

bill originated in the House as H.R. 240 under the guidance of Representative JOHN MICA, Chairman of the Subcommittee on Civil Service, and passed the House on April 9, 1997. S. 1021 provides improvements to veterans' preference and employment opportunities and strengthens veterans' employment rights with federal contractors.

Mr. Speaker, through veterans' preference, wartime and disabled veterans get a small advantage competing for federal jobs, along with promotion and retention protection. To date, veterans comprise 27.6 percent of the federal workforce. The bill in its entirety demonstrates the commitment of the Congress to America's 26 million veterans that preference for federal jobs is an important way to share the sacrifices of war.

I'd like to thank Chairman SPECTER of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee for two provisions in particular. Section 6 expands and improves veterans' employment under federal contracts, and expands the definition of who is a 'covered veteran' by including veterans who served on active duty during a war or in a campaign or expedition for which a campaign badge has been awarded. Section 7 requires federal contractors to include the maximum number and the minimum number of employees in their annual reports on veteran's employment. Both of these provisions are designed to afford additional protection to preference eligible veterans employed by Federal contractors.

This bill is the most significant improvement in veterans' preference in my memory and it deserves the strong support of the House. I urge my colleagues to support S. 1021.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, on behalf of all veterans, I'd like to express my thanks and sincere appreciation to Chairman JOHN MICA as well as the Ranking Member, ELIJAH CUMMINGS, and all of their staff for the commitment that they continue to show to our men and women who have proudly served our country in the U.S. Armed Forces.

Mr. PAPPAS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to support our veterans by calling for the passage of the S. 1021, the Veterans Employment Opportunity Act of 1998. Last year, the House did the right thing by passing H.R. 240 introduced by Representative MICA. This legislation is the Senate's long awaited companion bill and, while I wish it had gone further in its protection of veterans from Reductions In Force, nonetheless it also deserves our passage today.

For too long many of our nation's veterans have been neglected by our own government when it comes to obtaining federal employment. Our nation's veterans, who served so selflessly and risked their lives, face unnecessary restrictions that preclude them from federal employment. All they simply desire is the opportunity to continue serving their nation.

As the result of this legislation, veterans can apply for federal jobs on a more competitive basis at a time when their employment within the federal workforce is declining and approaching an historically low level.

This is a bipartisan bill and one that reflects the interests of the people who have served our country so courageously. I am proud that this legislation has the support of the American Legion. I commend Mr. MICA for his work and urge my colleagues to support it.

Mr. MICA. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BLUNT). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MICA) that the House suspend the rules and pass the Senate bill, H.R. S. 1021.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the Senate bill was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

FEDERAL EMPLOYEES LIFE INSURANCE IMPROVEMENT ACT

Mr. MICA. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and concur in the Senate amendments to the bill (H.R. 2675) to require that the Office of Personnel Management submit proposed legislation under which group universal life insurance and group variable universal life insurance would be available under chapter 87 of title 5, United States Code, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read as follows:

Senate amendments:

Strike out all after the enacting clause and insert:

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Federal Employees Life Insurance Improvement Act".

SEC. 2. STUDY AND REPORT ON CERTAIN LIFE INSURANCE OPTIONS OFFERED TO FEDERAL EMPLOYEES.

(a) *IN GENERAL.*—Not later than July 31, 1998, the Office of Personnel Management shall conduct a study on life insurance options for Federal employees described under subsection (b) and submit a report to Congress.

(b) *STUDY AND REPORT.*—The study and report referred to under subsection (a) shall—

(1) survey and ascertain the interest of Federal employees in an offering under chapter 87 of title 5, United States Code, of insurance coverage options relating to—

(A) group universal life insurance; and
(B) group variable universal life insurance; and

(C) additional voluntary accidental death and dismemberment insurance; and

(2) include any comments, analysis, and recommendations of the Office of Personnel Management relating to such options.

SEC. 3. REPEAL OF MAXIMUM LIMITATION ON EMPLOYEE INSURANCE.

