my colleagues what the effect of this bill will be. At the moment, there are 266,000 veterans who are enrolled in school under the Montgomery GI Bill. This is anticipated to increase to about 330,000 over the next 10 years. However, with the approval of our legislation, the number of veteran students in school under the MGIB will increase to about 375,000 in 2011, an increase of 45,000 over the current estimate. And each of these students will be positioned, we believe, to obtain a better job and make more money, thus repaying many times over our Nation's investment in them under the MGI Bill.

Let me also point out to my colleagues that there will also be an ancillary impact on utilization. We know that something on the order of 50 percent of the people who are eligible are using this benefit. It just has not been enough to make the difference. This, we believe, will boost that participation.

Let me also say, Madam Speaker, that this bill is indeed a starting point. It is not an ending point. Our committee report on the Budget for fiscal year 2002 says that the ultimate goal is a Montgomery GI Bill that pays tuition, fees and a monthly subsistence allowance, thus allowing veterans to pursue enrollment in any educational institution in America limited only by their own aspirations, abilities and initiative.

However, after looking at the history of the program, our committee report on the fiscal year 2002 budget also states that we need to take major steps now, no delay, to increase the benefit for today's veterans who are currently eligible for the program. On a bipartisan basis, Members of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs agreed that a graduated increase in the current monthly benefit was the most important step we could take over the next 3 years to encourage veterans to use the benefit they had earned by faithful service to our Nation. For the first time in anyone's memory, the chairman of the Committee on the Budget accepted our committee recommendation and included the necessary funds in the budget resolution. He also fought to keep those funds in the conference report. As a result, we are able to bring to this floor a bill that is in compliance with the Budget Act.

Madam Speaker, H.R. 1291 is good news for veterans. It is good for education. It is good for our military and our national defense. And it is good for our economy. H.R. 1291 is good public policy. I sincerely hope that all of our Members will support it.

Finally, Madam Speaker, I must, regrettably, comment on the process that brought us here today. Since I first entered the House in 1981, I have had the honor to serve on the Veterans' Affairs Committee, first as a Member, later as Vice Chairman and now as Chairman. During these twenty-one years, I had the privilege of serving for 14 years with Chairman Sonny Montgomery, the Montgomery GI Bill's namesake, as well as for 6 years with Chairman BOB STUMP, now the Armed Services Committee Chairman. During all these years, the Veterans' Affairs Committee operated on a bipartisan basis with one simple goal: to help improve the lives of our nation's veterans.

During the five and half months I have served as Chairman, we have sought to continue this tradition and operate on a bipartisan basis. I was gratified when the Committee approved in a unanimous vote—let me emphasize that—a unanimous vote, the Views and Estimates Report for the Budget Committee. It was in large part due to our bipartisan approach—doing what was right for our veterans, not for our parties or our political careers—that we were successful in seeing a 12 percent increase for veterans spending in this year's budget.

Madam Speaker, H.R. 1291, the legislation we are considering today, resulted from a lot of hard work by the Members and staff of the Veterans' Affairs Committee—Republicans and Democrats—over many, many months. This legislation offers a realistic yet substantial increase—a 70 percent increase—in the amount of money available to veterans for educational benefits.

Madam Speaker, it was with some sadness last week that I learned that the Democrats on the Committee, having already agreed to our bipartisan strategy for moving H.R. 1291, reversed course and decided instead to take a political course. Their ploy to offer an amendment raising the cost of the program from $9 billion over ten years to more than $23 billion over ten years may appear alluring to some, but is not paid for in the budget resolution and ultimately it is unsustainable and would stand no chance of becoming law.

Madam Speaker, I understand that some members would like to see an even larger increase in educational benefits for veterans than the 70 percent increase that my legislation offers—frankly I would like to get to the point where we can offer a full tuition and expenses GI bill—but we are not yet there.

That's why the Committee, on a bipartisan basis, had made the decision to move quickly to pass H.R. 1291 with its 70 percent increase, get it signed into law, and then see what could be done next.

That's why on March 27, when we held our bipartisan press conference introducing H.R. 1291, Mr. Evans himself said:

''I view the Smith-Evans legislation that will soon be introduced as the next interim step toward the Committee's final goal of providing our veterans with the full costs of getting educated.''

That's why on May 24, Mr. REYES, the Ranking Democrat on the Subcommittee on Benefits said:

''H.R. 1291 . . . represents a step in the right direction toward ensuring that these opportunities for our veterans remain real and truly meaningful opportunities for all.

''While I think everyone wishes it could do more, H.R. 1291 would indeed go far toward fulfilling our collective goals. And I am proud to be a cosponsor of this very important and vital legislation.''

Madam Speaker, I said at the outset that today can be an historic day for our nation's veterans. We have an opportunity to continue our longstanding tradition of supporting our veterans in a bipartisan manner.

Let's do what is right for our veterans. Let's make real progress, not just speeches. Let's agree to work together, on a bipartisan basis, without rancor or ill-will, to join together to ensure that we do right for those who have done right for us.

Let's pass this historic legislation which will result in a dramatic increase in GI educational benefits—a 70 percent increase. In 1944, during consideration of the original GI Bill, the Senate voted 50 to nothing for approval and the House followed suit, voting 387 to 0 in favor of this historic legislation. I hope we can do the same today.

Madam Speaker, I would urge all of my colleagues to join me today in voting unanimously to approve H.R. 1291, and renew our commitment to the men and women who are on the front lines promoting freedom and peace all over the world.

Madam Speaker, I want to thank Mr. HAYWORTH and Mr. REYES, Chairman and Ranking Member of the Benefits Subcommittee, for their hard work on this bill.

I also want to thank Ranking Member EVANS for his continuous efforts on behalf of our servicemembers and veterans.

Madam Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support the 21st Century Montgomery GI Bill Enhancement Act.

Madam Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

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

(Mr. EVANS asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks, and include extraneous material.)

Mr. EVANS. Madam Speaker, I urge all Members to vote for this measure. This legislation provides an increase which is moderate but it is important in veterans' educational benefits.

I want to salute the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH), the chairman. He has worked together with me in the past. I look forward to a good relationship in the future. He got that budgetary increase. We are quite proud of his hard work in that regard. We have some differences on this issue today, but they are honest differences.

