

I think I would be remiss if I did not say that this was landmark legislation in the waning hours of this session of Congress, and I want to congratulate the gentleman from Arizona [Mr. STUMP] and the gentleman from Mississippi [Mr. MONTGOMERY], because in a Congress that has sometimes been very difficult, they have shown us that even in difficult times, civility can prevail.

Mr. Speaker, I think it is appropriate that in the 104th Congress where we have freely exercised our freedom of speech on both sides of the aisle, that we finish this Congress by passing major legislation to honor those who have fought and been willing to give their life to protect that freedom of speech, both on the floor of this House and for all Americans across this country. This legislation is a first step, not a last step.

Mr. Speaker, I will finish by saying that this is landmark legislation. It is not the final step in the effort toward increasing care for our veterans, but it is a major step, a significant step that would not have happened had it not been for the leadership of the gentleman from Arizona [Mr. STUMP] and the gentleman from Mississippi [Mr. MONTGOMERY]. I want to express my thanks to both the gentlemen for their efforts on our veterans' behalf.

Finally, this is a win-win, not only for our veterans who will have simpler eligibility rules; they will know whether they can get VA care or not, but they will also be able to get outpatient care more easily. But it is a win also for our taxpayers because by providing outpatient care rather than more expensive inpatient care, our taxpayers will win from this major legislation.

To the gentleman from New York [Mr. SOLOMON] also, the chairman of the Committee on Rules, I want to express my thanks to him for helping this bill become the law of the land at the end of this session.

To all, this is a great piece of legislation. It is a great day for our veterans. Certainly they have earned this right to receive the care that they were willing to give their lives for our Nation for.

Mr. MONTGOMERY. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Texas.

Mr. Speaker, I withdraw my reservation of objection.

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

There was no objection.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. STUMP. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks on the Senate amendments to H.R. 3118.

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

There was no objection.

□ 2230

VETERANS' COMPENSATION COST-OF-LIVING ADJUSTMENT ACT OF 1996

Mr. STUMP. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to take from the Speaker's table the bill (H.R. 3458) to increase, effective as of December 1, 1996, the rates of compensation for veterans with service-connected disabilities and the rates of dependency and indemnity compensation for the survivors of certain disabled veterans, with Senate amendments thereto, and concur in the Senate amendments.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The Clerk read the Senate amendments, as follows:

Senate amendments:

Strike out all after the enacting clause and insert:

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 1996".

SEC. 2. INCREASE IN COMPENSATION RATES AND LIMITATIONS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—(1) the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall, as provided in paragraph (2), increase, effective December 1, 1996, the rates of and limitations on Department of Veterans Affairs disability compensation and dependency and indemnity compensation.

(2) The Secretary shall increase each of the rates and limitations in sections 1114, 1115(1), 1162, 1311, 1313, and 1314 of title 38, United States Code, that were increased by the amendments made by the Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 1995 (Public Law No. 104-57; 109 Stat. 555). This increase shall be made in such rates and limitations as in effect on November 30, 1996, and shall be by the same percentage that benefit amounts payable under title II of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 401 et seq.) are increased effective December 1, 1996, as a result of a determination under section 215(i) of such Act (42 U.S.C. 415(i)).

(b) SPECIAL RULE.—The Secretary may adjust administratively, consistent with the increases made under subsection (a)(2), the rates of disability compensation payable to persons within the purview of section 10 of Public Law 85-857 (72 Stat. 1263) who are not in receipt of compensation payable pursuant to chapter 11 of title 38, United States Code.

(c) PUBLICATION REQUIREMENT.—At the same time as the matters specified in section 215(i)(2)(D) of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 415(i)(2)(D)) are required to be published by reason of a determination made under section 215(i) of such Act during fiscal year 1996, the Secretary shall publish in the Federal Register the rates and limitations referred to in subsection (a)(2) as increased under this section.

Mr. STUMP (during the reading). Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate amendments be considered as read and printed in the record.

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

There was no objection.

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

Mr. MONTGOMERY. Mr. Speaker, reserving the right to object, and I will

not object, I yield to the gentleman from Arizona to explain the bill.

Mr. STUMP. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding me time.

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 3458, as amended, the COLA bill, increases the rates of compensation for veterans with service connected disabilities and the rates of dependency and indemnity compensation for the survivors of certain disabled veterans.