Chapter 87 of title 5, United States Code, is amended—

(1) in section 8701(c), in the first sentence, by striking the comma immediately following "\$10,000" and all that follows and inserting a period; and

(2) in section 8714b(b), in the first sentence, by striking "except" and all that follows and inserting a period.

SEC. 4. FOSTER CHILD COVERAGE.

Section 8701(d)(1)(B) of title 5, United States Code, is amended by inserting "or foster child" after "stepchild" both places it appears.

SEC. 5. INCONTESTABILITY OF ERRONEOUS COVERAGE.

Section 8706 of title 5, United States Code, as amended by section 5(2), is further amended by adding at the end the following new subsection:

"(g) The insurance of an employee under a policy purchased under section 8709 shall not be invalidated based on a finding that the employee erroneously became insured, or erroneously continued insurance upon retirement or entitlement to compensation under subchapter I of chapter 81 of this title, if such finding occurs after the erroneous insurance and applicable

withholdings have been in force for 2 years during the employee's lifetime."

SEC. 6. DIRECT PAYMENT OF INSURANCE CONTRIBUTIONS.

Chapter 87 of title 5, United States Code, is amended—

(1) in section 8707—

(A) in subsection (a), by striking "(a) During" and inserting "(a) Subject to subsection (c)(2), during";

(B) in subsection (b), by striking "(b)(1) Whenever" and inserting "(b)(1) Subject to subsection (c)(2), whenever"; and

(C) in subsection (c), by inserting "(1)" immediately after "(c)" and by adding at the end the following new paragraph:

"(2) An employee who is subject to withholdings under this section and whose pay, annuity, or compensation is insufficient to cover such withholdings may nevertheless continue insurance if the employee arranges to pay currently into the Employees' Life Insurance Fund, through the agency or retirement system that administers pay, annuity, or compensation, an amount equal to the withholdings that would otherwise be required under this section.";

(2) in section 8714a(d), by adding at the end the following new paragraph:

"(3) Notwithstanding paragraph (1), an employee who is subject to withholdings under this subsection and whose pay, annuity, or compensation is insufficient to cover such withholdings may nevertheless continue optional insurance if the employee arranges to pay currently into the Employees' Life Insurance Fund, through the agency or retirement system which administers pay, annuity, or compensation, an amount equal to the withholdings that would otherwise be required under this subsection.";

(3) in section 8714b(d), by adding at the end the following new paragraph:

"(3) Notwithstanding paragraph (1), an employee who is subject to withholdings under this subsection and whose pay, annuity, or compensation is insufficient to cover such withholdings may nevertheless continue additional optional insurance if the employee arranges to pay currently into the Employees' Life Insurance Fund, through the agency or retirement system which administers pay, annuity, or compensation, an amount equal to the withholdings that would otherwise be required under this subsection.";

(4) in section 8714c(d), by adding at the end the following new paragraph:

"(3) Notwithstanding paragraph (1), an employee who is subject to withholdings under this subsection and whose pay, annuity, or compensation is insufficient to cover such withholdings may nevertheless continue optional life insurance on family members if the employee arranges to pay currently into the Employees' Life Insurance Fund, through the agency or retirement system that administers pay, annuity, or compensation, an amount equal to the withholdings that would otherwise be required under this subsection.";

SEC. 7. ADDITIONAL OPTIONAL LIFE INSURANCE CONTINUATION AND PORTABILITY.

(a) *IN GENERAL.*—Section 8714b of title 5, United States Code, is amended—

(1) in subsection (c)—

(A) by striking the last 2 sentences of paragraph (2); and

(B) by adding at the end the following:

"(3) The amount of additional optional insurance continued under paragraph (2) shall be continued, with or without reduction, in accordance with the employee's written election at the time eligibility to continue insurance during retirement or receipt of compensation arises, as follows:

"(A) The employee may elect to have withholdings cease in accordance with subsection (d), in which case—

"(i) the amount of additional optional insurance continued under paragraph (2) shall be reduced each month by 2 percent effective at the

beginning of the second calendar month after the date the employee becomes 65 years of age and is retired or is in receipt of compensation; and

“(ii) the reduction under clause (i) shall continue for 50 months at which time the insurance shall stop.