I regret that no member of the Subcommittee on Benefits or the full Committee on Veterans' Affairs has been given the opportunity to vote on this measure or alternative legislation. Ironically, while this measure will improve educational benefits for men and women in uniform who serve to protect and defend our freedoms and liberties, members have been stripped of their right to vote in committee.

□ 1430

Not only have Members been disenfranchised, so too have the men and women who elected them to represent them in office here in the Congress.

After days of hearings of testimony from more than two dozen witnesses, there was no debate and there was no vote on this measure or any other proposal. This, I believe, is a sad commentary.

It will be said that this measure provides a major increase in the educational benefits for veterans; but while that is true, we could do much more.

It has been said that this legislation is a partial step. That is an acknowledgment that the benefits provided by the legislation are insufficient. Years from now, a future Congress may enact legislation providing veterans a truly meaningful educational benefit. There is no time at this point to wait, however. That meaningful veterans education benefit could be provided now. I am forced to conclude the leadership of this Congress is too timid and not willing to undertake that important step.

It may be said that it costs too much to provide our servicemen and women an educational benefit worthy of their service. I understand the budgetary surplus of the next 10 years is expected to be $500 billion. It is not a question about the budget. It is a question about our priorities.

The importance of a meaningful veterans educational benefit is well understood. The educational opportunities veterans had during World War II fundamentally changed our Nation for the better, as the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH) has pointed out.

Military service today is no less worthy. I regret that this measure provides inadequate benefits. I regret committee members are not given the opportunity to do their job. I regret that the gentleman from Texas (Mr. REYES), the ranking Democrat member of the Subcommittee on Benefits, will be unable to participate in this debate because of the circumstances by which this measure was brought to the floor.

Nonetheless, I urge my colleagues to support this measure. I salute the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH) and his staff for their hard work; but our veterans, I believe, deserve the help that they get from the Federal Government, and we must do more to make this a meaningful piece of legislation.

VA BENEFITS AS PERCENT OF ANNUAL HIGHER EDUCATION COSTS [1]

	Percentage of cost covered in fiscal year—						
	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
H.R. 1291	33	32	32	31	31	30	30
Evans amendment	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Current law	20	20	19	19	19	19	18

[1] Combined cost of tuition, fees, books, and supplies based on data provided by The College Board, plus annual stipend of $7,200 for living expenses.

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Average tuition + fees	$9,921	$10,418	$10,939	$11,486	$12,060	$12,663	$13,296	$13,961	$14,659	$15,392
Average books + supplies	717	753	791	831	873	916	962	1,010	1,061	1,114
Subtotal [1]	10,638	11,171	11,730	12,317	12,933	13,579	14,258	14,971	15,720	16,506
Living stipend [2]	7,200	7,380	7,565	7,754	7,948	8,146	8,350	8,558	8,772	8,992
Average annual cost	17,838	18,551	19,295	20,071	20,881	21,725	22,608	23,529	24,492	25,498
Average annual benefit under current law [3]	3,680	3,785	3,889	3,998	4,087	4,192	4,297	4,407	4,517	4,633
Percentage covered	21%	20%	20%	20%	20%	19%	19%	19%	18%	18%
Average annual benefit under HR 1291 [4]	$4,485	$5,372	$6,364	$6,525	$6,687	$6,855	$7,029	$7,202	$7,382	$7,567
Percentage covered	25%	29%	33%	33%	32%	32%	31%	31%	30%	30%
Average annual benefit under HR 320	$3,680	$3,785	$3,889	$20,071	$20,881	$21,725	$22,608	$23,529	$24,492	$25,498
Percentage covered	21%	20%	20%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

[1] Assumes inflation of 2.5% over CPIU, or 5% (CBO).
[2] Assumes 2.5% COLA (CBO).
[3] Assumes 2.5% COLA (CBO).
[4] Assumes 2.5% COLA after FY 2004.

Madam Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

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

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

Mr. HAYWORTH. Madam Speaker, I welcome this opportunity to come to the well of this House to speak in strong support of this legislation.

At this point, Madam Speaker, it is also important that I respond to some of the observations of the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS), my friend and the ranking member.

I think it is important to point out to this House that when the Committee on Veterans' Affairs met earlier this year to consider what our veterans budget should be, it decided unanimously to request funds to increase the Montgomery GI bill to $1,100 over 3 years. It also talked about the desirability of ultimately changing the program so that veterans would be entitled to a monthly stipend, as well as government reimbursement of tuition and fees, at any postsecondary institution in the United States.

However, the committee did not ask that funds for this program change be included in the budget resolution. Indeed, the committee explicitly stated that it would not seek funding for such a change until after a bill like this one we are bringing to the floor today had been enacted into law. Not only did the Democratic substitute offered by the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. SPRATT) contain funds to go beyond what was requested by the Committee on Veteran's Affairs, it also should be noted that although the Blue Dog Democrat budget substitute contained increased amounts specifically to fund H.R. 320, my good friend, the ranking member from Illinois, voted against that proposal.

Madam Speaker, the bottom line on the legislation today is this: rather than being prisoners of process, we have a chance to enact sound policy, a 70, 7–0, a 70 percent increase in benefits under the Montgomery GI bill over the next 3 years. That is something that is meaningful for today's veterans. That is why I rise in strong support of this legislation.

We should note this bill was introduced by the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH). It is cosponsored by 105 Members of this body, including as original cosponsors the majority leader, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. ARMEY); the dean of all House Members, the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. DINGELL); the chairman of the Joint Economic Committee, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SAXTON); and the chairman of the House Committee on Armed Services and the dean of our Arizona delegation, the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. STUMP).

As my friend, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH), the chairman of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, said, this measure increases the bill, again, we cannot state it enough, by 70 percent over the next 3 fiscal years, the most substantial increase to date.

There is no disputing the fact that the current Montgomery GI bill needs improvement as a transition tool from military to civilian life. At present, it pays $650 per month, from which the veteran must pay for tuition, books, fees, housing, transportation, and myriad other personal expenses that students incur while attending college.

Sixty-eight percent of veterans are married at the time of separation from the military and many of those vets have children. These vets are presented with even further expenses while trying to obtain higher education.

I would note that from 1987 through 1997, VA reported that only 37 percent of eligible veterans used the Montgomery GI bill. In comparison, almost 64 percent of Vietnam-era GIs used their education benefits during the first 10 years of the program.