The increase would be effective on December 1, 1996, and would be the same percentage increase as applied to Social Security benefits.

I would like to take a minute to thank Chairman SIMPSON and Senator ROCKEFELLER and their staff for all of the hard work done on this and the two veterans bills just passed.

I also want to thank all our subcommittee chairman and ranking members on the VA Committee for their hard work and bipartisan approach on our legislation this Congress.

In addition, I want to thank the staff members of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee for their support, hard work and willingness to do things in a bipartisan manner.

The veterans' service organizations have worked well with us on these bills and we appreciate their assistance and cooperation as well. I must take just a moment to express my deep appreciation and sincere thanks to the gentleman from Mississippi and my good friend SONNY MONTGOMERY, the ranking minority member of the full committee for his work on this measure, the final veterans bill to be passed during his career in the House. Without his efforts these bills would not be on the floor today.

And Mr. Speaker, without his leadership on veterans' issues over the past 30 years this country would not have fulfilled its obligation to our veterans of military service the way we have.

SONNY MONTGOMERY's commitment and dedication to the men and women serving in our Armed Forces has rightfully earned him the title "Mr. Veteran".

The members of the National Security Committee and the Veterans' Affairs Committee will miss his energetic support for those individuals wearing our country's uniform and those who have worn it.

I will personally miss his friendship and counsel over the many years we have served together in this body.

We wish this great legislator and champion of veterans the very best in all his future endeavors.

I hope all Members will support this bill and I ask unanimous consent to revise and extend my remarks and that all members may have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks on H.R. 3458, as amended.

Mr. MONTGOMERY. Mr. Speaker, further reserving the right to object, Mr. Chairman, BOB STUMP, thank you for the great ride. We have been together on a nonpartisan committee for

many years, and I thank the gentleman for his very, very kind words and wish him the best.

Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by thanking the chairman of the committee, BOB STUMP, for working with the Senate to bring this bill to the floor today. I also want to recognize the hard work of the chairman and ranking member of the Subcommittee on Compensation, Pension, Insurance, and Memorial Affairs, TERRY EVERETT and LANE EVANS.

I am pleased that the Senate has sent this very important bill over for final action.

H.R. 3458, as amended, is a bill that millions of veterans and the spouses of veterans who died of a service-connected cause depend on the Congress to enact. Each time we do so, we reaffirm our commitment to these disabled veterans and the survivors of veterans. Many of these beneficiaries depend on their monthly VA check to pay their rent and feed their families.

My colleagues can understand that even modest increases in food and housing costs must be addressed by providing cost-of-living increases to these veterans, who have earned our respect and assistance.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this bill.

Mr. Speaker, I withdraw my reservation of objection.

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

There was no objection.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

VETERANS' BENEFITS IMPROVEMENTS ACT OF 1996

Mr. STUMP. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to take from the Speaker's table the Senate bill (S. 1711) to amend title 38, United States Code, to improve the benefits programs administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, to provide for a study of the Federal programs for veterans and for other purposes, and ask for its immediate consideration in the House.

The Clerk read the title of the Senate bill.

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

Mr. MONTGOMERY. Mr. Speaker, reserving the right to object, I yield to the gentleman from Arizona [Mr. STUMP] to explain the bill.

Mr. STUMP. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding.

Mr. Speaker, the provisions of this bill come from both House and Senate-passed initiatives during the 104th Congress to enhance, improve, and continue many veterans benefits.

The bill makes positive changes to the administrative functions within the VA education service, the National Cemetery System, the VA life insurance program, and the Veterans Benefits Administration.

This bill repeals the Davenport versus Brown decision by reestablishing the long-standing requirement that a veteran's employment handicap be the result of a service connected disability in order to qualify for vocational rehabilitation benefits.

It uses the savings from that provision to make improvements to several education and survivors benefits programs.

I hope all Members will support this bill.

Mr. MONTGOMERY. Mr. Speaker, further reserving the right to object, I yield to the gentleman from New York [Mr. SOLOMON].