“(B) The employee may, instead of the option under subparagraph (A), elect to have the full cost of additional optional insurance continue to be withheld from such employee’s annuity or compensation on and after the date such withholdings would otherwise cease pursuant to an election under subparagraph (A), in which case the amount of additional optional insurance continued under paragraph (2) shall not be reduced, subject to paragraph (4).

“(C) An employee who does not make any election under the preceding provisions of this paragraph shall be treated as if such employee had made an election under subparagraph (A).

“(4) If an employee makes an election under paragraph (3)(B), that individual may subsequently cancel such election, in which case additional optional insurance shall be determined as if the individual had originally made an election under paragraph (3)(A).

“(5)(A) An employee whose additional optional insurance under this section would otherwise stop in accordance with paragraph (1) and who is not eligible to continue insurance under paragraph (2) may elect, under conditions prescribed by the Office of Personnel Management, to continue all or a portion of so much of the additional optional insurance as has been in force for not less than—

“(i) the 5 years of service immediately preceding the date of the event which would cause insurance to stop under paragraph (1); or

“(ii) the full period or periods of service during which the insurance was available to the employee, if fewer than 5 years,

at group rates established for purposes of this section, in lieu of conversion to an individual policy. The amount of insurance continued under this paragraph shall be reduced by 50 percent effective at the beginning of the second calendar month after the date the employee or former employee attains age 70 and shall stop at the beginning of the second calendar month after attainment of age 80, subject to a provision for temporary extension of life insurance coverage and for conversion to an individual policy of life insurance under conditions approved by the Office. Alternatively, insurance continued under this paragraph may be reduced or stopped at any time the employee or former employee elects.

“(B) When an employee or former employee elects to continue additional optional insurance under this paragraph following separation from service or 12 months without pay, the insured individual shall submit timely payment of the full cost thereof, plus any amount the Office determines necessary to cover associated administrative expenses, in such manner as the Office shall prescribe by regulation. Amounts required under this subparagraph shall be deposited, used, and invested as provided under section 8714 and shall be reported and accounted for together with amounts withheld under section 8714a(d).

“(C)(i) Subject to clause (ii), no election to continue additional optional insurance may be made under this paragraph 3 years after the effective date of this paragraph.

“(ii) On and after the date on which an election may not be made under clause (i), all additional optional insurance under this paragraph for former employees shall terminate, subject to a provision for temporary extension of life insurance coverage and for conversion to an individual policy of life insurance under conditions approved by the Office.”; and

(2) in the second sentence of subsection (d)(1) by inserting “if insurance is continued as provided under subsection (c)(3)(A),” after “except that.”.

(b) REPORT.—Not later than 3 years after the date of enactment of this Act, the Office of Personnel Management shall submit a report to Congress on additional optional insurance provided under section 8714b(c)(5) of title 5, United States Code (as added by subsection (a) of this section). Such report shall include recommendations on whether continuation for such additional optional insurance should terminate as provided under such section, be extended, or be made permanent.

(c) TECHNICAL AMENDMENT.—The last sentence of section 8714b(d)(1) of title 5, United States Code, is amended by inserting “(and any amounts withheld as provided in subsection (c)(3)(B))” after “Amounts so withheld”.

SEC. 8. IMPROVED OPTIONAL LIFE INSURANCE ON FAMILY MEMBERS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Section 8714c(b) of title 5, United States Code, is amended to read as follows:

“(b)(1) The optional life insurance on family members provided under this section shall be made available to each eligible employee who has elected coverage under this section, under conditions the Office shall prescribe, in multiples, at the employee’s election, of 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5 times—

“(A) \$5,000 for a spouse; and

“(B) \$2,500 for each child described under section 8701(d).

“(2) An employee may reduce or stop coverage elected pursuant to this section at any time.”.

