

of the Commerce Committee were shut out of this process last year and the year before while our Medicare and Medicaid providers were hemorrhaging and Medicare beneficiaries across the country were suffering. The legislation we are introducing today addresses some of the most critical problems with the Balanced Budget Act, but this \$21 billion package, like last year's \$16 billion package, is woefully inadequate.

I want to thank Chairman BLILEY and Rep. DINGELL for working with me to include a provision of great importance to me, a clarification of the homebound definition for the purpose of permitting people afflicted with Alzheimer's Disease to leave the home in order to receive adult day care. This is an important amendment that will make a real difference in the lives of Alzheimer's patients and their family caregivers. However, we need to do even more to help all people who are homebound. It's not only homebound Alzheimer's patients in need of adult day care. In addition, I believe all Medicare beneficiaries who are classified as homebound should be able to get out of their homes to attend religious services or once-in-a-lifetime events like the wedding of a granddaughter or the graduation of a grandson.

Mr. Speaker, three years ago, Congress passed the so-called "Balanced Budget Act" claiming it would cut \$115 billion from Medicare and \$12 billion from Medicaid. Mr. Speaker, that \$115 billion figure has become the Energizer Bunny of Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimates, it keeps growing and growing. CBOs most recent estimate from July 2000 shows that Medicare cuts now total \$230 billion. Medicare spending increased by just 1.5% in FY98, it actually went down 1% in FY99, and it remained flat in FY2000, increasing by just 1.5%.

And by some mystery Mr. Speaker, just as the amount cut from the Medicare program keeps growing, so too does the Budget surplus. The people in my district have watched in horror as local institutions—community hospitals and home health agencies—have closed their doors for good—a scene I'm sure has played out in many congressional district around the country.

Hospitals in Massachusetts will lose \$1.7 billion because of the BBA. My hometown hospital, the Malden Hospital is now an outpatient surgical center, a far cry from the fall-service hospital of my youth. The nearby Boston Regional Medical Center in Stoneham has closed. The Symmes Hospital in Arlington is closing. Others in my district are on life support. Home health agencies throughout my state have been decimated and devastated. Nursing homes are hurting as well.

Mr. Speaker, in this era of unprecedented surplus, we should be restoring \$40-50 billion over the next five years and \$80-100 billion over the next ten to the Medicare and Medicaid programs. It would be a refund of the amount we overcharged seniors in the BBA. Congress put a \$115 billion price tag on BBA, but when seniors came to the register, they were charged over \$200 billion — and we owe them a refund. I don't think that's too much to ask for our seniors, for the men and women who built this country. The surplus we enjoy today has been generated in large part by these Medicare cuts that have harmed seniors. I believe we should give this senior surplus back to the seniors, back to the programs that pay for their health care.

I am pleased that the Commerce Committee has produced a bill that deals with some of the most critical aspects of the BBA cuts. However, I am hopeful that as we move forward in the few remaining weeks of this session, that we will increase the price tag for this giveback package—\$21 billion is not going to get the job done.

CONGRATULATING MONTGOMERY COUNTY VETERANS OF THE NORMANDY INVASION

HON. CONSTANCE A. MORELLA

OF MARYLAND

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, September 26, 2000

Mrs. MORELLA. Mr. Speaker, I rise to honor and congratulate the Montgomery County, Maryland veterans who participated in the Invasion of Normandy during World War II. Many of the veterans who took part in that courageous assault have never before been recognized for their valor. This evening, I will be handing out medals at American Legion Post #268 in Wheaton, Maryland that symbolize our district and our country's thanks for their heroism on the beaches of Normandy.

Over 56 years ago, the greatest seaborne invasion the world had ever seen commenced on June 6, 1944. The German army had established a strong line of defense, and Allied forces took heavy losses but their determination and valor enabled these soldiers to persevere under the most harrowing conditions. For the next 87 days, soldiers from Montgomery County, Maryland joined forces with our allies to expel the Nazi occupiers and liberate Europe.

Their supreme efforts ultimately destroyed Nazi Germany and paved the way for democracy and freedom to spread throughout Europe and the world. Their success did not come without a price. Over 9,300 men including 33 pairs of brothers and a father and son lost their lives in the Normandy invasion. These soldiers never knew what their service meant to America and the rest of the world. They never saw America become the prosperous country that has championed the notions of liberty, democracy, and equality. They never had the opportunity to see a world that has departed from the factionalism and distrust that marred the 20th century's first fifty years. But their service is not forgotten. The medal that I am presenting today is a reminder that the people who you fought for remember your sacrifice and the sacrifice of those that did not return from Europe.

