

Mr. LARSON of Connecticut. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor and pay tribute to one of the oldest and greatest civil rights organizations in our country's history. The NAACP has served for nearly a century to provide help for those who cannot help themselves, to provide justice for the wronged, and to give a voice to the disenfranchised. Though the group formed to fight for equality for minorities and the disadvantaged, the NAACP has vigilantly stood guard for all Americans so that the basic rights of none are infringed upon.

In 1909, six great Americans, Ida Wells-Barnett, W.E.B. DuBois, Henry Moscowitz, Mary White Ovington, Oswald Garrison Villiard, and William English Walling, banded together to produce the "Call to National Action." This founding document of the NAACP laid out the organization's goals—to protect the rights guaranteed by the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments to the Constitution. From their ever-present task to preserve these rights to the fight to put an end to lynching, the great victory over segregation won in 1954's *Brown v. Board of Education*, and their continuing crusade to protect civil rights, the NAACP has been an inimitable champion of the cause of equality and social justice in our Nation. Today, under the leadership of Chairman Julian Bond, the organization has grown to over 2,200 branches with over 500,000 members nationwide.

Connecticut is very grateful for the work that the NAACP has done in the State. Headquartered in Hartford, Connecticut and led by chapter president Scot X. Esdaile, the Connecticut NAACP has been a great advocate for civil rights in the State.

The Connecticut NAACP has been a valuable partner in local efforts to ensure civil rights. Our chapter has worked to ensure that minorities are represented in all levels of government as important legislative decisions are being made. The group worked with other local organizations to develop a talent bank of highly qualified minority candidates to fill senior-level positions in the State and combat any discrimination that might exist. The local NAACP has also worked tirelessly with the seven members of the Connecticut Congressional delegation to ensure that our Federal Government secures the blessings of liberty for all. I am proud to have a 95 percent rating from the NAACP. It remains a prevalent voice in the State and a standard-bearer of the principles of equality and justice.

Mr. Speaker, I believe we can honor the work of the NAACP best by continuing to work for the noble cause for which the organization exists: to protect the rights of all persons and eliminate hatred and racial discrimination. I extend to the NAACP my best wishes for a happy 99th anniversary and I commend and thank them for a century of service.

Mr. SCOTT of Virginia. Mr. Speaker, I am honored to rise today to congratulate the NAACP on its 99th Anniversary. As the Nation's oldest civil rights organization, the NAACP has for 99 years fought to ensure the educational, social, economic and political equality of all persons, so that all may participate and share in this country's great Democracy.

The NAACP was founded by a multi-racial group of activists who answered "The Call" to engage in a national conference to discuss the civil rights of African Americans in the summer of 1908. That year, the NAACP embarked on

its mission to ensure equal rights for all citizens and to eliminate racial prejudice in the United States.

Since then, the NAACP has worked tirelessly to accomplish its mission by continually looking for ways to improve the democratic process and by seeking the enactment and enforcement of Federal, State, and local laws that secure civil rights. The NAACP furthers its mission by making the public aware of the adverse effects of racial discrimination and by seeking its elimination. The NAACP also seeks to educate the public about their constitutional rights and goes to court to enforce those rights when necessary.

Shortly after its founding in the early 1900s, the NAACP undertook an anti-lynching campaign and launched a public protest when segregation was introduced into the Federal Government. The NAACP was influential in President Harry Truman's decision to issue an Executive Order in 1948 ending discrimination by the Federal Government. In 1954, the NAACP helped bring an end to segregation in public schools in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education*. In 1964, it worked to raise support for the passage of the Civil Rights Act. In 1979, it helped expand voter participation through voter registration in high schools. And the list goes on.

Today, the NAACP continues to eliminate racial prejudice when it rears its ugly head, and informs the public of its intolerable presence when it does. It continues to act as a watchdog to protect the constitutional and civil rights of all people. And it educates the public about civil rights so that future generations will know tolerance and equality as the norm, rather than the exception.

I am proud to be a Diamond Life Member of the NAACP and to have once served as President of the Newport News, Virginia branch.

Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the NAACP on 99 years of service to our great country and its people, and I wish them another highly successful 99 years.

Mr. COHEN. I yield back the remainder of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. COHEN) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the concurrent resolution, H. Con. Res. 289.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds being in the affirmative, the ayes have it.

Mr. CHABOT. 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.

□ 1715

AMERICAN BRAILLE FLAG MEMORIAL ACT

Mr. RODRIGUEZ. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 4169) to authorize the placement in Arlington National Cemetery of an American Braille tactile flag in Arlington National Cemetery honoring

blind members of the Armed Forces, veterans, and other Americans.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 4169

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 "American Braille Flag Memorial Act".