(b) TECHNICAL AND CONFORMING AMENDMENTS.—Section 8714c of title 5, United States Code, is amended—

(1) in subsection (c)(2), by striking “section 8714b(c)(2) of this title” and inserting “section 8714b(c) (2) through (4)”;

(2) in subsection (d)(1), by inserting before the last sentence the following: “Notwithstanding the preceding sentence, the full cost shall be continued after the calendar month in which the former employee becomes 65 years of age if, and for so long as, an election under this section corresponding to that described in section 8714b(c)(3)(B) remains in effect with respect to such former employee.”.

SEC. 9. OPEN SEASON.

Beginning not later than 180 days after the date of enactment of this Act, the Office of Personnel Management shall conduct an open enrollment opportunity for purposes of chapter 87 of title 5, United States Code, over a period of not less than 8 weeks. During this period, an employee (as defined under section 8701(a) of such title)—

(1) may, if the employee previously declined or voluntarily terminated any coverage under chapter 87 of such title, elect to begin, resume, or increase group life insurance (and acquire applicable accidental death and dismemberment insurance) under all sections of such chapter without submitting evidence of insurability; and

(2) may, if currently insured for optional life insurance on family members, elect an amount above the minimum insurance on a spouse.

SEC. 10. MERIT SYSTEM JUDICIAL REVIEW.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Section 7703 of title 5, United States Code, is amended—

(1) in subsection (b)(1) by striking “within 30 days” and inserting “within 60 days”; and

(2) in subsection (d) in the first sentence, by inserting after “filing” the following: “, within 60 days after the date the Director received notice of the final order or decision of the Board.”.

(b) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendments made by this section shall take effect on the date of enactment of this Act, and apply to any suit, action, or other administrative or judicial proceeding pending on such date or commenced on or after such date.

SEC. 11. EFFECTIVE DATES.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Except as otherwise provided in this Act, the amendments made by this Act shall take effect on the date of enactment of this Act.

(b) MAXIMUM LIMITATION ON EMPLOYEE INSURANCE.—Section 3 shall take effect on the first day of the first applicable pay period beginning on or after the date of enactment of this Act.

(c) ERRONEOUS COVERAGE.—Section 5 shall be effective in any case in which a finding of erroneous insurance coverage is made on or after the date of enactment of this Act.

(d) DIRECT PAYMENT OF INSURANCE CONTRIBUTIONS.—Section 6 shall take effect on the first day of the first applicable pay period beginning on or after the date of enactment of this Act.

(e) ADDITIONAL OPTIONAL LIFE INSURANCE.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Section 7 shall take effect on the first day of the first pay period that begins on or after the 180th day following the date of enactment of this Act, or on any earlier date that the Office of Personnel Management may prescribe that is at least 60 days after the date of enactment of this Act.

(2) REGULATIONS.—The Office shall prescribe regulations under which an employee may elect to continue additional optional insurance that remains in force on such effective date without subsequent reduction and with the full cost withheld from annuity or compensation on and after such effective date if that employee—

(A) separated from service before such effective date due to retirement or entitlement to compensation under subchapter I of chapter 81 of title 5, United States Code; and

(B) continued additional optional insurance pursuant to section 8714b(c)(2) as in effect immediately before such effective date.

(f) IMPROVED OPTIONAL LIFE INSURANCE ON FAMILY MEMBERS.—The amendments made by section 8 shall take effect on the first day of the first pay period which begins on or after the 180th day following the date of enactment of this Act or on any earlier date that the Office of Personnel Management may prescribe.

(g) OPEN SEASON.—Any election made by an employee under section 9, and applicable withholdings, shall be effective on the first day of the first applicable pay period that—

(1) begins on or after the date occurring 365 days after the first day of the election period authorized under section 9; and

(2) follows a pay period in which the employee was in a pay and duty status.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MICA) and the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. CUMMINGS) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MICA).

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. MICA. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks on the bill, H.R. 2675.

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

There was no objection.

