

With the legislation I offer today, our service members would still make the initial contribution. However, this contribution would no longer count against them later on when they apply for federal student aid.

In many cases, Madam Speaker, the Montgomery GI Bill alone does not cover the cost for college or job training. Our service members must also apply for federal student aid to cover tuition and other expenses.

The Department of Education considers their benefits from the Montgomery GI Bill as "income"—thereby reducing the amount they are eligible to receive from federal student aid programs.

This legislation goes back to the \$1,200 out-of-pocket contribution that a service member made to become eligible for the Montgomery GI Bill.

It is not fair to ask our service members to pay the original amount out of their own pocket and then penalize them for it later on.

This bill would simply exempt the original contribution that came from their own pocket from the Department of Education's income consideration.

This legislation does not present significant cost to the federal government but would go a long way to help America's individual service members afford college.

During the last Congress, I offered the provisions contained in this legislation as part of the College Access and Opportunity Act (H.R. 609) when it was on the House floor.

Unfortunately, the amendment was not accepted, but I plan to pursue the issue until we correct this inequity.

Madam Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to offer legislation benefiting America's military service members and helping them to attend college or receive job training.

INTRODUCTION OF THE ANIMAL PROHIBITION ACT OF 2007

HON. ELTON GALLEGLY

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, January 4, 2007

Mr. GALLEGLY. Madam Speaker, today I reintroduce the Animal Fighting Prohibition Act to address the brutal, inhumane practice of animal fighting, something I have been trying to federally criminalize for the past several Congresses.

A few years ago, Congress enacted legislation to tighten federal law and close some loopholes that were allowing the barbaric practices of animal fighting to thrive nationwide, in spite of bans in virtually every state.

But Congress didn't finish the job. We left in place weak penalties that have proven ineffective. Misdemeanor penalties simply don't provide a meaningful deterrent. Those involved in animal fighting ventures—where thousands of dollars typically change hands in the associated gambling activity—consider misdemeanor penalties a "slap on the wrist" or merely a "cost of doing business." Moreover, we've heard from U.S. Attorneys that they are reluctant to pursue animal fighting cases with just a misdemeanor penalty.

In recent years, we've seen a marked rise in the frequency of animal fighting busts in communities across the country. Local police and sheriffs are increasingly concerned about

animal fighting, not only because of the animal cruelty involved, but also because of the other crimes that often go hand-in-hand, including illegal gambling, drug trafficking, and acts of human violence. Furthermore, there is an inherent danger for the children of animal fighters to be close to these animals.

There is the additional concern that cockfighters spread diseases that jeopardize poultry flocks and even public health. We in California experienced this first-hand, when cockfighters spread exotic Newcastle disease, which was so devastating to many of our poultry producers in 2002 and 2003. That outbreak cost U.S. taxpayers "nearly \$200 million to eradicate, and cost the U.S. poultry industry many millions more in lost export markets," according to former Agriculture Secretary Ann Veneman. Cockfighting has been identified as the major contributor of the spread of avian flu throughout Thailand and other parts of Asia, where the strain originated. Many of the humans who contracted avian flu and died from it contracted it from fighting birds. Experts say it's just a matter of time before it reaches our shores.

It is time Congress finishes the job and helps state and local law enforcement officials who have requested a strengthening of federal laws to rid animal fighting from communities that do not want it.

This legislation makes violations of federal animal fighting law a felony punishable by up to three years in prison, makes it a felony to transport an animal across state or international borders for the purpose of animal fighting, and prohibits the interstate and foreign commerce in knives and gaffs designed for use in cockfighting.

In the past, this legislation has been endorsed by nearly 400 law enforcement organizations, 110 animal control and humane organizations as well, and I expect to have their support again. The Animal Fighting Prohibition Act of 2006 had 324 cosponsors and was passed through the Senate by unanimous consent. I ask my colleagues to support this legislation so we can end the deplorable practice of animal fighting and all of the destructive behavior associated with it.

INTRODUCTION OF THE SENIOR'S HEALTH CARE FREEDOM ACT

HON. RON PAUL

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, January 4, 2007

Mr. PAUL. Madam Speaker, I rise to introduce the Seniors' Health Care Freedom Act. This act protects seniors' fundamental right to make their own health care decisions by repeal federal laws that interfere with seniors' ability to form private contracts for medical services. This bill also repeals laws which force seniors into the Medicare program against their will. When Medicare was first established, seniors were promised that the program would be voluntary. In fact, the original Medicare legislation explicitly protected a senior's right to seek out other forms of medical insurance. However, the Balanced Budget Act of 1997 prohibits any physician who forms a private contract with a senior from filing any Medicare reimbursement claims for two years.

As a practical matter, this means that seniors cannot form private contracts for health care services.

Seniors may wish to use their own resources to pay for procedures or treatments not covered by Medicare, or to simply avoid the bureaucracy and uncertainty that comes when seniors must wait for the judgment of a CMS bureaucrat before finding out if a desired treatment is covered.

Seniors' right to control their own health care is also being denied due to the Social Security Administration's refusal to give seniors who object to enrolling Medicare Part A Social Security benefits. This not only distorts the intent of the creators of the Medicare system; it also violates the promise represented by Social Security. Americans pay taxes into the Social Security Trust Fund their whole working lives and are promised that Social Security will be there for them when they retire. Yet, today, seniors are told that they cannot receive these benefits unless they agree to join an additional government program!

At a time when the fiscal solvency of Medicare is questionable, to say the least, it seems foolish to waste scarce Medicare funds on those who would prefer to do without Medicare. Allowing seniors who neither want nor need to participate in the program to refrain from doing so will also strengthen the Medicare program for those seniors who do wish to participate in it. Of course, my bill does not take away Medicare benefits from any senior. It simply allows each senior to choose voluntarily whether or not to accept Medicare benefits or to use his own resources to obtain health care.

Forcing seniors into government programs and restricting their ability to seek medical care free from government interference infringes on the freedom of seniors to control their own resources and make their own health care decisions. A woman who was forced into Medicare against her wishes summed it up best in a letter to my office, "... I should be able to choose the medical arrangements I prefer without suffering the penalty that is being imposed." I urge my colleagues to protect the right of seniors to make the medical arrangements that best suit their own needs by cosponsoring the Seniors' Health Care Freedom Act.

TRIBUTE TO MAYOR BOB POYDASHEFF

HON. SANFORD D. BISHOP, JR.

OF GEORGIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, January 4, 2007

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Madam Speaker, today I have the distinct privilege of recognizing a man of remarkable vision and unyielding commitment to the community, which he has so faithfully served. Through the leadership of Mayor Bob Poydasheff, the city of Columbus has experienced extraordinary growth and prosperity. During his tenure as mayor, the area has gained in excess of seven thousand new jobs and under his leadership the Columbus Consolidated Government has exercised fiscal responsibility resulting in balanced budgets and a surplus.

Bob Poydasheff has always exhibited exceptional character throughout his professional