The citizens of Normandy had this medal struck to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the invasion. The Medal of the Jubilee of Liberty was originally presented to the veterans that were able to return for the 1994 ceremony. Many of the soldiers who fought there were unable to attend, and so the people of Normandy allowed these medals to be given out in an appropriate ceremony. Today, we honor the Montgomery County veterans that were instrumental in securing our freedom. Their actions not only made America the leader of the free world but demonstrated the fortitude of democratic nations in surmounting evil and tyranny and establishing peace throughout the world.

Those being recognized this evening are Nicholas Caime, Mortimer Caplin, George

Copley, Norman Creel, Louis Davids, Donald Foor, David Goldberg, Albert Gruber, John D. Fitzgerald, John Hardy, Peter Hayes, Roy Hickman, Robert Higgins, Cornelius Holden, Paul Lamb, Elroy Lovett, Thomas McDermitt, Howard J. Moore, William Perryman, Alvin Reiner, Philip Shepsle, Ira Shoemaker, John Smith, Peter Violante, and Norbert Young.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. JOHNNY ISAKSON

OF GEORGIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, September 26, 2000

Mr. ISAKSON. Mr. Speaker, I was detained in my district due to inclement weather yesterday and was not able to vote on rollcall No. 487. Had I been present I would have voted "yes" on this vote.

VETERANS' FAMILY FARM PRESERVATION ACT

HON. LANE EVANS

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, September 26, 2000

Mr. EVANS. Mr. Speaker, on September 25, 2000, I introduced H.R. 5271, the "Veterans' Family Farm Preservation Act", to make it possible for more wartime veterans and their survivors to qualify for pension benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) without being forced to sell their family farms and ranches. This legislation will also benefit low-income veterans who seek to obtain health care from VA.

The productivity of America's family farms is undisputed. Family farms and ranches feed our Nation. Family members and unpaid workers account for 70% of farm labor in the United States. While America's family farmers and ranchers are unmatched in their productivity, they have little or no control over many factors which determine the economic results of their labor.

Veterans who have gone in harm's way and placed their lives on the line by serving our nation in the Armed Forces should not be asked to relinquish their family farm in order to qualify for veterans' benefits. Unfortunately, that is what is occurring today. The Veterans' Family Farm Preservation Act addresses this problem.

Pension benefits administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) are payable to wartime veterans who are totally and permanently disabled due to a non-service connected medical condition. A small, but important number of these disabled wartime veterans own family farms or ranches, which provide the livelihood for their families. Most family farms in the United States are very small. Over 75% of family farms have less than \$50,000 in gross annual sales. After deductions for costs of operating the farm or ranch, the net income of the family farmer is much lower. Farmers receive an average of 20 cents for every dollar of produce sold. In 1995, the average net farm income for very small farms was \$510. The average net family income for small farms with gross sales between \$50,000 and \$250,000 averaged \$14,335. Clearly most family farmers have modest annual income.

In determining eligibility for pension benefits, VA is required to consider not only the family income, but also the family's "net worth." Currently, unless VA determines that the land can be sold at "no substantial sacrifice", the value of farm and ranch land is included in determining net worth. Some veteran farmers are "land rich." While having little or no liquid assets, the value of their land makes their "net worth" appear larger on paper.

On May 25, 2000, Senator GRASSLEY and I wrote to VA's Under Secretary for Benefits, Joseph Thompson, requesting that he recognize the unique nature of a family farm and take immediate steps to address the need for a fair evaluation of the eligibility of our Nation's family farmers for veteran's pension benefits. On June 27, 2000, Mr. Thompson replied indicating that VA viewed a family farm in the same light as interest-producing bank deposits or securities.

Family farms are important not only for the food and fiber they produce, but also for the values they represent. Family farms should not be considered as simply substitutes for liquid bank accounts or other liquid assets.

In good years, family farms and ranches provide an adequate income. In bad times, adverse crop conditions or illness, the income and liquid resources of family farmers and ranchers are quickly depleted. Wartime veterans have made a substantial sacrifice on behalf of our Nation by serving in the Armed Forces. We should not ask them to sacrifice their family farms in order to receive the assistance they have earned by their wartime service.

I believe that an operating family farm can never be liquidated without substantial sacrifice on the part of the veteran. It is never reasonable to require a veteran to sell his or her means of future livelihood in order to obtain pension benefits or VA health care. If the farm is sold, the assets which in future years can be expected to generate income for the veteran and the veteran's dependents, are permanently lost.

The Veterans' Family Farm Preservation Act would exempt farm and ranch land owned by the veteran and the veteran's dependents from being counted in determining net worth. The bill would also exclude land used for similar agricultural purposes, such as timberland, Christmas tree farms, or horticultural purposes.

During the past century, the number of family farms in our country has declined dramatically. When a veteran is required to sell his or her farm in order to receive necessary VA assistance, another family farm may be lost forever. No veteran should be called on to make this additional sacrifice. I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 5271, the Veterans' Family Farm Preservation Act. America's family farmers and ranchers deserve no less.