SEC. 2. FINDINGS.

Congress finds the following:

(1) There are more than 175,000 blind veterans.

(2) The Department of Defense estimates that 16 percent of the members of the Armed Forces who have been injured in Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom have severe vision loss as a result of their injuries.

(3) The American Braille tactile flag was created by the Kansas Braille Transcription Institute in Wichita, Kansas, to allow blind Americans and blind veterans to experience the American flag.

(4) Arlington National Cemetery, visited by approximately 4,000,000 people annually, is a national place of remembrance and honor for the Nation's veterans.

SEC. 3. AUTHORIZATION OF PLACEMENT OF AN AMERICAN BRAILLE TACTILE FLAG IN ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY HONORING BLIND MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES, VETERANS, AND OTHER AMERICANS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of the Army is authorized to place in Arlington National Cemetery an American Braille tactile flag in Arlington National Cemetery honoring blind members of the Armed Forces, veterans, and other Americans.

(b) APPROVAL OF DESIGN AND SITE.—The Secretary of the Army shall have exclusive authority to approve an appropriate design and site within Arlington National Cemetery for the memorial authorized under subsection (a).

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. RODRIGUEZ) and the gentleman from Florida (Mr. STEARNS) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. RODRIGUEZ. 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. 4169.

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

There was no objection.

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

Mr. Speaker, today I rise in strong support of the American Braille Flag Memorial Act, H.R. 4169. I would like to thank my colleague, Mr. TIAHRT, for drafting this important piece of legislation and for his leadership in this area.

Today, there are nearly 1.3 million blinded and visually impaired Americans, and approximately 187,000 of those are veterans. It is estimated that 16 percent of these veterans have sustained injuries in Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom,

leaving them with some form of severe visual loss and impairment. These veterans, due to their disability, are often not afforded the opportunity to cherish and witness the American flag as those without visual impairment are. That is why passing the American Braille Flag Memorial Act is so important. It would authorize the Secretary of the Army to place an American Braille tactile flag on the grounds of the Arlington National Cemetery to honor the sacrifice of our Nation's blind veterans and members of the Armed Forces.

This legislation would also allow the Secretary of the Army to approve the appropriate design of the flag, as well as the site in the Arlington National Cemetery that would be most appropriate for the memorial, which I understand is likely to be at the visitors center. The bronze Braille American flag, generously donated by the Kansas Braille Transcription Institute, would include the Pledge of Allegiance, and allow the blind and visually impaired to feel the Stars and Stripes and colors of the American flag placed near Arlington National Cemetery Visitors Center.

I am pleased that the Blind Veterans Association, the American Council and American Foundation of the Blind wholeheartedly support this piece of legislation. Our efforts today will show the over 4 million visitors who come to the Arlington National Cemetery each year that we remember and honor the blind veterans who died in service to our Nation, as well as all veterans and servicemembers who live today with blindness and vision loss.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation provides a way to include all Americans in this wonderful patriotic experience when visiting Arlington National Cemetery and seeing the American flag where heroes are laid to rest. I am told that when feeling miniature mock-up versions of the Braille flag, blinded veterans and servicemembers often break down and cry.

It would only be appropriate to allow our blind and visually impaired veterans and servicemembers to share this experience by paying tribute and honoring them with the recognition they deserve at the hallmark of American memorials, the Arlington National Cemetery.

I urge my colleagues to support the passage of H.R. 4169 without delay.

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

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

I rise also in strong support for H.R. 4169, which would authorize the placement in Arlington National Cemetery of an American Braille tactile flag honoring blind members of the Armed Forces, veterans and other Americans.

My colleagues, our Nation's veterans have fought for our freedom, many at the expense of their health and well-being. Some of our veterans have not just lost use of an arm or a leg as a consequence of service, but now live in darkness from the loss of their sight.

In order to serve the needs of blind Americans, the Kansas Braille Transcription Institute created and designed a tactile American flag in Braille which would enable these blind veterans and other blind Americans the simple ability to see through the use of their hands the beauty of our American flag.

The flag has been specifically designed in a way that informs the blind of the full color of the American flag, 13 stripes and 50 stars on the blue field. Additionally, the tactile flag bears the Pledge of Allegiance in both raised print and grade one Braille. It is a plaque. It is not a traditional flag.

Mr. Speaker, I offer my full support of this great bill, the American Braille Flag Memorial Act. By placing the Braille American flag at Arlington National Cemetery, we do indeed bring honor to our Nation's blind veterans community and allow our blind veterans to see the American flag.

