

persistent efforts to move this legislation forward this year.

SPECIALIZED SERVICES

Section 903 continues the current practice of requiring reports from the Secretary of Veterans Affairs regarding specialized treatment and rehabilitative needs of disabled veterans, including veterans with spinal cord dysfunction, blindness, amputation, and mental illness.

Section 903 also requires the Under Secretary for Health to prescribe objective standards of job performance, so as to ensure compliance and place greater emphasis on specialized services. I truly believe that we need to refocus VA on specialized services, and I am pleased that this provision was included.

Officers of the West Virginia Paralyzed Veterans of America have told me about their concerns about the quality of training made available to VA staff serving on the Spinal Cord Injury (SCI) primary care teams in the VA medical centers in my State of West Virginia. Instead of the week of specialized training (followed by hands-on training in an SCI unit) recommended by a VHA Directive, SCI primary care teams in West Virginia receive a 3-day training session only. I also hear disturbing accounts from veterans who were given wheelchairs without being measured to make sure they fit properly; improper cushions placed in wheelchairs causing pressure sores that can last for months; and VA staff who were unfamiliar with such procedures as turning the hospitalized SCI patient or even dressing them. This is not acceptable.

In sum, Mr. President, I cannot guarantee that the necessary specialized care is there in all four of the West Virginia VA medical centers, or any other VA medical center across the country. The legislation before us today will give VA an objective and uniform standard by which to judge, and accurately report on, the quality and scope of specialized services.

COLA

H.R. 4110 also contains one of the most important pieces of legislation that Congress must pass every year—authorization for a cost-of living-allowance (COLA) increase for veterans and survivors compensation programs. The amount of the increase is not specified in this legislation, since the percentage of the increase had not been determined by the time of its passage in the House. Instead, as is customary, the bill authorizes the increase to be equal to the rate of increase in Social Security recipients' benefits amounts. The rate of increase is based on leading economic indicators of inflation. By being tied to the rate of inflation, the COLA ensures that veterans' benefits will keep pace with rising costs and maintain the buying power of compensation for our service-connected disabled veterans and their families.

CONCLUSION

Mr. President, in closing, I want to acknowledge the work of our Commit-

tee's Chairman, Senator SPECTER, in developing this comprehensive legislation. Through his efforts, and that of his staff—especially the Committee Staff Director, Charles Battaglia, and the Committee General Counsel, William Tuerk, the Senate Committee has fully met its responsibilities and can be proud of the legislation we consider today.

Mr. LOTT. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate agree to the amendments of the House.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. AKAKA. Mr. President, I am pleased that the Senate passed H.R. 4110, the Veterans Programs Enhancement Act of 1998. This measure strives to improve the services and benefits provided to our nation's veterans by amending several health, education, housing, and other benefits programs within the Department of Veterans Affairs.

I am especially pleased that the measure contains two provisions which I have been working on. Section 603 of the bill will extend the eligibility of members of the National Guard and Reserve for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Home Loan Guaranty Program. The provision will ensure that the men and women in the Selected Reserve will continue to be eligible for this program through September 30, 2003. Under current law, authorization for the program is scheduled to expire in October 1999.

As the author of legislation in 1992 which extended eligibility for VA-guaranteed home loans to National Guard and Reserve members who complete six years of service, I am pleased with the participation in the program by members of the Selected Reserve. The VA Home Loan Guaranty Program for Guard and Reserve members has provided many individuals and families with a needed opportunity to obtain a mortgage in order to purchase a home, many for the first time. The VA Home Loan Guaranty Program is not only beneficial for members of the Selected Reserve, it also contributes to the financial viability of the VA Home Loan Guaranty Program since the origination fees paid by Reservists more than offset the cost of additional loan guarantees. I am gratified that the home loan program will continue to be made available to members of the National Guard and Reserves who have served our country.

I am also pleased with the inclusion of Section 706 in H.R. 4110. This provision would prohibit the Secretary of Veterans Affairs from establishing or collecting parking fees at the Spark M. Matsunaga Department of Veterans Affairs Medical and Regional Office Center in Honolulu, Hawaii. Under current law, the VA is required to charge its users and employees to park at facilities built with special revolving funds. In Hawaii, the VA parking structure is located on the grounds of the Tripler Army Medical Hospital and will be

shared by VA and the Department of Defense. The joint VA/DOD parking facility would result in an administrative nightmare if parking fees were required to be assessed for VA medical employees and visitors but not DOD personnel and visitors. Furthermore, the costs of administering the parking fees far outweigh the revenues that would be generated from the assessment of nominal parking charges. The waiver of parking fees for the VA parking structure at Tripler Army Medical Center will ensure that all visitors and employees enjoy free and equal access to the facilities.

EXPRESSING THE SENSE OF THE SENATE WITH RESPECT TO THE BRUTAL KILLING OF MATTHEW SHEPARD

Mr. LOTT. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of S. Res. 313, submitted earlier by Senators THOMAS and ENZI.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A resolution (S. Res. 313) expressing the sense of the Senate with respect to the brutal killing of Mr. Matthew Shepard.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection to the immediate consideration of the resolution?

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the resolution.

Mr. LOTT. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the resolution be agreed to, the preamble be agreed to, the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table, and that any statements relating to the resolution be printed in the RECORD.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The resolution (S. Res. 313) was agreed to.

The preamble was agreed to.

The resolution, with its preamble, is as follows:

S. RES. 313

Whereas Mr. Matthew Shepard, a 21-year old student at the University of Wyoming in Laramie, Wyoming, was physically beaten and tortured, tied to a wooden fence and left for dead; and

Whereas Mr. Matthew Shepard died as a result of his injuries on October 12, 1998, in a Colorado hospital surrounded by his loving family and friends; Now therefore be it

*Resolved by the Senate*, That it is the Sense of the Senate that it—

(1) condemns the actions which occurred in Laramie, Wyoming, as unacceptable and outrageous;

(2) urges each member of Congress and every citizen of the United States, in his or her own way, through his or her church, synagogue, mosque, workplace, or social organization, to join in denouncing and encouraging others to denounce this outrageous murder of another human being;

(3) pledges to join in efforts to bring an end to such crimes, and to encourage all Americans to dedicate themselves to ending violence in the United States; and

(4) pledges to do everything in its power to fight prejudice and intolerance that leads to the murder of innocent people.