Providing for the common defense was the primary reason for establishing our constitutional Republic. Therefore, military service is our Nation's most fundamental form of national service. Today's servicemember is no less valued than those who were conscripted. Service personnel and veterans represent an untapped opportunity for the Nation, as Mr. G. Kim Wincup, vice chairman of the Transition Commission, stated in his testimony before our Subcommittee on Benefits.

We as a Nation benefit from highly educated veterans. The gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SAXTON), chairman of the Joint Economic Committee, testified before our subcommittee that, quoting now, ''providing our veterans with educational assistance creates a more highly educated, productive workforce, that spurs the economy while rewarding the dedication and great sacrifices made by members of our military.''

Madam Speaker, I would suggest this bill is not just about greater purchasing power under the Montgomery GI bill. It is about the value we place on our military volunteers, persons who are in fact not drafted into the military but who as a Nation have asked to serve voluntarily, military veterans who are indeed a unique national resource.

These are individuals who after they conclude their military service will ultimately use this GI bill not only to catch up with their nonveteran peers but also to serve among America's leaders.

I would applaud the chairman for his leadership on this bill. I urge all of my colleagues to support this important piece of legislation. What part of a 70 percent increase do my colleagues fail to understand?

Mr. EVANS. Madam Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. SKELTON), the ranking member of the Committee on Armed Services.

Mr. SKELTON. Madam Speaker, I thank my friend, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS), for yielding me this time.

Madam Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 1291, the 21st Century Montgomery GI Bill Enhancement Act. As a co-sponsor of the bill, I urge its passage. This legislation continues our efforts to improve the education program for our men and women in uniform. The bill provides an increase in benefits, including raising the monthly educational stipend to $800 a month for fiscal year 2002, to $1,100 by fiscal year 2004.

I remember well the beginnings of what was later known to be the Montgomery GI bill. It was shared between the Committee on Veterans' Affairs and the House Committee on Armed Services, and I remember playing a part in making sure that it reached the floor at that time.

The gentleman from Mississippi, the Honorable Sonny Montgomery, was the author, is the author; and we should remember his efforts as we improve on that bill today.

This legislation is the right step toward enhancing this bill for our veterans. We must continue to take advantage of opportunities to provide our veterans a truly meaningful and substantial educational program.

Full funding for tuition and fees and a monthly stipend for living expenses in exchange for a service commitment would dramatically improve the GI program and would bring parity with other scholarship and tuition assistance programs currently available to young Americans. Efforts by the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS) to build upon improvements under the Montgomery GI bill will greatly improve this education program for our men and women in uniform, and I hope that his efforts on the Committee on Veterans' Affairs will continue and that they will be able to pass additional educational benefits, as the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS) so desires.

Now while it is important that the House consider this legislation, the process by which it is brought to the floor concerns me. It is deeply disturbing that no member of the Subcommittee on Benefits or of the full Committee on Veterans' Affairs has been given the opportunity to engage in a full and open debate on this measure or vote on the bill before today.

I hope procedural abuses like this do not occur again, because it is not fair, either to the Members of this body or to the veterans for whom it is intended to benefit.

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Madam Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. EVANS. Madam Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. SNYDER).

Mr. SNYDER. Madam Speaker, as one of the veterans who took advantage of the GI bill after I got out of the Marine Corps, in fact to the tune of 45 months, or 2 years of undergraduate and 3 years of medical school, like all Members of this House I care about the GI bill, and that is why I find this process in which those of us who serve on

the Committee on Veterans' Affairs was an unfortunate one in which this bill did not come before the committee to be considered and voted on.

What are my concerns? Well, in 1999, Anthony Principi, who is now Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and this was before he was Secretary of Veterans Affairs, chaired a commission known as the Principi Commission. The formal title was ''Report of the Congressional Commission on Service Members and Veterans Transition Assistance.''

Basically, what this report called for was a return to an education benefit for our veterans, much more like the original GI bill right after World War II.

Now what is the problem? What is the difference between what the Principi Commission called for and the legislation we are considering today? The average budget last year for 4 years for tuition and fees only was about $3,500. If we add in the costs, living expenses for a student, that gets to about $12,000.

The average private college tuition for a 4-year college was about $16,300 last year. That does not include any living expenses. That is just tuition and fees.

It does not take a whole lot of math to figure out that 3 years from now, when the bill we are considering today is in full effect, the maximum benefit annually will be $13,200; $3,000 short of just the tuition and fees with nothing provided for living expenses.

So in my view what we have done, Madam Speaker, is missed an opportunity to increase opportunity for our veterans; to help our military recruiters; to help our colleges; and perhaps, most important of all, to help the students at all of our colleges, even our very expensive 4-year private colleges, who would benefit by sitting next to a 4-year veteran of the military.

We will all vote for this bill, Madam Speaker; but it could have been so much better.

Let me make some response to the comments earlier that somehow we were engaging in petty politics. It is not petty politics to want to improve this bill or any bill. It is not petty politics to want bills to go through committee. It is certainly not petty politics to be in agreement with the current Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Anthony Principi, who put out this very important report; and the amendment of the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS) that he wanted to bring up in committee merely reflects the desires of the Principi Commission.

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Madam Speaker, I yield 1½ minutes to the gentleman from Connecticut (Mr. SIMMONS).

Mr. SIMMONS. Madam Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 1291. This bipartisan bill greatly increases the Montgomery GI bill as a recruitment tool for our military services. Based on recent testimony provided to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs by the college board, the monthly benefit needed to meet current average costs for a 4-year college is $1,025. Yet the current GI bill benefit is only $650.

Madam Speaker, $650 per month is just not enough. As a consequence, America's youth and their families no longer see military service as a path to education. They see it as a detour away from their college plans.

□ 1445

As a Vietnam veteran and somebody who spent 30 years in the Reserves, I know that quality personnel are the backbone and the brains of our military, and one way to attract quality personnel is to provide an enhanced education benefit.

If my colleagues believe as I do that an improved education benefit is going to serve as an enlistment tool and is also going to provide for an educated citizenry, then support this bill. Let us help our young citizens, let us help our military, let us help America. Vote for this bill.

Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 1291, the 21st Century Montgomery GI Bill Enhancement Act, and I commend Chairman SMITH and subcommittee Chairman HAYWORTH for their leadership in introducing the bill we are considering this afternoon.

This bipartisan bill greatly improves the Montgomery GI Bill as a recruitment tool for our military services.

Based on recent testimony provided to the Veterans' Affairs Committee by the College Board, the monthly benefit needed to meet the current average cost for a four-year college is $1,025. Yet the current GI Bill benefit is only $650 per month.

Madam Speaker, $650 per month is just not enough. As a consequence, America's youth and their families no longer see military service as the path to education; they see it as a detour away from their college plans. This, in turn, makes it more difficult to recruit young high school graduates into the services.

As a Vietnam veteran, and as someone who has spent 30 years in the U.S. Army Reserve, I know that quality personnel are the backbone and the brains of our military. One way to attract quality personnel into the military is to provide an enhanced education benefit through the GI Bill; and H.R. 1291 does just this.

Under the provisions of this legislation, the monthly educational benefit for someone who commits to a standard three-year enlistment will go from $800 in October of this year; to $950 in October 2002; to $1,100 on October 1, 2003.

A two-year enlistment with a four-year commitment to the Reserves also carries an improved benefit.

Testimony before the Veterans' Affairs Committee shows that the majority of recruits, across all branches of service, list money for education as their primary reason for enlistment. It is clear that an increase in that money would provide a greater incentive for high school graduates to join the military.

On May 24th of this year, the personnel chiefs from all of our military services testified that H.R. 1291's enhancements to the Montgomery GI Bill would be ''very effective'' as a recruitment and retention tool.

If my colleagues believe, as I do, that an improved education benefit will not only serve as an enlistment tool, but will also provide a more educated citizenry, then I urge them to join me in supporting this bill.

Let's help our young citizens. Let's help the military. Let's help America! Let's pass this bill.

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

Mr. RODRIGUEZ. Madam Speaker, I am proud to be here today and be a cosponsor of H.R. 1291, the 21st Century GI Bill Enhancement Act. At a time when drastic tax cuts have overshadowed our Nation's priorities, it is refreshing that the House should take up the legislation that takes a major step towards restoring purchasing power for the GI Bill.

Educational benefits are the military's best recruiting tool. The Montgomery GI Bill must be modernized to meet today's demands. H.R. 1291 moves toward this goal of expanding access to higher education by increasing the current monthly benefits from $650 to $800 by the year 2002, and ultimately to $1,100 by 2004.

Clearly, today's legislation provides a stronger education package to the men and women who choose to serve our country.

However, while I support this measure, I regret that I did not have the opportunity to vote for the bill in full committee because of the manner in which H.R. 1291 was brought to the House floor.

More importantly, I am disappointed that the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS), the ranking member, was not permitted to offer his amendment during the subcommittee markup on H.R. 1291, which was abruptly canceled.

H.R. 320, the amendment offered by the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS), the Montgomery GI Bill Improvements Act, would have provided additional resources for tuition, would have provided additional resources for fees, would have provided additional resources for books and supplies, as well as provided assistance and allowances for these people that would have enlisted for 4 additional years in service. As drafted and presented today on the House floor, H.R. 1291 only provides modest assistance in covering this cost.

Yes, we are happy that this is here. We would have had a great opportunity to make some things happen, and it is unfortunate we did not have the opportunity to make that happen.

My understanding is, based on the rules that we operate under, Rule 4(c)(1), the committee rule states that each subcommittee is authorized to meet and report to the full committee on all matters under its jurisdiction.

These committees were not allowed to practice the way we should, and it is something that we also need to recognize, that this is not a way of handling our issues that come before the House.

As we look in terms of the resources that we have now and the costs of higher education, recent reports show that

fees alone are higher than tuition in most universities around the country, so there is a real need for us to look at this seriously.

We can stand here today and be proud of this piece of legislation, but we can also not feel proud of the way it was handled. Why, why, did this particular piece of legislation not have an opportunity to have a vote?

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Madam Speaker, I yield 1½ minutes to the distinguished gentleman from Florida (Mr. CRENSHAW).

Mr. CRENSHAW. Madam Speaker, as an original cosponsor of this legislation, I am proud to stand here and urge its passage, because I think it improves one of the most popular and important benefits that the military offers today, the GI Bill.

When it started after World War II, as you know, it really changed the way we look at higher education in America, because it took the college education opportunity and experience and changed it from kind of an elite opportunity for a privileged few to something that everybody could enjoy. All Americans could enjoy that. It became the fulfillment of the American dream, and became something that we could look forward to. It became a way that a grateful Nation could say thank you and pay back those patriots that marched into harm's way to change this world.

But it got expensive to provide education, and it was hard to keep up. Yet this legislation does just that. We have heard it increases those benefits by 70 percent, and that is important, but it also should be emphasized that every dollar we spend is a good investment, because every time we spend a dollar helping some young man or woman get an education, it returns back into our economy. It is estimated in a two-year degree, that a dollar spend comes back seventeen-fold. In a four-year degree, it comes back fourteen-fold.

I encourage everyone to support the passage of this. I want to thank the gentleman from New Jersey (Chairman SMITH) for introducing this legislation and for his leadership. I pledge my commitment to make it even better. I urge everyone to pass this legislation.

Madam Speaker, as an original cosponsor of this truly landmark legislation, I rise in strong support of the 21st Century Montgomery GI Bill Enhancement Act. This legislation will vastly improve one of the most popular and important benefits our military provides—the All Volunteer Force Educational Assistance Program, or the Montgomery GI Bill.

This important program serves two main purposes:

(1) It is a key recruitment and retention tool for our military, and

(2) It helps servicemembers transition into civilian life and apply the skills they learned in uniform in the larger society.

The program has a broad and overwhelmingly positive impact on society. Servicemembers with college degrees or additional skills and training—as with any individuals who attain higher degrees—are more likely to be able to support themselves and their families through steady employment, and less likely to require government assistance.

Furthermore, according to a study done for the VA by the Klemm Analysis Group last year, servicemembers who gain college education or additional skills and training using the Montgomery GI Bill contribute more to our economy than servicemembers who do not take advantage of this program. They are able to get higher paying jobs, buy more goods and services, and invest at higher levels. In fact, the Klemm study indicates that for every dollar the government spends on the Montgomery GI Bill for servicemembers who use these benefits to get a four-year degree, as much as $14 is returned to the economy. For servicemembers who use the benefits to get a two-year degree, as much as $17 is returned to the economy.