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

My colleagues, this legislation makes improvements in the Federal Employees Group Life Insurance program generally called FEGLI. The House passed this bill after the Subcommittee on Post Office Civil Service conducted the most comprehensive review of benefits under this program in over 40 years.

As a result of this legislation, there will be major improvements in the life insurance benefits for our Federal employees for the first time in 16 years. Our Federal employees will be able to obtain better life insurance for themselves, their spouses and their children.

They will also be able to carry more insurance into retirement.

The House bill required the Office of Personnel Management to submit a legislative proposal for offering group universal life insurance, group variable life insurance and voluntary additional accidental death and dismemberment to Federal employees. The Senate has substituted a requirement that the Office of Personnel Management review and study this matter. I believe OPM can and should submit that study within 6 months and recommend to the Congress legislative language to make these life insurance options available to our Federal employees.

The Office of Personnel Management will not be required to establish a new Federal program to make this insurance available. Commercial insurance carriers have been offering these products to private sector employees for years. The Office of Personnel Management should be able to find suitable products virtually off the shelf. There is no need, in fact, to reinvent the wheel.

It is important that Federal employees and also our Federal retirees be given these up-to-date choices. It would be the first time since the program was started in 1954 that employees would have a life insurance choice other than just term insurance.

The Senate amendment also allows Federal employees to purchase life insurance for their foster children and allows them to pay their life insurance premiums directly under certain circumstances. The amendments also allow individuals who are wrongly covered by life insurance to remain covered if the policy has been in force for 2 years. The Senate also expanded the open season during which our Federal employees may begin or increase their life insurance.

One final amendment, not related to life insurance, provides the Office of Personnel Management employees with an additional 30 days to appeal Merit Systems Protection Board decisions to the United States Court of Appeals for the Federal circuit.

This is a good bill. A long overdue review of this program and Federal employees will benefit from the improvements we make with this legislation. I urge all Members to support this legislation.

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

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

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 2675 is designed to improve the structure and administration of the Federal Employees Group Life Insurance program provided by the Federal Government for its civilian employees and retirees. FEGLI was established in 1952 and is managed by the Office of Personnel Management. Since 1954 it has been administered by Metropolitan Life Insurance Company through a contract with OPM. FEGLI provides low cost life insurance coverage to Federal employees and retirees.

Enrollees have a choice of basic life insurance, six levels of additional life insurance, family insurance, three options with respect to post-retirement basic insurance and accelerated payments options for the terminally ill.

□ 2330

Nearly 90 percent of the eligible Federal work force participates in the program. The gentleman from Florida (Chairman MICA) and I, along with all of the members of the Subcommittee on Civil Service, were able to work together to develop legislation that would have implemented some excellent recommendations we receive from the witnesses at an oversight hearing we held on FEGLI last year.

However, some of the provisions implementing these recommendations were dropped when the Senate considered the bill. The House bill directed the Office of Personnel Management to submit draft legislative proposals for group universal life, group variable life, and accidental death and dismemberment insurance coverage within 6 months of passage of this legislation.

The Senate version requires OPM to merely conduct a study on these additional forms of insurance, rather than submit legislative proposals. While we can accept the Senate language on this issue, we strongly urge OPM to include in their study recommendations for legislative changes that may provide new life insurance options for Federal employees.

Included in the bill is a provision that will give enrollees the opportunity to continue the full extent of their life insurance coverage after they reach 65. By doing this, we will be providing a measure of comfort and convenience to many who would still have a desire to provide for the security of their loved ones. They will no longer have to seek out a new insurance company from which to purchase life insurance, something often difficult and expensive to do at that late stage in life.

I offered an amendment to H.R. 2675 during our subcommittee's markup of the bill, which added a provision that would enable enrollees to purchase an increased amount of insurance coverage for their spouse and dependent children.

Clearly the present levels of coverage available, \$5,000 for one's spouse and \$2,500 for each child are inadequate. They neither compensate for the loss nor cover average burial expenses. My amendment would make it possible for enrollees to obtain coverage for their spouse and dependent children up to five times the current levels. I am pleased to see that this important provision is still in the bill.