Mr. RODRIGUEZ. I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. STEARNS. Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from Kansas (Mr. TIAHRT), the author of the bill.

Mr. TIAHRT. I thank the gentleman from Florida and the gentleman from Texas for their assistance in helping me with this very fine piece of legislation.

Mr. Speaker, last summer, one of my constituents, Randy Cabral, president of the Kansas Braille Transcript Institute, e-mailed me with an idea, to place an American Braille flag at Arlington National Cemetery. Today, we see the fruition of one man's idea.

Prior to the creation of the American Braille flag, the American flag was not accessible to the blind. This flag was created by the Kansas Braille Transcription Institute in Wichita, Kansas.

As you can see on this poster to my left, the flag has been specially designed in a way that informs the blind of the full color of the American flag, the 13 stripes and the 50 stars on a blue field. Additionally, this tactile flag bears the Pledge of Allegiance, both in raised print and in grade one Braille.

Few know that our Nation has more than 1 million blind and low-vision veterans, and those numbers continue to rise. The Department of Defense estimates that 16 percent of those injured in Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom suffer from severe vision loss. An additional 10 to 12 million Americans are blind or of low vision.

The American Braille Flag Memorial Act authorizes the placement of an American Braille flag at Arlington National Cemetery, a national place of remembrance and honor for our Nation's veterans. The cemetery is visited by an estimated 4 million people annually. The American Braille Flag Memorial will bring honor to our Nation's blind community and allow our blind veterans to see the American flag again.

In order to ensure that this effort will enhance and not detract from the

cemetery, I have worked with the superintendent of the Arlington National Cemetery, John Metzler. Mr. Metzler believes that a 15-inch by 17-inch bronze replica of the American Braille flag would be a wonderful addition to the visitors center at the cemetery.

This is a unique bronze replica, and, as such, this new drawing and special casting had to be commissioned. The drawings for the bronze replica were completed by Kevin West, a student at Wichita Area Technical College. Kevin is a specialist in the Kansas Army National Guard. He is also a veteran of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom. He served in the 778th Combat Heavy Equipment Transport Group, or HET, out of Kansas City, Kansas, as both a convoy security and a HET operator. Let me take this moment to thank Kevin for his service to the Nation.

The actual bronze flag memorial will be cast free of charge by the Truxes Company of Oswego, Illinois. The Truxes Company was founded by another American hero, Mr. Bill Truxes. Mr. Truxes joined the Army Air Corps during World War II and served as a B-24 pilot. While serving in World War II, he was shot down during the Battle of the Bulge and became a POW in Germany in 1944. He was liberated at the end of the war. I greatly appreciate Mr. Truxes' patriotism and generosity in agreeing to donate the bronze casting, and I also want to thank him for his service.

With Mr. West and Mr. Truxes both donating their service, and the Kansas Braille Transcription Institute donating the transportation, this entire project will be provided to the government free of charge.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my 16 cosponsors and the Blind Veterans of America for their endorsement and support of this effort. But more importantly, I want to thank those who served this Nation. We owe a huge debt of gratitude to our veterans, and this simple action will mean much more to our patriotic blind veterans.

I encourage my colleagues to join with me in supporting this effort and placing the Braille flag at Arlington National Cemetery.

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

Mr. Speaker, I want to again congratulate my colleague from Kansas for introducing this bill. It clearly shows a special sense of sensitivity to the needs of disabled veterans. I commend my distinguished colleague for doing this and for the support of the institute for their offering this to the government at the Arlington National Cemetery.

Again, it is a lot of hard work by Mr. TIAHRT, and I commend him. I urge my colleagues to support and pass this bill, H.R. 4169.

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

Mr. RODRIGUEZ. Mr. Speaker, I want to take this opportunity also to

thank both the gentleman from Florida as well as the author, Todd Tiahr, on their efforts in this area.

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

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Texas (Mr. RODRIGUEZ) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 4169.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds being in the affirmative, the yeas have it.

Mr. STEARNS. 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.

□ 1730

COMMENDING THE PEOPLE OF WASHINGTON FOR SHOWING THEIR SUPPORT FOR VETERANS

Mr. RODRIGUEZ. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the resolution (H. Res. 790) commending the people of the State of Washington for showing their support for the needs of the State of Washington's veterans and encouraging residents of other States to pursue creative ways to show their own support for veterans.

The Clerk read the title of the resolution.