Regrettably, too few servicemembers take advantage of this benefit because it has failed to keep pace with the skyrocketing costs of higher education. The current benefits under the Montgomery GI Bill cover just 63% of the average cost of a baccalaureate degree for a commuter student at a state college with no other expenses. And, it is rare that the servicemember taking advantage of his GI Bill benefits has no other expenses. In fact, more than two-thirds of all veterans are married at separation from the military, and many have children.

The 21st Century Montgomery GI Bill Enhancement Act provides the most significant increase—an increase of nearly 70% from the current benefit of $650 per month to the fully implemented benefit of $1,100 per month in 2004—in this program's 16-year history. According to the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities during testimony before the Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Benefits earlier this month, this $1,100 benefit "would cover the full tuition charges at many four year public institutions, and even at a substantial number of private colleges."

There is little doubt that the original GI Bill benefits, which paid the full costs for a higher education, were tremendously successful both as a recruitment and retention tool, and as a bridge from military to civilian life. That program helped veterans returning home from World War II transition smoothly into civilian life, and our nation was all the better for it. It is estimated that every dollar invested in the GI Bill brought between $5 and $12.50 back into the economy in the form of higher wage-paying jobs and increased purchases of goods and services. These patriots bore the weight of the building of a new America. They first saved the nation from tyranny and then helped the nation to rise to the responsibilities of world leadership with the help of the GI Bill.

H.R. 1291 does not restore the Montgomery GI Bill to the high standards of its predecessor. It would be enormously difficult to keep up the pace of increases in the costs of higher education. In the past twenty years, the average tuition and fees at 4-year private colleges rose by 352%. During that same period, the costs at 4- and 2-year public colleges rose by 336%. But, while H.R. 1291 may not be all that we want it to be, it does make significant progress. It will enable many more servicemembers to take advantage of this great tool for advancing their hopes and improving their prospects for the future.

There are other bills that would make bigger leaps in shorter time. But the fact of the matter is that it is the bill before us that is fully funded in the budget resolution passed by this house. It is not a responsible course of government to make promises that cannot be kept. Over time, given the commitment of our Veterans' Affairs Chairman CHRIS SMITH and others on the committee and in this body, we may very well get a benefit comparable to the promise of the original GI Bill. But, in the meantime, as Carl Sagan once said, "It's better to light a candle than to curse the darkness."

Madam Speaker, I thank Chairman CHRIS SMITH for introducing this legislation, and pledge my commitment to continuing to work with him for further improvements in these important education benefits. I encourage my colleagues to make that pledge with me. With that, I urge my colleagues to support this legislation.

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

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Madam Speaker, I yield 1 minute to the distinguished gentleman from New York (Mr. GILMAN).

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

Mr. GILMAN. Madam Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding me time.

Madam Speaker, I want to commend the gentleman from New Jersey, the distinguished chairman of our committee, for bringing this measure to the floor.

Madam Speaker, I rise in strong support of this measure, the GI Enhancement Act, and urge my colleagues to join in lending their support. This bill provides education benefits to veterans to a level more in line with today's increasingly expensive higher education opportunities by raising the current monthly Montgomery GI Bill rates.

Madam Speaker, this GI Bill is the most profound and far-reaching piece of legislation enacted by the Congress in the 20th century. The program, first implemented after World War II, single-handedly afforded college education to the millions of middle and working class men and women who served during the war, and it helped transform America in the postwar years, leading to the "baby-boom" and the rise of middle class suburbia.

Accordingly, I urge my colleagues to support this worthy, timely legislation. With prices rising three times faster than the Consumer Price Index, I can think of no better way to enhance the education benefits that we provide for those who serve in our Armed Forces.

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Madam Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the distinguished gentleman from Mississippi (Mr. PICKERING).

Mr. PICKERING. Madam Speaker, I rise with great pride to support H.R. 1291, the 21st Century Montgomery GI Bill. It is a great honor for me to follow G.V. Sonny Montgomery, who represented the Third District of Mississippi, the legislation which bears his

name and which is an embodiment of his commitment and his legacy to our Nation's Armed Services, the military, and to our veterans.

What does it mean for Mississippi? In the Third District we have 4,763 members of the Army-Air Force National Guard throughout the district; 1,410 active duty Air Force at Columbus Air Force Base; 1,646 active duty Navy and Marine Corps personnel at Meridian, Mississippi.

It means that they will have the opportunity to get an education, to better their lives, to have a higher standard of living and quality of life for their children and for their families.

At Mississippi State University, if they choose to attend there, today 55 percent of their tuition is covered. Under this legislation, 87 percent of their tuition and costs will be covered. One hundred twenty student veterans are now enrolled at the University of Southern Mississippi. Today, 51 percent of their costs of covered under this legislation. Three years from today, 83 percent of their costs will be covered. Four hundred sixty students are enrolled there today.

At the University of Mississippi, 55 percent of the costs are covered today. Eighty-seven percent will be covered in the future, and over 100 students will benefit.

Madam Speaker, it is time for the next generation to step up to the plate and follow the leaders of the World War II generation, to show our commitment to the Armed Services. For the men and women of the 21st century who are willing to commit to serve their country, we need to make sure we can recruit and retain and give them the educational opportunities and benefits of the Montgomery GI Bill. For that reason, I have great pride in supporting this good and noble effort.

Mr. LARGENT. Madam Speaker, I rise today in strong support of H.R. 1291 and the opportunities it provides our veterans across the country. College tuition has risen approximately 49 percent over the last ten years, and more than 114 percent since 1980. This does not include costs which are incurred beyond tuition and fees. The Montgomery GI Bill benefits have not risen significantly during this time, causing hardship for our veterans who continue their education after their military service.

Many of our military personnel and veterans have families to consider, and it is of utmost importance to assist our veterans and their families who depend upon them. Veterans who continue their education often face burdens greater than the average student because they often live off campus and commute in an effort to provide the best possible situation for their families.

Our veterans serve their country with a strong sense of duty, courage and loyalty, and it is unfortunate that they have to worry about putting food on the table and about their future after military service. Our goal of recruiting high quality personnel into the Armed Forces and strengthening the ranks with personnel who make a career of serving our nation must be a top priority. Our veterans deserve the best educational benefits we can offer. I believe H.R. 1291 raises benefits to a level fitting of our nation's defenders. I thank our nation's veterans for their hard work and dedication, and I thank my colleague, Representative CHRIS SMITH, for introducing this bill and for his leadership on veteran's issues.