Mr. SOLOMON. Mr. Speaker, again, I just want to commend the gentleman from Arizona, Chairman STUMP, and certainly the ranking member, the gentleman from Mississippi, SONNY MONTGOMERY. This is a very vital piece of legislation. It is timely, and it also extends the date of the Vietnam era to February 28, 1961, and it extends eligibility for certain health benefits to those serving on or after January 9, 1962. As you know, some Vietnam veterans have been excluded, and they never should have been. This makes that correction after all these years. I thank both gentlemen for having included it in their legislation.

Mr. MONTGOMERY. Mr. Speaker, further reserving the right to object, I yield to the gentleman from Indiana [Mr. BUYER].

Mr. BUYER. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of this legislation. This is a consolidation of several bills that passed the House, including H.R. 2289, H.R. 3673, and H.R. 3674. They are all combined with several of the Senate provisions. Notably, this is a culmination of fine bipartisan work that is a hallmark of our two Veterans' Affairs Committees.

Mr. Speaker, it has been a pleasure to serve under the gentleman from Arizona, Chairman BOB STUMP, and former chairman and now ranking member of the Committee on Veterans Affairs, the gentleman from Mississippi, SONNY MONTGOMERY. SONNY, all of us in this body are going to miss you. You are a true American hero, and a role model of honor and integrity for many in this country.

I have been at so many receptions that honor you, SONNY, the only thing left is either to create a statue or make a bronze something out there. I am afraid the pigeons might do something I disagree with. We will do things to continue your legends in this body.

This is a great bill in bipartisan fashion. We are going to spend about \$202 million in this bill to enhance and improve veterans benefits, and we are doing the right thing for America's heroes. I appreciate you service, SONNY, as does America.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of S. 1711, which is a consolidation of several bills passed by the House including H.R. 2289, H.R. 3673, and H.R. 3674, and are combined with several

Senate provisions. Notably, it is the culmination of fine bipartisan work that is the hallmark of our two Veterans Affairs Committees.

I wish to extend to the chairman, Mr. STUMP, and to his dear friend the ranking member, Mr. MONTGOMERY, my thanks for their leadership on this legislation.

I would be remiss if I did not recognize the efforts of my colleagues on the Veterans Affairs Committee for their contributions—and interest—in this legislation.

The bill contains several notable provisions that will enhance a wide variety of benefits and will spend about \$209 million over the next 6 years. I will address the provisions that fall within the jurisdiction of my subcommittee.

Section 101 overrides the Court of Veterans Appeals decision in Davenport versus Brown by reestablishing the long-standing requirement that a veteran's employment handicap be the result of a service-connected disability in order to qualify for vocational rehabilitation benefits.

Section 102 would make permanent the program to provide GI bill funding for veterans enrolled in programs designed to certify teachers through nontraditional educational institutions.

Section 103 removes the GI bill's 2-year restriction on all degree granting institutions, including branch campuses.

Section 104 would allow individuals the opportunity to pursue their educational programs through open circuit TV without taking part of the course in residence.

Section 105 allows veterans training under cooperative training programs to be paid full-time educational benefits instead of the current 80 percent of the full-time educational benefit rate.

Section 106 will allow active duty service members to transfer from the old Post-Vietnam Era Education Assistance Program [VEAP] to the more generous Montgomery GI bill (chapter 30). Under VEAP, a veteran could expect a maximum benefit of \$8,100. Under the Montgomery GI bill, a veteran can expect a minimum of about \$15,500 for a 3-year enlistment.

Section 107 will offer active duty Army and Air Force National Guard members who enlisted between June 30, 1985, and November 29, 1989, and who were not eligible for any sort of education benefit the opportunity to participate in the Montgomery GI bill.

Section 201 extends VA's authority to guarantee the real estate mortgage investment conduits [REMIC's] that are used to market vendee loans on the secondary market for an additional year.

Section 202 authorizes VA to refinance direct loans to native Americans.

Section 301 would require that Regional Administrators be veterans.

Section 302 would authorize broadening the duties of support personnel assigned to the offices of VETS State Directors for Veterans Employment and Training.

Section 303 would authorize the Secretary of Labor to conduct a pilot program in five States under which the primary responsibilities of Local Veterans Employment Representatives [LVER's] would be case management and the provision of direct employment and training services to veterans.

Subtitle B of title III of the bill provides for a series of technical amendments regarding the Uniformed Service Employment and Reemployment Rights Act of 1994 and greatly