

Mr. BALLENGER. Madam Speaker, nothing we do here in Congress can be accomplished alone. Today I want to thank my colleagues on both sides of the aisle who have worked to make the 106th Congress' record one of accomplishment and not of partisan gridlock.

This Congress has passed some of the most solid education reform ever brought before this body, measures that will give parents and teachers more flexibility to meet students' unique needs.

But that is not all. We have also worked tirelessly to pay off our national public debt, which is saddling children born this year with a \$13,300 debt burden.

Our debt relief measure also saves the average household an estimated \$4,000 in interest payments over the next 10 years.

Think of what American families can do with that \$4,000 in additional income.

The 106th Congress has an agenda for success, and I am proud to be part of it.

REPUBLICAN ACCOMPLISHMENTS

(Mr. BARTLETT of Maryland asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. BARTLETT of Maryland. Madam Speaker, since 1995, Republicans have worked to change the very essence of government to make it an example of common sense, not nonsense.

While it is impossible to change 40 years of big government overnight, we are making significant progress.

This year alone, House Republicans passed a Medicare lockbox bill, a sequel to last year's successful Social Security lockbox measure, which protected Social Security surpluses from being spent on anything but Social Security or debt reduction.

We have also passed a prescription drug measure that makes prescription drugs affordable and available to the 30 percent of Medicare beneficiaries who currently cannot afford the prescription drugs they need.

We have also passed the IDEA Full Funding Act, legislation to help handicapped children get the best education possible.

These measures bring much-needed fairness to the Federal Government, and Republicans will continue to work to make legislation like this a priority for Congress.

AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY

(Mr. DUNCAN asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. DUNCAN. Madam Speaker, the Census Bureau is proving that it is another arrogant Federal agency with a power-mad, public-be-damned attitude.

Despite the huge public outcry against the personal, intrusive questions on the Census long form, the Bu-

reau wants to keep prying with the same or similar personal questions on the form called the American Community Survey to be sent to 250 homes each month.

The lame defense of questions on the long form was that these questions had been approved by Congress and that they had been asked before.

Well, Congress never had a vote on the specific questions and no Member saw those questions beforehand except possibly a few on the Subcommittee on the Census.

Also, if these nosy, personal questions were asked in the past, it was before the Federal Government got as big and out of control as it is today and before the age of the Internet.

I guess with the computer-controlled society we have today, true privacy is a thing of the past. But the Congress should offer at least a little resistance and not allow the Census Bureau to keep butting its nose into areas that should be none of our Federal Big Brother's business.

106TH CONGRESS HAS DONE NOTHING FOR AMERICANS

(Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Madam Speaker, I wish I had good news, but this Republican Congress is about to recess for our work session in the district and we have no real Medicare prescription drug benefit for our seniors.

Medicare is down. HMOs are closing. Over a million seniors will be kicked off of the HMO+Choice program through the Medicare. And we cannot give them a Medicare drug prescription benefit. We have no Patients' Bill of Rights, which allows individuals not to suffer the drive-by refusal of service in our hospitals.

We have no housing for individuals who work but cannot afford the large payments of high-priced condominiums, and the housing appropriations was cut.

We have no legislation to repair the crumbling schools throughout our Nation because we could not pass a school construction bill that would lend dollars to local communities to help them build new schools for our children.

And, yes, as we start another school year, we did not have the courage to pass real gun safety legislation that would close the loopholes that keep guns out of the hands of children.

All I can say is a bunch of nos. What have we done? Nothing for Americans.

"LA FE" CLINIC, EL PASO, TEXAS

(Mr. REYES asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. REYES. Madam Speaker, this morning I would like to take a moment to recognize a community health clinic in my district that has recently received national recognition.

The clinic is called Centro de Salud Familiar La Fe, or, as we call it in El Paso, "La Fe" Clinic. It was named as the best clinic in the Nation by one of the largest Hispanic advocacy groups in the United States, the National Concilio de la Raza.

I am very proud of the work that La Fe Clinic is doing in El Paso. It is truly a stellar facility that serves the needs of many local community residents.

I should add that many of these residents would have no other place to receive affordable health care if it were not for La Fe Clinic. This clinic has been at the center of this community for 34 years and continues to play an integral part in the health of El Paso's south side residents.

