

Mr. Speaker, when the President says support our troops, support our troops, support our troops, and then does not provide the adequate funding when those troops come home, we are not doing the job that we should be doing to thank the veterans for their service. It is time to adequately fund the health care budget. It is time to listen to the Independent Budget. It is time for the chairman to listen to those who have been saying this for years. It is time to show proper respect for the veterans who have given us our freedom today.

Ms. BERKLEY. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time.

Mr. Speaker, I would urge everybody to support H.R. 1220, everyone in this body. I do not think there is a reason why anybody should be voting against it. It is a very important piece of legislation. But I would like to echo what the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER) has so eloquently stated in his floor remarks.

When I go home and talk to my veterans, they look to me for my help and my support in providing the health care that they so justly deserve and are entitled to. This Congress needs to step up to the plate and do what we know is right. We cannot continue short-changing our veterans. We cannot continue low-balling them, taking the lowest number, when we know it is the highest number that will barely suffice to provide for the health care needs of our veterans.

Our older veterans, Vietnam, Korea, World War II, some left in World War I, these men and women age, and they are continuing to age. We will have hundreds of thousands of veterans from our latest operations across the globe. Let us be farsighted. Let us be prepared for what is coming. And let none of us, none of us, have the temerity or the audacity to state that we did not know what the needs of the veterans were or what they will be confronted with in the near future. Let us all be on the same page, work in a bipartisan way, and let us do what is right for our veterans. And let us pass unanimously H.R. 1220.

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

Mr. BUYER. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time.

(Mr. BUYER asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. BUYER. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the ranking member of the committee, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS), for his work and cooperation on this legislation. I also would like to say to him that he is a champion of Parkinson's Disease, and I am proud of his leadership by example and I am proud of his spirit to live and equally am proud to call him my friend.

I also commend the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MILLER) and the gentlewoman from Nevada (Ms. BERKLEY), the chairman and ranking member on

the Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs, for their timely work concerning H.R. 1220, ensuring that disabled veterans and their survivors receive their COLA.

I would also like to thank the gentleman from Florida (Mr. BILIRAKIS) and the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. STRICKLAND), the chairman and ranking member of the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, for their hard work on reaching a compromise on the authorization of the demonstration project.

I am equally appreciative of the hard work of the staff directors of the majority and the minority, Art Wu and Len Sitek for their work to improve the bill.

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Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support the Veterans Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2005.

Mr. REYES. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 1220, the Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2005.

All too often, our veterans and their dependents are forced to pay unexpected medical fees and sometimes forced to juggle their finances just to make ends meet. By increasing the COLA we would help ease these burdens forced upon our veterans and their dependents. Our veterans deserve and need this assistance now.

This legislation is especially important to me because my Congressional District of El Paso, Texas is home to nearly 60,000 veterans.

These brave men and women have made tremendous sacrifices for our freedom, just as our servicemembers are currently doing in Iraq and Afghanistan. It is our responsibility as Members of Congress to take care of our Nation's heroes so that we can fulfill our promises to our veterans after their service to our country.

Mr. Speaker, my colleagues and I on the House Veterans' Affairs Committee favorably passed H.R. 1220 and I would urge all my colleagues to do the same on the House floor.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 1220, the Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act, which will increase, effective December 1, 2005, the rates of disability compensation for veterans with service-connected disabilities and the rates of dependency and indemnity compensation for survivors of certain disabled veterans. As in previous years, these deserving men and women will receive the same cost-of-living-adjustment (COLA) that Social Security recipients are scheduled to receive, and as a cosponsor of H.R. 1220, I am pleased that we are acting to provide disabled veterans and their survivors with an annual COLA.

In the 108th Congress, we created an additional Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) payment of \$250 a month provided for the first two years of DIC eligibility to surviving spouses with minor children. This new benefit is aimed at easing the transition following the death of the servicemember or veteran. H.R. 1220, as amended, would also increase the amount of this additional assistance by the same COLA.

I am pleased that the amended bill also includes the provisions from H.R. 2988, the Vet-

erans Medical Care Revenue Enhancement Act of 2005. This is a bill that I introduced which authorizes a two-year demonstration project to improve business practices within the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) relating to third-party billing collections.

When Congress gave the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) the authority to collect payment from insurance companies for the treatment of non-service connected conditions, the funds collected were returned to the U.S. Treasury. At one point, the VA acknowledged that it did a poor job of collecting payments from insurance companies because it had no real incentive to do so. As a result, in 1997 Congress gave VA the authority to retain any third party collections recovered.

Despite improvements in VA's third-party collections, there continue to be weaknesses in the billing and collections processes that impair the VA's ability to maximize the amount of dollars paid by third-party insurance companies. In June, the VA briefed the staff of the Veterans' Affairs Committee that the Department has about \$600 million in outstanding payments that have been billed but not collected from third-party insurers. Collecting these funds would be a significant revenue source for the Department which could improve its ability to provide health care services to our Nation's veterans.

H.R. 1220 creates a modest \$10 million demonstration project to improve the VA's business practices at two sites that have low collections rates. It is our hope that this demonstration project will lead to improved collection practices by the VA.

Finally, H.R. 1220 would permanently authorize six Parkinson's Disease Research Education and Clinical Centers with the VA.

I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 1220.

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

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SIMPSON). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. BUYER) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 1220, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. BUYER. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 1220, as amended, the bill just passed.

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

There was no objection.

MAKING PERMANENT THE AUTHORITY OF THE SECRETARY OF COMMERCE TO CONDUCT THE QUARTERLY FINANCIAL REPORT PROGRAM

Mr. TURNER of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the