The text of the resolution is as follows:

H. RES. 790

Whereas every day, American men and women risk their lives serving the country in the Armed Forces;

Whereas it is important to many Americans to be able to donate money directly to causes about which they care;

Whereas it is important for residents to have a tangible way to demonstrate their support for veterans;

Whereas despite Government funding for the Nation's veterans, many important needs of veterans remain unmet;

Whereas citizens in the State of Washington have banded together in a grassroots effort to create a Veterans Family Fund Certificate of Deposit;

Whereas any financial institution in the State of Washington can choose to offer a Veterans Family Fund Certificate of Deposit;

Whereas the Bank of Clark County has become the first institution to offer these Certificates of Deposit;

Whereas the Governor of the State of Washington and the Washington State Veterans Affairs Department have expressed the State's support for this program;

Whereas when a person buys a Veterans Family Fund Certificate of Deposit from a participating financial institution, half of the interest is automatically donated to the State of Washington's Veterans Innovation Program to address the unmet needs of the State of Washington's veterans and their families;

Whereas the Veterans Innovation Program provides emergency assistance to help current or former Washington National Guard

or Reserve service members cope with financial hardships, unemployment, educational needs, and many basic family necessities; and

Whereas the Veterans Family Fund Certificate of Deposit will be officially launched on November 8, 2007: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the House of Representatives—

(1) commends the people of the State of Washington for showing their support for the needs of the State of Washington's veterans; and

(2) encourages residents of other States to pursue creative ways to show their own support for veterans.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. RODRIGUEZ) and the gentleman from Florida (Mr. STEARNS) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas.

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

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my distinguished colleague, Congressman BRIAN BAIRD of Washington, for drafting this resolution which calls on the States to create innovative ways to supplement State and Federal programs created to assist our Nation's veterans. I would also like to commend the Washington delegation for the strong bipartisan support they demonstrated in introducing this resolution.

This resolution establishes a certificate of deposit in participating financial institutions that would automatically donate 50 percent of the accrued interest to the State of Washington's Veterans Innovation Program. Providing this avenue to invest in our veterans will help ensure that the needs of our Nation's heroes are available when they need them.

I strongly support the resolution and encourage all States to follow the enthusiasm and support for our veterans. Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to join me in support of House Resolution 790.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. STEARNS. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H. Res. 790, a bill commemorating the people of the State of Washington for showing their support for the needs of the State of Washington's veterans and encouraging residents of other States to pursue creative ways to show their own support for veterans. This resolution was introduced by my distinguished colleague from Washington (Mr. BAIRD).

It was particularly inspired by the Veterans Family Fund Certificate of Deposit, an insured account created through the grassroots efforts of citizens in Washington State to benefit military veterans and their families. The Veterans Family Fund Certificate of Deposit was officially launched on November 8, 2007.

When an individual purchases a Veterans Family Fund Certificate of Deposit from a participating financial institution, half of the interest is automatically donated to the State of

Washington's Veterans Innovation Program. The Veterans Innovation Program was created to provide emergency assistance to help current or former Washington National Guard or Reserve servicemembers simply cope with financial hardships, unemployment, educational needs, and many other basic family necessities.

The initiative of the citizens of the State of Washington in creating this program is to be commended. Throughout the years, young men and women across this great Nation have answered the call to duty and taken up arms in defense of our freedom and that of others in this world. We should recognize the service of these veterans and encourage others to honor them by simply passing this bill today.

I would like to thank Chairman FILNER and Ranking Member BUYER for bringing this resolution so quickly to the floor for consideration today.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. RODRIGUEZ. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from Washington, BRIAN BAIRD.

Mr. BAIRD. I thank my friend and colleague from Texas and the gentleman from Florida as well. I want to commend Chairman FILNER for his support as well.

I am very, very pleased today to recognize the efforts of my constituents, who joined together with many others from across Washington State to unite in a common endeavor, to help our veterans and their families. The desire of Washington residents to help our veterans has led to the creation of the Veterans Family Fund Certificate of Deposit in November of last year.

As my friends have described earlier, anyone wishing to show their personal support for our veterans can do so in a simple way: They can simply invest in a 6-month Veterans Family Fund Certificate of Deposit. After the 6 months, as mentioned earlier, half of the interest earned on the certificate goes back to the individual who invested, but the other half of the interest is donated as a charitable contribution to the Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs' Veterans Innovation Program.

The Department of Veterans Affairs will use the new funding to provide assistance to veterans and their families in areas where none is otherwise available through the State or Federal Government. This will include direct grants for emergency financial assistance and efforts to promote the long-term financial stability of Washington State's veterans. Speaking personally, as someone who worked in the VA system as a clinical psychologist, I can tell you how valuable this sort of flexible individualized assistance can be to helping our veterans and families.

Last year, Congress stepped up to the plate and provided significant increases in funding for our Nation's veterans, but this is a creative way for the average citizen to show his or her support for the brave men and women who