Mr. LANGEVIN. Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 1291, the 21st Century Montgomery GI Bill Enhancements Act. This measure will modernize one of the most important pieces of legislation of the Twentieth Century, the Montgomery GI Bill, which was passed in 1944. I am pleased that we finally have the chance to bring the GI Bill in line with the current costs of higher education.

When the GI Bill was first enacted, it provided the stimulus for thousands of Americans to go to college after serving their country in World War II. This was a fitting reward to what has come to be termed as ''The Greatest Generation,'' allowing them to move beyond the places they came from and pursue the American Dream. The GI Bill has since allowed millions of young men and women who could not otherwise afford college to have their education paid for after serving their country.

Unfortunately, as time has passed, the costs of sending our men and women to college has escalated considerably, and increased funding for the GI Bill has not been enough to keep the benefit current with costs. The maximum benefit right now is only $650 a month, which does not cover the cost of the average four-year state institution. As a result of letting inflation erode our commitment to our veterans, we have lost a powerful recruiting tool for bringing new people into our armed forces. It is past time for us to raise the amount of these benefits. That is why I am proud to be a cosponsor of H.R. 1291. It will link any future increase in the education benefit to the consumer price index so that inflation will no longer be an issue.

We owe this not only to our veterans, but to the millions of young men and women who will be looking to our military in the future as their best hope of obtaining a college degree. I ask that all my colleagues join me in wholeheartedly supporting this measure today.

Mr. SHOWS. Madam Speaker, I am so proud to be here, as a member of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, to share my continued support for H.R. 1291 with my colleagues in Congress.

As a young man growing up in Mississippi, two great men—my father and Sonny Montgomery, indisputably inspired my life in public service and advocacy for veterans. The valiant service rendered by men like my father and Congressman Montgomery was not done for any personal reward, just for knowing they had done their part to keep America and democracy strong. And yet, our nation did right by them by enacting the 1944 GI Bill of Rights, one of the landmark pieces of legislation of the 20th Century. It transformed America by providing for the education of millions of World War II veterans, as well as thousands of veterans who followed in their selfless path.

We all know why we must act swiftly on the passage of this legislation for our veterans. Simply put, they have earned it and deserve it. Our servicemen and women accept lower pay and modest living conditions in the military—we must meet their commitment with a promise to invest in their future.

As a country that depends on the volunteer membership of our servicemen and women to defend our nation's ideals, we must provide competitive benefits for our veterans. Recruiting is increasingly difficult in a thriving economy. We can strengthen the retention of our trained solders, if we deliver appropriate benefits and support.

At the same time, it is critical that the current cost of higher education be reflected. The cost of higher education since the inception of the Montgomery GI Bill in 1985 has increased more than double the rate of increase in GI Bill benefits. During the 106th Congress, and again during this Congress I introduced H.R. 1280, the Veterans Higher Education Opportunities Act. This legislation would index education benefits annually to the Annual figure published by the College Board, adjusting for the cost of attending a public four-year university as a commuter student. This way of determining benefits has received tremendous support from the Partnership for Veterans Education, made up of 40 organizations of veterans, military members, and higher education officials, as well as Admiral Tracey, the Administration's representative from the Pentagon who testified before the House Veterans Affairs Benefits Subcommittee on May 24th.

I am disappointed that we are debating this bill under the Suspension of the rules, and that there is no opportunity to consider alternatives. My bill, H.R. 1280, more accurately reflects the mission of Representative Montgomery by providing the level of education benefits that was promised to our soldiers when they entered the service. I support H.R. 1291, Madam Speaker, but we can do better. We are shortchanging our veterans by refusing to open the floor for honest debate.

Our nation's veterans are our heroes. They have shaped and sustained our nation with courage, sacrifice and faith. They have earned our respect and deserve our gratitude. Let us join together and do something meaningful by passing legislation to modernize and improve the Montgomery GI bill. It is the right thing to do.

Mr. DINGELL. Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 1291, the ''21st Century'' Montgomery G.I. Bill. This legislation is indeed important to our nation's national security as well as the men and women who serve our nation selflessly in uniform. It is also a sensible, bipartisan bill that will better America. It is good policy. As a veteran and a former GI Bill beneficiary, I am proud to be an original cosponsor of H.R. 1291.

However, Madam Speaker, I am troubled by my Republican colleagues' decision to subvert the process and bypass the committee system. Last week, the Veterans Subcommittee on Benefits was scheduled to markup H.R. 1291. However, this markup was cancelled after the Committee's Democratic staff informed their Republican counterparts that Mr. EVANS and REYES each intended to offer an amendment at the scheduled markup.

Mr. EVANS' amendment would, like H.R. 320, have boosted to H.R. 1291's benefit package to cover the full cost of tuition for every servicemember now and in the future. Mr. REYES' amendment would have indexed the MGIB benefit to educational inflation instead of using the CPI, thus preventing a future deterioration in the real value of the MGIB.

Why did the Republicans block debate on these amendments? Why did Republican staff,

after being informed of Mr. EVANS' and REYES' intentions two days prior to the markup—a clear demonstration of good faith—attempt to browbeat veterans' groups into preventing a full debate on H.R. 1291 that would have improved this legislation? Both amendments, after all, would only benefit our veterans, servicemembers, and their families. They were not ''Democratic'' amendments meant to derail the MGIB, but honest attempts to better the MGIB program.

I remain in support of H.R. 1291. When I testified in support of it on June 7, I emphasized this bill was a good interim step in our efforts to overhaul the MGIB to make it more in line with the World War II-era GI Bill. I stressed that H.R. 1291 was good policy and a step in the right direction, but was not as comprehensive as H.R. 320, which would essentially pay the full cost of tuition and grant a living allowance for every MGIB beneficiary. I urged passage of H.R. 1291 as a positive step in the process of passing H.R. 320, not as the end of the road. Short-circuiting the committee process by preventing Republican or Democratic members from perfecting this legislation is not in the interest of America's veterans. This bill should be about what best helps veterans, not over who get credit for helping veterans.