Mr. Speaker, I request the response which the Honorable Joseph Thompson, Under Secretary for Benefits of the Department of Veterans Affairs, sent to me and Senator GRASSLEY concerning VA's valuation of farm lands be included in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD at this point.

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS,
VETERANS BENEFITS ADMINISTRATION,
Washington, DC, June 27, 2000.

Hon. LANE EVANS,
Ranking Democratic Member, Committee on Veterans' Affairs, U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, DC.

DEAR CONGRESSMAN EVANS: This is in response to your letter of May 25, 2000, concerning the issue of net worth as it applies to the non service-connected pension program administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

In order to qualify for our pension program, a veteran is required to be permanently and totally disabled. Generally, there are relatively few instances where an individual who is operating a working farm meets the basic requirements for pension eligibility. Although there is no such disability requirement for surviving spouse claimants, it is our belief that an individual operating a farm or other business with assets that could be converted to substantial amounts of cash should not qualify for pension. We view the operator of a business in the same light as an individual owning rental property or an owner of interest-producing bank deposits or securities.

VA pension, similar to Supplemental Security Income (SSI), is intended to provide an income supplement for needy individuals and not to allow beneficiaries to build up substantial assets. Although countable income limitations for VA pension are in the same range as those for SSI, our net worth guideline of \$50,000 for the preparation of an administrative decision is more generous than SSI's \$2,000 for an individual and \$3,000 for a couple.

As you pointed out, our procedural manual, M21-1, indicates that a determination of excessive net worth is a question of fact for resolution after the consideration of the facts and circumstances in each case. The \$50,000 guideline is not to be interpreted as a strict, mechanical limitation. We will issue clarifying guidance on that point.

We are also conducting an analysis of our recent net worth determinations. Based on these results we will decide whether additional changes to our rules and procedures are appropriate. At that time, we will also consider whether the \$50,000 guideline should be increased. You will be apprised of our results.

In April 2000, representatives from the Veterans Health Administration and the Veterans Benefits Administration met with Senator Grassley, members of his staff, farmers and their representatives in Des Moines, Iowa. We understood their concerns and informed them about our efforts to address their concerns.

Our reports show that between December 1997 and December 1999, an average of 213 beneficiaries had their pension benefits terminated for excessive net worth. In FY 1999, there were 131 terminations for excessive net worth. Unfortunately, no data are available on the number of claimants who are disallowed for excessive net worth, or the number of administrative decisions made annually on the issue of net worth or the type of assets involved.

I hope this information is helpful to you. I am providing Senator Grassley a similar response.

Sincerely,

JOSEPH THOMPSON.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. CHARLES H. TAYLOR

OF NORTH CAROLINA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, September 26, 2000

Mr. TAYLOR of North Carolina. Mr. Speaker, due to flight delays, I was again unavoidably detained in North Carolina and unable to cast a vote on rollcall vote No. 487. Had I been present, I would have voted "yea" on rollcall vote No. 487.

IN HONOR OF DR. MURRAY ITZKOWITZ, AFTER 31 YEARS AS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE BRIDGE INC.

HON. CAROLYN B. MALONEY

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, September 26, 2000

Mrs. MALONEY of New York. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor Dr. Murray Itzkowitz, of The Bridge Inc., who after 31 years as Executive Director is now the Executive Director Emeritus in charge of research and new program development.

For more than 45 years, The Bridge Inc. has worked with mentally disabled adults as a nonprofit mental health, rehabilitation, and housing agency. The Bridge is a key provider of housing and support services for the chronically mentally ill within New York City. Its Mental Health Clinic provides individual, group, and family psychotherapy with specialties in, among others, bereavement and divorce counseling, substance abuse counseling, and offers treatment to victims of crime.

The Bridge offers health care services provided by a part-time primary care physical and nurse practitioner team and a full-time licensed practical nurse. This service provides comprehensive services such as physicals and follow-up visitations.

Another cornerstone of The Bridge Inc. is its residence assistance program. The Bridge operates more than 300 beds in various settings, such as 24-hour supervised residences and independent apartments. In fact in December 1998, The Bridge Inc. was granted a \$1.7 million grant from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development to finance 18 individual apartment units in the South Bronx and Harlem.

Finally, I must mention the vocational and educational programs offered by The Bridge. Among these programs include work training, on-site employment, and job-placement services. The education program includes basic literacy instruction, GED preparation, and college preparatory work.

Through his selfless leadership of this fine organization, Dr. Murray Itzkowitz has demonstrated his desire for a physical and mentally healthy, better educated, and properly housed citizenry of New York City. Exceptional individuals like Dr. Itzkowitz, help improve the quality of life for many of our most needy citizens.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to have a deeply intelligent and compassionate man like Dr. Murray Itzkowitz working within my district and