Fattah, PA; and Mr. Doug King of St. Louis, MO.

Yours Very Truly,

RICHARD A. GEPHARDT.

REMOVAL OF NAME OF MEMBER AS COSPONSOR OF H.R. 3

Mr. EWING. Mr. Speaker, I am a cosponsor on H.R. 3, and I ask unanimous consent to have my name removed as a cosponsor of that legislation.

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

There was no objection.

SPECIAL ORDERS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 1999, and under a previous order of the House, the following Members will be recognized for 5 minutes each.

KEEPING THE PROMISE TO OUR VETERANS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to call the attention of the House to five bills I have introduced to address some major concerns of our Nation's service members, military retirees and veterans.

The first is H.R. 363, the Military Survivor's Equity Act. It is hard to believe that we continue to condone a system that penalizes the aging widows of our Nation's veterans, but that is exactly what the Military Survivors Benefits Plan does. When a member of the military retires, he or she may join the Survivors Benefits Plan, known as the SBP. After paying a premium for many, many years, the retiree expects that his or her spouse will receive 55 percent of the retired military pay.

Most of the survivors who receive SBP benefits are military widows. You may not realize that when these widows who are receiving SBP benefits turn 62, a Social Security offset causes their benefits to be reduced from 55 percent to 35 percent of their husband's military retiree pay. This occurs even when the Social Security comes from the wife's employment.

What does this reduction mean to our Nation's military widows? I have received many letters on this subject. Let me just read from one. I am quoting:

''My husband, who served in the Army for 20 years, was on Social Security disability because of heart problems and could no longer work. He died in July, 1995. I was then 61 years old. I received Social Security income plus my SBP. With both of these incomes, I was doing fine paying my monthly bills and having enough left for groceries. When I turned 62, I was notified that my SBP was reduced from $476 to $302. What a shock. This was my grocery money that they took away from me.''

It is time to change this misleading, unfair law. We must provide some equity to the surviving spouses of our military retirees. My bill would fix this problem by eliminating the callous and absurd reduction in benefits and give what is expected and what is deserved: 55 percent of the military retired pay. To put it simply, no offset. A simple solution to a difficult problem, an equitable solution to a mean-spirited practice.

The second bill is H.R. 364, the Veterans' Training and Employment Bill of Rights Act. This would ensure that service-disabled veterans and veterans who serve in combat areas will be first in line for federally funded training-related services and programs. Under current law, veterans are often underserved by national programs such as the Job Training Partnership Act because it sometimes mistakenly assumes that the veterans receive the same services from the VA Department. My bill would reinforce our commitment to provide special training assistance for veterans and make it clear that eligible veterans have earned a place at the front of the line.

The bill would also establish the first effective appeals process for veterans who believe their rights have been violated under veterans' employment-related programs. The Secretary of Labor would be required to help veterans who believe that Federal contractors have not met their obligation to hire veterans and to help veterans who believe they were not given preference for enrollment in Federal training programs. This bill would provide the teeth that have been missing from some veterans' training programs and would go a long way toward ensuring that veterans' rights are respected.

A third bill is H.R. 366, the Veterans' Entrepreneurship Promotion Act.

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Many veterans have told me that they would like to own a small business, and our national economy would certainly be strengthened if more veterans were able to establish their own companies. This bill is designed to do just that, by establishing a program to help disabled and other eligible veteran-owned small businesses compete for Federal contracts. Also included is a program of training, counseling and management assistance for veterans interested in starting a small business. Veterans who want to pursue self-employment should be supported and encouraged.

H.R. 365 is the Let Our Military Buy a Home Act. Under this plan, the Department of Defense, in cooperation with Veterans Affairs, would be permitted to test a program designed to relieve the military housing crisis. Military personnel stationed in areas where the supply of suitable military housing is adequate, as in my hometown of San Diego, could purchase homes for themselves and their families at reduced interest rates. This practice would reduce the cost of building on-base housing and would expand opportunities for service members to own their own homes.

Initially introduced in the 104th Congress by our good friend and former colleague, the honorable and legendary G.V. Sonny Montgomery, and included in Public Law 104–106, this program was inexplicably not implemented by the Department of Defense. Sonny's idea is a good one and I encourage you to join in pursuing this creative approach to dealing with the military housing program.

Finally, a bill to Extend Commissary and Exchange Store Privileges, H.R. 362. This legislation would allow veterans with service-connected disability to use commissary and exchange stores on the same basis as the members of the Armed Forces entitled to retired pay. I believe that these veterans have earned the right to commissary privileges.

REJECT THE PRESIDENT'S BUDGET

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. GREEN of Wisconsin). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California (Mr. HERGER) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. HERGER. Mr. Speaker, if one were to believe the White House and all they are saying regarding the debt of our Nation, one would be convinced that the President's recently released FY 2000 budget is good fiscal policy for future generations. Unfortunately, the exact opposite is true.

The White House would like the American people and this Congress to believe that the national debt is going down under their budget, but page 389 of the President's own budget from his Office of Management and Budget shows a very different picture.

Looking at the chart, we see that the total national debt goes up from $5.394 trillion in 1998 to $5.576 trillion in 1999, and to almost $5.8 trillion in the Year 2000, and the red ink continues to rise every year under Clinton's budget.

The truth is, the total Federal debt under the Clinton plan does not go down, as the President would like the American people to believe. In fact, the total Federal debt goes up to the tune of over $1.3 trillion over the next five years.

I asked the President's Budget Director, Jacob Lew, during a recent Committee on the Budget hearing about this discrepancy, and he was evasive about the fact that the President's own budget called for a $1.3 trillion more in debt on our children and grandchildren.

I then asked Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin the next day during a Ways and Means hearing the same question, and Secretary Rubin refused to answer a simple yes or no question about whether the total debt is going up.

Regardless of where the debt is placed, it will still need to be paid, and guess who will pay it? The answer is