

formed. It is not just health care where coordination and sharing is needed. There is a substantial amount of information that DOD maintains that is essential for the administration of various benefits, programs such as the Montgomery GI bill and disability compensation. Clearly, the government can be more responsive to future veterans and claims for benefits they earned if the two Departments can exchange information accurately and quickly.

H.R. 1911 would also increase flexibility for the joint committee to make recommendations in mutual interest areas. The committee would also be permitted to assess policy changes in both Departments in order to advance services and opportunities for the future. As a result, a more efficient system of delivery of health care and benefits to VA and DOD beneficiaries should evolve.

This is a goal I know both VA and DOD share, to provide continuity of care, prompt access to earned benefits, and better service to our current and former service members.

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

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

Mr. Speaker, I stand today in support of H.R. 1911, which would elevate an advisory committee created in last year's defense authorization. H.R. 1911 would elevate the charter of the joint executive committee established between the Department of Defense and the VA to review activities Departmentwide, rather than simply limiting its charter to health care.

We are pleased that the Department has asked for this authority. I appreciate the leadership of the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH) on the bill we are going to consider today, and I thank the chairman of the Subcommittee on Health, the gentleman from Connecticut (Mr. SIMMONS), and their ranking member, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. RODRIGUEZ).

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

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. KIRK).

Mr. KIRK. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the committee for bringing this needed legislation to the floor. I also thank the Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Dr. Leo McKay, and David Chu of the Department of Defense for their leadership on this.

We have several key projects that put together DOD and VA health care: at Kirtland, in Las Vegas, and in my own congressional district of North Chicago. These projects help us realize fundamental facts: 15 million Americans have served our country in uniform, with 25 million of them still alive today and in need of VA care. But in many parts of this country, combining DOD and VA projects can help improve the care both of veterans and active duty personnel alike.

In my district, the North Chicago VA Medical Center and the Great Lakes Naval Hospital are combining. During the last administration, there were two attempts to close the North Chicago VA Hospital, but on June 19, 2001, VA released a capital asset realignment enhanced services study. That study pointed the way towards combining these two institutions, offering better health care for the veterans of northern Illinois.

I want to applaud the committee for bringing this legislation forward which codifies the existing agreements between DOD and VA and also enhances their ability to work in other places. Later on in this week, we will have the opportunity to increase the authorized level of spending that the DOD spends on its cooperative programs with the VA. I hope the House not only adopts this legislation overwhelmingly but that amendment as well. Our veterans and our active duty would both benefit from that.

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time, and I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 1911.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 1911, a bill to amend Title 38 of the United States Code, to enhance cooperation and the sharing of resources between the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Defense. I support this bill because I support the men and women of our military whether they are currently enlisted or veterans.

H.R. 1911 establishes an interagency committee to be called the Department of Veterans Affairs-Department of Defense Joint Executive Committee. The Joint Executive Committee will operate with the goal of "improving the quality, efficiency and effectiveness of the delivery of benefits and services to veterans, service members, military retirees and their families through an enhanced Department of Veterans Affairs and Department of Defense partnership."

Both the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Defense provide valuable services to help our service men and women. The Department of Veterans Affairs administers the laws that provide benefits and other services to veterans and their families. The Department of Veterans Affairs is responsible for insuring our veterans receive the medical care, benefits, social support, and memorials they so rightfully deserve after their valiant service to our America. The Department of Defense coordinate the activities of our activities of our armed services branches and ensures the professional and safe operations of our currently enlisted soldiers.

America's heroes are America's soldiers. The remarkable talent, bravery, and sacrifice of our military personnel was illustrated in the recent War in Iraq. We celebrated the safe return of our military personnel and we will revere them as veterans.

I support H.R. 1911 because the cooperative efforts of the Departments of Veterans Affairs and Defense to improve the quality of life for our soldiers and veterans. For example, Veterans Affairs and the Department of Defense are presently collaborating in the Defense Department's Prisoner of War/Missing

Personnel Office to account for our missing-in-action from all of America's wars, and to provide case-specific information to their next-of-kin.

H.R. 1911, and the collaboration between the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Defense, will establish better health services, benefits, and other programs for our soldiers and veterans. I support this bill because I support our soldiers and our veterans. They are our heroes.

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. BOOZMAN) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 1911.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds of those present have voted in the affirmative.

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX and the Chair's prior announcement, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 1911.

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

There was no objection.

VETERANS' COMPENSATION COST-OF-LIVING ADJUSTMENT ACT OF 2003

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 1683) to increase, effective as of December 1, 2003, the rates of disability compensation for veterans with service-connected disabilities and the rates of dependency and indemnity compensation for survivors of certain service-connected disabled veterans, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 1683

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2003".

SEC. 2. INCREASE IN RATES OF DISABILITY COMPENSATION AND DEPENDENCY AND INDEMNITY COMPENSATION.

(a) RATE ADJUSTMENT.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall, effective on December 1, 2003, increase the dollar amounts in effect for the payment of disability compensation and dependency and indemnity compensation by the Secretary, as specified in subsection (b).

(b) AMOUNTS TO BE INCREASED.—The dollar amounts to be increased pursuant to subsection (a) are the following: