

country deserve a patriotic and esteemed burial.

It is with these thoughts in mind that I not only compliment the committee, the chairman and ranking member and those who worked on it, but I endorse it wholeheartedly and urge its passage.

Mr. STUMP. Madam Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Alabama [Mr. BACHUS], a member of the committee.

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

Madam Speaker, I want to commend the chairman of our committee, the gentleman from Arizona [Mr. STUMP], and the gentleman from New York [Mr. QUINN], the chairman of the subcommittee. What they have done through their leadership on this bill is to give us a much better piece of legislation than what we had when it came over from the Senate.

The bill is not to punish; the bill is to protect our veterans. It is to respect our veterans. It is meant to protect them. It is not punitive. This bill does a very fine job of doing that.

When the bill came over from the Senate, the gentleman from Missouri [Mr. SKELTON] talked about a loophole, and I think that is a very good word. I think the gentleman is correct, in that when it came over from the Senate it said that certain people could not be buried in a National Cemetery if they had committed a Federal offense or a Federal capital offense. We agreed with that.

But the Committee on Veterans' Affairs felt we should not set up a preference for someone who commits Federal offenses, nor should there be preferential treatment given to Federal offenses as opposed to State offenses. In other words, if you blew up a Federal building, if you killed a Federal officer, if you committed a murder on an Indian reservation, you would be prohibited from being buried in a national cemetery; but if you blew up a city hall, if you killed a sheriff, if you walked in a McDonald's and killed 20 people, there would be no prohibition on you, a mass murderer, being buried in a national cemetery.

We took care of that simply by saying that all capital offenses were covered. What the gentleman from Arizona [Mr. STUMP] took leadership on is he was interested in respecting our cemeteries, preserving their dignity, thinking about those heroes who are buried there, and our statement to the Nation on who are our heroes.

The Senate bill, I think, was punitive, in that it denied to the widows, to the dependents, all benefits, and that was not what we were after. That is not what we were seeking. We were seeking to protect and to respect, not to be punitive.

The final product I wholly endorse. I originally introduced part of this legislation in response to a lynching of a 19-year-old young man in Mobile County.

The bill that came from the Senate would not have addressed this. The people that participated in the military honor guard protested having to participate in honoring a man who had just been executed in the electric chair in Alabama. The Senate bill did not address that; the House bill did.

Madam Speaker, this is a much better bill, and I urge its passage, and I thank the chairman and the subcommittee chairman.

Mr. EVANS. Madam Speaker, I yield the balance of my time to the gentleman from Texas [Mr. RODRIGUEZ], a fighter for veterans and member of the committee.

Mr. RODRIGUEZ. Madam Speaker, I rise today to commend the leadership for taking swift and precise action to prevent violent criminals from being honored in our Nation's veterans' cemeteries.

The bill we are passing today amends earlier provisions which may have unfairly targeted those who would be blamed, veterans' families or veterans who suffer from mental illness. I believe the focus of this bill on actual convicts and veterans who obviously committed the crime with the requisite mental intent protects due process for veterans and their families.

In protecting veterans and veterans' families from the arbitrary elimination of benefits, this legislation strikes the resounding chord that we will not bless criminal veterans with the honor of burial in our national cemeteries.

Madam Speaker, in closing, let me thank the chairman and the ranking member, as well as the gentleman from New York, Chairman QUINN. I think the gentleman did an exceptional job in reaching out to us in a bipartisan manner.

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

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

Madam Speaker, once again I would like to commend the gentleman from New York [Mr. QUINN] and the gentleman from California [Mr. FILNER], the chairman and ranking member of this subcommittee, and also again the gentleman from Alabama [Mr. BACHUS] and the gentleman from Texas [Mr. RODRIGUEZ] and the ranking member of the full committee, the gentleman from Illinois [Mr. EVANS], for all their fine work on this bill. I think we have come up with a very fine product, and I would urge all Members to support it.

Mr. KNOLLENBERG. Madam Speaker, I rise in strong support of S. 923, a bill to deny veterans burial benefits to persons convicted of Federal capital offenses. I would also like to commend the chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, Mr. STUMP, for his guidance in bringing this important bill before the House.

On June 18, I introduced H.R. 1955 which is similar to the legislation before the House today. As a member of the VA-HUD Appropriations subcommittee, I felt it was necessary and appropriate to introduce this legislation

after the Senate passed S. 923 by a vote of 98 to 0.

As pictures of the Oklahoma City bombing were brought into the lives of everyone across this great country, no one watched with more horror than I did. It will always remain ingrained in our hearts, our minds, and our souls.

Like the rest of the Nation, I was saddened more by the fact the person responsible for killing 168 people in the most heinous domestic terrorist act ever committed could receive a hero's burial with taps, a 21-gun salute, and a flag-draped coffin.

S. 923 is the right thing to do. Our Nation's veterans' cemeteries are sacred ground, and they are a solemn and sad reminder of the price our Nation has paid for the freedom we enjoy every day. It is wrong for those veterans and their dependents to live with the thought that someone who has killed so many innocent lives on our own soil could be laid to rest next to these fallen heroes.

I commend Chairman STUMP and the rest of the Veterans' Committee for their diligence on this issue. I would also like to thank the chairman for allowing me to testify before his committee on this very issue. All of us, including myself, who served in our armed services are thankful for his leadership to ensure our Nation's cemeteries remain sacred.

#### GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. STUMP. Madam 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 S. 923 and H.R. 2367.

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

There was no objection.

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

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the amendment in the nature of a substitute offered by the gentleman from Arizona [Mr. STUMP].

The amendment in the nature of a substitute was agreed to.

The Senate bill was ordered to be read a third time, was read the third time, and passed.

The title of the Senate bill was amended so as to read:

An Act to amend title 38, United States Code, to prohibit interment or memorialization in certain cemeteries of persons committing Federal or State capital crimes.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

#### SPECIAL ORDERS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 7, 1997, and under a previous order of the House, the following Members will be recognized for 5 minutes each.

#### IN HONOR OF JOHN N. STURDIVANT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Maryland [Mrs. MORELLA] is recognized for 5 minutes.