Additional provisions added to the bill by the Senate were to eliminate Basic insurance maximum limitation, make erroneous FEGLI coverage incontestible if discovered after 2 years of withholding, allow direct payment option for any enrollee whose pay or an-

nity will not cover withholdings, implements a 3-year demonstration program that would allow employees who separate before retirement to continue Option B coverage for 5 years, by paying usual group rates, covers a foster child in the Family Optional insurance, and provides for open enrollment period following enactment of the bill.

Mr. Speaker, once again, I believe that we still have a very good bipartisan bill. I strongly urge all Members to give their support, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. MICA. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to yield 3 minutes to the gentlewoman from Maryland (Mrs. MORELLA), a member of our Subcommittee on Civil Service and, again, a tireless advocate for our Federal employees and retirees.

Mrs. MORELLA. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding to me.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of the Federal Employees Life Improvement Act, and I want to thank our chairman of the Subcommittee on Civil Service, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MICA), and the ranking member, the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. CUMMINGS) for their leadership on this issue.

This issue coming up at this hour of the night may just be the kind of the insomnia that people who are watching might well need. However, for Federal employees, it is critically, critically important.

The legislation will provide better life insurance benefits to Federal employees under the Federal Employees Group Life Insurance Program, the FEGLI Program. It is an important program. It provides Basic and Optional Life insurance coverage for almost 2.5 million Federal employees and 1.6 million retirees.

The legislation fulfills the legislative goal that I began to pursue in 1993 through legislation I introduced, H.R. 3297. The goal of that legislation was to extend the treatment currently afforded to Federal judges under FEGLI to other judicial officials.

Since 1993, I worked to get this important provision enacted into law, and now this important goal is realized through the increase in the class of eligible Federal employees who may choose this coverage during open enrollment that this bill provides.

The version of the bill we passed in the House of Representatives directed the Office of Personnel Management to conduct a study of Federal employees' interest in additional insurance proposals and to submit a legislative proposal to offer group universal life insurance and group variable universal life insurance policies under FEGLI within 6 months.

The Senate language differs from the House version in that it does not mandate that OPM submit a legislative proposal, but instead requires OPM to submit findings to Congress by July 31.

While I think it is beneficial to compel OPM to submit a legislative proposal, this difference does not affect

my support for this legislation because of its many other benefits. The legislation also incorporates a component of legislation I introduced in the last Congress to increase the amount of additional optional life insurance for dependents from the present level.

Although it does not mirror my proposal exactly, my proposal would have only included dependents with severe disabilities. This approach makes sense in that it will include a larger risk pool and reduce the costs. I thank the chairman for introducing this measure.

Finally, the bill provides Federal employees with the opportunity to continue the full extent of their life insurance coverage after they reach age 65. Under current law, when Federal employees reach age 65, they cease making premium payments, and the face value of the employees life insurance is reduced by 2 percent each month for 50 months. Giving Federal retirees the opportunity to purchase life insurance benefits is a great accomplishment. I simply encourage my colleagues to support this bill, H.R. 2675.

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

I want to thank my colleague, the gentlewoman from Maryland, when she talked about insomnia. I am sure, hopefully, we will be able to wake some people up with all this good news we are imparting here tonight.

But with that, Mr. Speaker, I just want to again reiterate this is another piece of legislation that would not have been possible without the bipartisan efforts on the part of our subcommittee.

This is a very important piece of legislation because it once again sheds light on the fact that we care about our Federal employees who make it possible for us to do our jobs the way we do them and certainly to support our Nation.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all of my colleagues to support this legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. MICA. Mr. Speaker, I have no additional speakers, and I yield myself the balance of my time.

Mr. Speaker, first I just want to take a moment to thank again the ranking member, the gentlewoman from Maryland (Mrs. MORELLA) and other members of our subcommittee.

Tonight we brought before the House two pieces of legislation, the Veterans Employment Opportunity Act, which provides veterans preference, which is something our veterans have sought for decades since really World War II. It is an important piece of legislation. The staff and Members, in a bipartisan fashion, showed today what we can do working together.

