

legislative work to adopt a resolution of sympathy and support for the United States.

One week later, the government of Mexico released a statement which reiterated "our solidarity with the people and government of the United States."

Mr. Speaker, I thank the government and the people of Mexico for their concern and support. I attach these two statements, translated into English, for all our Members to read.

STATEMENT OF THE MEXICAN SENATE,
SEPTEMBER 11, 2001

"The Mexican Senate wishes to express to the Government of the United States of America as well as to all Nations, its most profound sympathy and deep indignation relative to the barbarous acts which today have offended the entire world.

"The Mexican Senate calls upon all men and women of good faith to prevent this tragedy from escalating into an interminable blood bath.

"Let us bring together the governments and peoples of the world to work together to guard against further harm; to scrupulously respect human rights throughout the world; and to build together a peaceful, dignified, and just world for all mankind."

THE MEXICAN GOVERNMENT WILL PARTICIPATE
IN THE SPECIAL PERMANENT COUNCIL MEETING
OF THE OAS

(Statement of the Mexican Government (Deliberated with the Mexican Senate), September 18, 2001)

The Mexican government declared its most energetic and unequivocal indignation for the terrorist atrocities that took place in New York and Washington, D.C. on September 11, 2001, which brought about incalculable human and economic losses and they have caused profound grief in the international community. Regarding this, we reiterate our solidarity with the people and government of the United States.

These events are true crimes against humanity; they shake up the true foundation of civilized co-existence among nations and represent a serious threat for peace and international security. Therefore, the Mexican Government condemns terrorism categorically in every shape or form, being for political, philosophical, ideological, racial, ethnic, religious or whatever reason.

In agreement with resolution 1368 (2001) of the Security Council of the United Nations, the Mexican Government ratifying our peaceful vocation, expresses its total willingness to collaborate, with the urgency and firmness that the situation requires, in the cooperation of international efforts leading to the prevention and eradication of terrorism, as expressed by the General Assembly of the United Nations in resolution A/56/1, dated September 12.

Regarding the diplomatic measures that have been developing in recent days in the Interamerican environment, the Mexican Government manifests its decision to participate actively in the Special Permanent Council Meeting of the OAS, summoned for the 19 of September at the OAS Headquarters, with the intention of reaching a consensus about the political and diplomatic actions that are considered appropriate in responding to the call of the General Assembly of the United Nations and for the decision taken by the Security Council.

Likewise, Mexico applauds its initiative for calling for a Consultation Meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, in agreement with article 61 of the Charter of the Organi-

zation, which establishes the perfect forum in the hemisphere to agree upon the measures that the present situation demands. The decisions that come from that forum must be taken under the protection of article 53 of the Charter of the United Nations, which prohibits the application of restrictive measures adhered to regional agreements or by regional organisms without the explicit authorization of the Security Council, and being fully understood that the decisions adopted and to be adopted by the Security Council and the General Assembly of the United Nations on the subject, must prevail above any other adopted in the hemispheric environment.

Regarding the summons of the Interamerican Reciprocal Assistance Treaty, the Mexican Government considers that, in agreement with what was expressed by the President of Mexico, on September 7 at the OAS Headquarters, this is not the ideal mechanism to confront the present challenges regarding the safety of our region. Mexico considers that a Consultation Meeting of the Foreign Affairs Ministers in the framework of the OAS would have an upgraded hierarchy and greater representation of the continental community, since the Interamerican Reciprocal Assistance Treaty only has half of the amount of members that the OAS has.

Notwithstanding the above mentioned, whichever the hemispheric measures applied that will deal with the tragic happenings of September 11, Mexico will seek a consensus in the region that will actively defend the principles and intentions of the United Nations and will provide political and diplomatic cooperation for the legitimate efforts applied to take to justice those intellectual authors, organizers and sponsors of these actions, as well as those responsible in giving them support and protection.

The Mexican Government, as it has always done and as is its obligation, will proceed with total respect for the traditional principles of our foreign affairs policies specified in our Constitution.

INTRODUCTION OF VETERANS'
PENSION IMPROVEMENT ACT OF
2001—H.R. 3087

HON. LANE EVANS

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, October 11, 2001

Mr. EVANS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce the Veterans' Pension Improvement Act of 2001. This important legislation would recognize the military service of our Nation's wartime veterans by providing low-income veterans with pension benefits at age 65 without regard to a finding of total and permanent disability. The bill would reinstate a provision of Public Law 90-77, which was repealed in 1990.

From 1967 until 1990, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) was authorized to presume that low-income veterans were disabled at age 65. In hearings on the 1967 bill, the American Legion testified that providing for benefits at age 65 would affect less than one-tenth of one percent of pension applicants and that the cost associated with providing medical examinations and disability adjudications would be reduced. Recent evidence indicates that the Legion's 1967 assessment was correct.

In 1990, Congress eliminated the presumption of permanent and total disability at age 65 in Public Law 101-508. At that time, the Congressional Budget Office optimistically predicted that the measure would generate savings of \$17 million in 1991 and total savings of \$313 million over the five-year period. Such savings have not materialized. According to VA, it is rare for a wartime veteran with income below the pension threshold to be found not permanently and totally disabled. Rather than saving money, VA estimates that it is spending more money to provide medical examinations than would be paid out if benefits were granted at age 65.

A July 1997 sample of pension claims showed that only 5.9 percent of all claims from veterans age 65 and older were initially denied on the basis that the claimants were not permanently and totally disabled. In 1998 and 1999, that number was even lower with only three percent of claims denied on that basis. After taking into account reversals on appeal, VA estimates that fewer than 300 veterans age 65 and older per year are denied disability pension based upon a finding that they are not permanently and totally disabled.

VA projects the annual cost of the benefit will be less than \$2 million per year. The cost of providing medical examinations for these claims exceeds \$2 million per year. In addition to the costs of the medical examinations, additional costs are incurred in rating the disability. Our current policy is penny-wise and pound-foolish.

Currently VBA has a backlog of 536,626 claims pending in regional offices. Another 95,066 claims are pending appeals to the Board of Veterans Appeals. Requiring the VA to provide a medical examination and make a disability determination on claims, which are almost certain to result in a finding of disability, is exacerbating the backlog with no financial gain to the government. Although prior legislation presumed a finding of disability at age 65, this bill would provide for a service pension without regard to disability similar to that previously provided to veterans of Indian Wars and the Spanish-American War.

VA would only be required to obtain a medical examination and a finding of disability for those veterans over 65 who seek additional benefits based upon a disability which renders them homebound or in need of aid and attendance. This would reduce the cost and workload of providing disability examinations for low-income veterans who are almost always found to be disabled.

The bill does not specifically require that veterans be unemployed to qualify for the benefit. This reflects the practical reality that wartime veterans whose income is low enough to qualify for pension benefits are almost always unemployed. Full-time employment at the minimum wage level provides income which exceeds the pension amount and would therefore disqualify a veteran for benefits.

Mr. Speaker, in order to reduce the backlog and reduce the cost of making expensive disability determinations for claims of elderly wartime veterans, I ask my colleagues from both sides of the aisle to support the Veterans' Pension Improvement Act of 2001.