Madam Speaker, LANE EVANS and I have worked hard over the last three years to pass H.R. 320, which aims to bolster military recruiting and assist young men and women who choose to serve our nation in uniform. H.R. 1291 is a solid interim measure that will improve military recruiting and increase access to higher education for veterans. It is good policy for our country, and represents an important step in what must be a continuing process of improving the MGIB. I would urge all my colleagues to support H.R. 1291 today, but also urge my Republican colleagues to commit themselves to working with us the remainder of this session to fully restoring the G.I. Bill's purchasing power by passing H.R. 320.

Mr. HOLT. Madam Speaker, as an original cosponsor of the 21st Century Montgomery GI Bill Enhancement Act, I am pleased to see the House of Representatives taking this action today.

More than 21 million veterans have been able to get a college education with the help of the government since the original GI Bill in 1944. By the time the last American World War II veteran graduated in 1956 with the help of this program, the United States was richer by 450,000 engineers; 238,000 teachers; 91,000 scientists; 67,000 doctors; 22,000 dentists; and more than a million other college-trained men and women. It was a landmark idea that paid off for our nation, and helped to catapult the United States into its position of post-war prominence.

Today, by updating the Montgomery GI Bill, we are taking a step that will help many more men and women achieve the goal of a college degree and a brighter future for themselves.

This bill will implement a historic funding increase in the Montgomery GI Bill education benefit. The legislation goes a long way toward closing the gap between current GI Bill benefit levels and the rising cost of a college education.

This legislation will increase the monthly education benefit from its current level of $650 per month for 36 months to $1,100—the largest hike ever enacted. When fully phased in, the new education benefit will bring the total GI Bill benefit to $39,600, an amount roughly equal to the estimated cost for a student at a four-year public college. Today, these benefit levels total only $23,400, an amount that is far below what it takes to afford a degree in most institutions. The bill makes these increases over a three year period in responsible steps, increasing to $800 the first year, the second year to $950, and finally to $1,100 per month in the third year.

As a Member of the House Budget Committee, I am pleased that the Budget Resolution our Committee constructed included provisions allowing for this much-needed benefit increase.

This is an important step to honor our veterans. Increasing benefit levels will also help to recruit young, talented people to our nation's armed forces. And, like the original GI Bill, it will help pay dividends for our nation, in college-educated young people who will go on to make contributions to their neighborhoods and our nation.

I urge my colleagues to join me in passing this legislation.

Mr. BUYER. Madam Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 1291, the 21st Century Montgomery GI Bill Enhancement Act.

H.R. 1291 increases the amount of educational benefits available under the Montgomery GI Bill for an approved program of education on a full-time basis from the current monthly rate of $650 for a minimum three-year enlistment to $1,100 over three years.

The benefits for a two-year active enlistment and four years in the Reserves, currently $528, will rise to $894 over three years.

This legislation is truly important.

Over the last decade, benefits under the Montgomery GI Bill have not kept pace with the rising cost of a college education.

In fact, the Department of Veterans Affairs has indicated that roughly 50 percent of eligible veterans do not use the GI Bill education benefits that they are entitled to.

Veterans repeatedly cite the lack of buying power of the Montgomery GI Bill as one of the reasons for not using this benefit.

The bill will help hundreds of thousands of veterans, service members, and their families who take advantage of the Montgomery GI Bill.

Equally important, this bill will ultimately strengthen our national defense by helping to improve the military's recruiting efforts.

The original GI Bill of 1944 is widely regarded as one of the most important pieces of social legislation ever passed by Congress.

Like that original bill and its later versions, this bill makes higher education and training more affordable to military personnel returning to civilian life.

Again, I rise in strong support of this legislation.

Mr. REYES. Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 1291, the 21st Century Montgomery GI Bill Enhancement Act. I would like to thank my good friend and colleague, the Ranking Member of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, LANE EVANS as well as Chairman CHRISTOPHER SMITH and Benefits Subcommittee Chairman J.D. HAYWORTH for their efforts to improve education benefits for our nation's veterans. I commend each of you for your leadership and your efforts toward improving the lives of America's veterans. However, as the Ranking Member on the Benefits Subcommittee, I am very disappointed that this matter was brought to the House Floor without Members of the Benefits Subcommittee or the Full Committee on Veterans' Affairs having an opportunity to debate and consider the measure in a mark-up.

Consistently, history has referred to GI Bill benefits as the most significant reason for the high educational attainment and post World War II economic leadership success of the United States. Through financial and tuition benefits, the GI Bill still provides millions of today's returning military service members the opportunity to gain important educational skills and knowledge they could not afford otherwise. With the cost of college climbing over the last two decades, and our nation's military plagued with recruitment problems, our obligation to our nation's veterans is to keep pace with these costs and provide stronger, more adequate GI Bill benefits. Increasing sources of private scholarships and funding, along with the Montgomery GI Bill's current inadequate level of benefits, has seriously hurt military recruiting efforts.

Our veterans certainly deserve better. From a national security standpoint, we cannot afford to allow our military to be without necessary manpower and strength. We must continue to work to maintain and improve the benefits for our veteran population. By doing this, we honor their service and provide for their future. As the Ranking Democratic Member of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on Benefits, I, along with my colleagues on the Subcommittee, held hearings on this legislation and heard testimony surrounding the significant issue of GI Bill enhancement. The testimony of individuals such as Representative JOHN DINGELL, himself an architect of GI Bill enhancement legislation, my colleague on the Committee Representative RONNIE SHOWS, and Secretary of Veterans' Affairs Anthony J. Principi, reflected a need to ensure that a GI Bill for the new century must provide a meaningful readjustment benefit to discharged service members while also giving our military an effective recruiting tool. We understand that there have been significant economic, societal, and military changes since the implementation of the GI Bill. These changes must be addressed, and Congress is now addressing its responsibility to make improvements to the structure and benefit level of this program.

It is unfortunate to mention, however, that this bill came to the floor of the House of Representatives without a mark-up. While this bill does much for American veterans and service members, many, including myself, wish it could do more. I intended to introduce an amendment to H.R. 1291 that would index the GI Bill to educational inflation rather than the Consumer Price Index. Indexing the GI Bill to the inflating cost of college tuition and expenses would allow veterans and beneficiaries of the GI Bill to receive full educational benefits without constant Congressional or governmental adjustment. The benefits would correspond with the significant costs of an institution of higher learning.

My colleague, Representative LANE EVANS, was going to introduce his bill, H.R. 320, as a substitute to H.R. 1291 during mark-up. H.R. 320, of which I am a co-sponsor, was designed to restore the GI Bill program to a benefit level comparable to that once provided to

veteran students after World War II. Essentially, H.R. 320 would pay for the full cost of attending college and would remove the large enrollment fee that is paid by service members. This legislation is modeled after the recommendations made by Secretary of Veterans' Affairs Anthony Principi when he was chairman for a Congressional Commission charged with studying the needs of military service members when they leave the military to return to civilian life. This legislation enjoys broad Congressional support and the support of several national veteran service organizations. Despite the absence of a mark-up or a chance for full Committee deliberation on this matter, the provisions within H.R. 320 and the amendment I intended to offer continue to enjoy strong support among Members of Congress and veteran service organizations. I, along with my colleagues, will continue to address this issue until all our veterans are finally given a fully functional, fully beneficial, fully enhanced GI Bill.

I am a supporter of H.R. 1291 because this measure does provide a considerable increase in veterans' educational benefits under the Montgomery GI Bill. Under H.R. 1291 the monthly benefit would increase to $800 per month for fiscal year 2002, increasing to $1,100 by fiscal year 2004. While I do believe that students and service members entering college in 2002 would benefit more from a bill that includes the amount of benefits that would be provided to veterans if the bill was adjusted to educational inflation, I encourage my colleagues to vote for the passage of this bill. It is the first step in a long road toward veterans' benefits enhancement.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mrs. BIGGERT). 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. 1291.

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. Madam 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.

HONORING ARMY NATIONAL GUARD COMBAT UNITS DEPLOYED IN SUPPORT OF ARMY OPERATIONS IN BOSNIA

Mr. THORNBERRY. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the concurrent resolution (H. Con. Res. 154) honoring the continued commitment of the Army National Guard combat units deployed in support of Army operations in Bosnia, recognizing the sacrifices made by the members of those units while away from their jobs and families during those deployments, recognizing the important role of all National Guard and Reserve personnel at home and abroad to the national security of the United States, and acknowledging, honoring, and expressing appreciation for the critical support by employers of the Guard and Reserve.

The Clerk read as follows:

H. CON. RES. 154

Whereas in October 1999 the Army announced a groundbreaking multi-year plan to mobilize and deploy the headquarters of National Guard combat divisions to command the United States sector of the Multinational Stabilization Force in Bosnia and to employ significant elements of the Army National Guard enhanced combat brigades in that sector;

Whereas the 49th Armored Division, Texas Army National Guard, and Army National Guard combat units from the 30th Enhanced Separate Brigade of North Carolina and the 45th Enhanced Separate Brigade of Oklahoma have completed deployments in Bosnia, and 1,200 soldiers of the 48th Infantry Brigade of Georgia are as of June 2001 deployed to Bosnia in the largest such deployment of National Guard personnel in support of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization peacekeeping mission in Bosnia;

Whereas the more than 1,200,000 citizen-soldiers who comprise the National Guard and Reserve components of the Armed Forces nationwide commit significant time and effort in executing their important role in the Armed Forces;

Whereas these National Guard and Reserve citizen-soldiers serve a critical role as part of the mission of the Armed Forces to protect the freedom of United States citizens and the American ideals of justice, liberty, and freedom, both at home and abroad; and

Whereas thousands of employers nationwide continue their support for service of their employees in the Reserve components: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the House of Representatives (the Senate concurring), That the Congress—

(1) honors the continuing service and commitment of the citizen-soldiers of the Army National Guard combat units deployed in support of Army operations in Bosnia;

(2) recognizes the deployment of the 48th Infantry Brigade in March 2001 as an important milestone in that commitment;

(3) honors the sacrifices made by the families and employers of the members of those units during their time away from home;

(4) expresses deep gratitude for the continuing support of civilian employers for the service of their employees in the National Guard and Reserve;

(5) recognizes the critical importance of the National Guard and Reserve to the security of the United States; and

(6) supports providing the necessary resources to ensure the continued readiness of the National Guard and Reserve.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. THORNBERRY) and the gentlewoman from California (Ms. SANCHEZ) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas (Mr. THORNBERRY).

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. THORNBERRY. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks on H. Con. Res. 154.

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

There was no objection.

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

Madam Speaker, I rise in strong support of this resolution, introduced by the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. COLLINS), honoring the continuing commitment of Army National Guard combat units in support of U.S. operations in Bosnia.

Throughout our history, America's citizen soldiers have played a crucial role in making and keeping the peace. Nowhere has this been more evident than in recent deployments of the National Guard to support peacekeeping missions in Bosnia. Clearly, we are increasingly reliant on the men and women of the National Guard and Reserve to perform peacetime operational missions. For example, in 1996, the National Guard and Reserves provided less than 1 million duty days of direct support to active components. Today, they are providing in excess of 12 million duty days of support annually, the equivalent of nearly 34,000 active duty personnel.

In October 1999, the Army announced an important decision to employ National Guard combat units and National Guard division headquarters in support of the NATO peacekeeping mission in Bosnia. As a result, the 49th Armored Division headquarters for the Texas National Guard, and combat units from the 30th Enhanced Separate Brigade, North Carolina National Guard, and the 45th Enhanced Separate Brigade of the Oklahoma National Guard have completed deployments in Bosnia.

I am particularly proud of the 49th, because several of its members came from my district, soldiers like Bob Wenger of Amarillo, Texas. The 49th was the first Guard or Reserve unit to command active duty troops since World War II. They set the standard for others to follow. Today, more than 1,200 soldiers of the 48th Brigade, Georgia National Guard, have deployed in the largest such deployment of National Guard soldiers to Bosnia.

This resolution not only honors the commitment and dedication of the soldiers in these combat units who have left home and family to serve the Nation, but it also honors the sacrifices of their families and employers. It also serves as a reminder to us, and to the Nation, that the National Guard and Reserve are critically important to the security of the United States. Their readiness directly contributes to America's military readiness, and we must continue to provide the support necessary for both the active and reserve components to perform the missions assigned to them.

□ 1500

Madam Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this resolution, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. SANCHEZ. Madam Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I rise in support of House Concurrent Resolution 154, and I urge my colleagues to support this important measure.