Today has been a difficult day for the Congress and for the American people. It does show, in fact, what we can all do for the benefit of those who served us.

Finally, on this bill, this bill is important because we have over 4 million Federal employees and retirees.

□ 2340

This bill saves money for the taxpayer. This program has not been bid or really examined in some number of decades, and we can provide better benefits at lower cost to those who are actively serving us in Federal employment now.

So I ask my colleagues to support this legislation, and I urge all Members to support this bill tonight.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BLUNT). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MICA) that the House suspend the rules and concur in the Senate amendments to the bill H.R. 2675.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the Senate amendments were concurred in.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

RECOGNIZING THE IMPORTANCE OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Mrs. MORELLA. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the concurrent resolution (H. Con. Res. 302) recognizing the importance of children and families in the United States and expressing support for the goals of National KidsDay and National Family Month.

The Clerk read as follows:

H. CON. RES. 302

Whereas there is an epidemic of children in crisis in the United States caused by the increased stresses on children from contemporary society, which can even include instances of child abuse and neglect;

Whereas newspaper headlines, news reports, and various studies provide evidence that children are more frequently committing acts of violence, taking illegal drugs, and committing suicide, indicating that the future of the children of the United States, and therefore the future of the Nation, is at risk;

Whereas all families in the United States, regardless of their economic status, ethnic or cultural heritage, or geographic location, are experiencing the pressures caused by contemporary society while trying to raise and nurture their children;

Whereas it is imperative that the people of the United States act boldly to secure the future of the Nation by halting and healing the pain of children in crisis;

Whereas KidsPeace is the oldest, most successful, and most comprehensive not-for-profit organization dedicated solely to helping children attain the confidence and develop the courage necessary to confront and overcome crises;

Whereas KidsPeace has more than 1,500 caregivers helping more than 2,000 children each day in 25 locations across the United States;

Whereas KidsPeace established National KidsDay and National Family Month to recognize and focus attention on relationships between parents and children;

Whereas National KidsDay is celebrated on the third Saturday of September, during the period when children are returning to school, when children are subject to a very high level of stress, and when there is a critical need for children to feel honored, valued, supported, and loved;

Whereas National Family Month is celebrated during the five-week period between Mother's Day in May and Father's Day in June, which is a critical adjustment period for families to prepare for children to return to the home at the end of the school year and can provide a wonderful opportunity for families to prepare to use their time together during the summer to grow and strengthen as a family unit; and

Whereas these celebrations can provide opportunities for parents, grandparents, and caregivers to recognize the importance of being involved in the physical and emotional lives of their children: Now, therefore be it

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

(1) recognizes the importance of children and families to the future of the United States;

(2) expresses support for the goals of National KidsDay and National Family Month, as established by KidsPeace; and

(3) encourages the people of the United States to participate in local and national activities and celebrations recognizing National KidsDay and National Family Month.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentlewoman from Maryland (Mrs. MORELLA) and the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. CUMMINGS) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Maryland (Mrs. MORELLA).

GENERAL LEAVE

Mrs. MORELLA. Mr. 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. 302.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from Maryland?

There was no objection.

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H. Con. Res. 302, which recognizes the importance of children and families in the United States, and I express my support for Kidsday and National Family Month. I particularly want to commend the sponsor of the bill, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. MCHALE) and the chairman and ranking member for bringing this bill to the floor.

Kidsday and National Family Month were established by KidsPeace, a special organization dedicated to helping children in crisis. KidsPeace believes that every child is unique, and that children are helped the most by their mothers and fathers, the people who are closest to them.

We all have a responsibility to protect and support America's children. Mr. Speaker, 1 out of every 4 Americans is a child. Children are our hope for the future, our chance for renewal. They carry on our values and our ideals.

Childhood should be a time of learning and of play, and a time to be sheltered from the wickedness of the outside world. However, children and youth today are coping with increasingly serious problems that are robbing them of their innocence, security and physical safety. Violence in the schools