

(Mr. PALLONE addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extension of Remarks.)

H.R. 4921 AMENDING TITLE 38 TO ENSURE THAT ALL VETERANS EXPOSED TO IONIZING RADIATION ARE CONSIDERED IN FULL FOR THEIR DISABILITY CLAIMS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Hawaii (Mrs. MINK) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mrs. MINK of Hawaii. Mr. Speaker, I am introducing a bill to enable veterans exposed to radiation to be considered for medical assistance without regard to their particular level of exposure. The bill, also, expands the definition of radiation-risk activity to include veterans exposed to residual contamination.

The destroyer U.S.S. Brush entered the waters of the Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshall Islands, an area contaminated with radiation from a large number of ships that had served as targets during two atmospheric nuclear tests. Crew members of the U.S.S. Brush ate fish and drank water distilled from the bay and crew members made trips to the target vessels to retrieve souvenirs. There was no dosimetry data collected on the U.S.S. Brush or at the Kwajalein Atoll to determine levels of exposure. No safety precautions were taken to prevent exposure and the crew was unaware of the dangers of ionizing radiation.

Veterans who served on the U.S.S. Brush now suffer from a number of diseases that can be linked to radiation exposure. However, their disability claims have repeatedly been denied because they were not onsite participants in an atmospheric nuclear test and they were exposed to low levels of ionizing radiation.

Congress has assisted veterans exposed to radiation in the past. In 1988 Congress passed the Radiation-Exposed Veterans Compensation Act (PL 100-321). This law covered veterans which participated in a radiation risk activity. The law has three definitions of radiation risk activity. They include: onsite participation in a nuclear detonation, occupation of Hiroshima or Nagasaki, Japan, by United States forces during the period beginning on August 6, 1945 and ending on July 1, 1946, and internment as a prisoner of war in Japan during WWII which resulted in the opportunity for exposure to ionizing radiation comparable to that of veterans occupying Hiroshima or Nagasaki. Clearly, this language does not cover those veterans exposed to radiation while in the service of their country.

VA claims that lab tests on these veterans show that levels of residual radiation are not sufficient to sustain their claims for disability. However, these dose levels were based on lab tests, not data collected on sight at the Kwajalein Atoll. This is important because Congress has previously concluded that determining the level of exposure, unless collected onsite, is a futile exercise. Disability claims must be considered without regard to whether any particular level of radiation was measured for that individual especially when exposure is not denied.

Congress must act to ensure that veterans exposed to ionizing radiation either on site or residually be considered for benefits. Without this legislation radiation exposed veterans do

not have a realistic chance of proving their disability claim. I urge my colleagues to support our veterans by co-sponsoring this bill.

NIGHTSIDE CHAT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 1999, the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. MCINNIS) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. MCINNIS. Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to go basically over what the comments that I am going to make this evening, but I guess it would be appropriate to make a couple comments about this weekend back in Colorado.

First of all, I would like to express deep appreciation for all the firemen and the firefighters that are so courageously fighting the forest fires that we have out there in Colorado.

As many of my colleagues know, my district is the Third Congressional District of the State of Colorado. That district geographically is larger than the State of Florida. It is essentially all the mountains of the State of Colorado. As one can guess, it is the highest district in the United States. So we have a lot of lightning strikes and so on.

We do have a major fire down at Mesa Verde National Park down at the Four Corners of Colorado. Right now it has consumed about 17,000 acres. The conditions are very tough to fight the fire. But we have got a lot of volunteer firefighters. We have a got a lot of volunteers from the community. We, of course, have our own fire fighting teams. We have got the bombers in there. We have got the helicopter pilots. We just have a lot of cooperation out there in Colorado. So I thank my colleagues for their expressions of support, and I do want to express my deep appreciation for all of the people out there in Colorado who are helping get an upper hand on the fires right there in their Third Congressional District.

Second thing I would like to mention to my colleagues before I go into my comments, and that is I had the privilege Friday of speaking at a service for a Colorado State patrolman, Captain Fred Bitterman. Captain Bitterman was a well-respected officer of the Colorado State Patrol.

I used to be a police officer. I used to know the captain. Of course, I was not on the State Patrol. I was a city police officer.

The service was a very moving service. He has a wonderful family. His commitment to the State of Colorado, his commitment to the Colorado State Patrol, his commitment to his friends, his commitment to the communities was all well represented at that service.

We are going to miss him. The captain did a good job. He was a very, very good man. I have entered into the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD a congressional tribute in honor of the service that he gave to us. He will be sorely missed.

Mr. Speaker, this evening I would like to address three fundamental subjects, and they are fundamental especially for the younger generations of this country. For the people that are, say, below 45, 45 and under. We hear a lot of discussions going on, but what is the real focus for the future?

There are three items that I would like to talk about that I think focus on the future that our young people that are under 45 years of age should take special interest in, because I think our generation over 45 years of age owes something to this generation, not owes in the way of a giveaway, but owes in the way that we have a responsibility to move this country forward in such a fashion that these three elements have some sense of protection or some sense of right direction for the generation that follows us.

The first topic that I am going to visit with tonight is this death tax. Then I am going to move from the death tax into the marriage penalty. Then from the marriage penalty, I would like to talk about Social Security. In all three of these areas, there is a distinct difference between what the administration, President Clinton and AL GORE, are advocating and what is being advocated by the Bush team. I think it is fair to reflect on those this evening when I have these discussions with my colleagues.

Let me first of all begin on the death tax. As my colleagues know, I have spoken several times on this House floor in regards to what that death tax does and how devastating it is in this community. What has been of interest is the people opposed to this, including the Clinton administration, and, by the way, I refer specifically to the administration's policies, because I want my colleagues to know here in the House of Representatives we actually had 65 Democrats who voted to eliminate the death tax. So here in the House we have had a bipartisan effort, both Democrats and Republicans, going out there and recognizing just how punitive, how punishing the death tax is.

Well, since the debate started taking place on this several weeks ago, I have noted a number of different comments in our national press. One thing that is of special interest, I think, or a counterpoint I guess one would make, my point being that the death tax is devastating for a community as a whole; and the counterpoint that is being put out there by some of the liberal media writers I guess one would say is, wait a minute, all this does is favors the wealthy in this country.

Well, I want to talk about what I call the trickle-down impact of what that death tax does, not only just in a community, but what it does to family farms and family ranches.

For example, right here, we will have a family ranch. Now, I can tell my colleagues that most working ranches, at least the ones I am familiar with, and I have been on a lot of ranches in my career, but most of the family ranches