La Fe Clinic is truly a remarkable organization. In 1999, this clinic served almost 18,000 clients. This facility provides low-cost prescription medication to the elderly and to other patrons; provides pediatric care; provides dental care, even treating the dental needs of patients with AIDS; and assists in signing up children for the CHIPS program in Texas.

I would like to recognize the chief executive officer, Mr. Salvador Balcorta, and the staff of the La Fe Clinic for maintaining a vision and focus for the clinic many times against what seemed to be insurmountable odds.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, the Chair announces that she will postpone further proceedings today on motions to suspend the rules on which a recorded vote or the yeas and nays are ordered, or on which the vote is objected to under clause 6 of rule XX.

Any record votes on H.R. 4888 and H.R. 4923 will be taken after debate has concluded on those motions.

Record votes on remaining motions to suspend the rules will be taken later today.

□ 1015

VETERANS BENEFITS ACT OF 2000

Mr. STUMP. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 4850) to provide a cost-of-living adjustment in rates of compensation paid to veterans with service-connected disabilities, to enhance programs providing compensation and life insurance benefits for veterans, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 4850

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 "Veterans Benefits Act of 2000".

TITLE I—ANNUAL COMPENSATION INCREASE

SEC. 101. INCREASE IN RATES OF DISABILITY COMPENSATION AND DEPENDENCY AND INDEMNITY COMPENSATION.

(a) **RATE ADJUSTMENT.**—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall, effective on December 1, 2000, increase the dollar amounts in effect for the payment of disability compensation and dependency and indemnity compensation by the Secretary, as specified in subsection (b).

(b) **AMOUNTS TO BE INCREASED.**—The dollar amounts to be increased pursuant to subsection (a) are the following:

(1) **COMPENSATION.**—Each of the dollar amounts in effect under section 1114 of title 38, United States Code.

(2) **ADDITIONAL COMPENSATION FOR DEPENDENTS.**—Each of the dollar amounts in effect under sections 1115(1) of such title.

(3) **CLOTHING ALLOWANCE.**—The dollar amount in effect under section 1162 of such title.

(4) **NEW DIC RATES.**—The dollar amounts in effect under paragraphs (1) and (2) of section 1311(a) of such title.

(5) **OLD DIC RATES.**—Each of the dollar amounts in effect under section 1311(a)(3) of such title.

(6) **ADDITIONAL DIC FOR SURVIVING SPOUSES WITH MINOR CHILDREN.**—The dollar amount in effect under section 1311(b) of such title.

(7) **ADDITIONAL DIC FOR DISABILITY.**—The dollar amounts in effect under sections 1311(c) and 1311(d) of such title.

(8) **DIC FOR DEPENDENT CHILDREN.**—The dollar amounts in effect under sections 1313(a) and 1314 of such title.

(c) **DETERMINATION OF INCREASE.**—(1) The increase under subsection (a) shall be made in the dollar amounts specified in subsection (b) as in effect on November 30, 2000. Each such amount shall be increased by the same percentage as the percentage by which benefit amounts payable under title II of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 401 et seq.) are increased effective December 1, 2000, as a result of a determination under section 215(i) of such Act (42 U.S.C. 415(i)).

(2) In the computation of increased dollar amounts pursuant to paragraph (1), any amount which as so computed is not a whole dollar amount shall be rounded down to the next lower whole dollar amount.

(d) **SPECIAL RULE.**—The Secretary may adjust administratively, consistent with the increases made under subsection (a), 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.

SEC. 102. PUBLICATION OF ADJUSTED RATES.

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 2000, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall publish in the Federal Register the amounts specified in subsection (b) of section 101, as increased pursuant to that section.

TITLE II—BENEFITS IMPROVEMENTS

SEC. 201. STROKES AND HEART ATTACKS INCURRED OR AGGRAVATED BY MEMBERS OF RESERVE COMPONENTS IN THE PERFORMANCE OF DUTY WHILE PERFORMING INACTIVE DUTY TRAINING TO BE CONSIDERED TO BE SERVICE-CONNECTED.

(a) **SCOPE OF TERM "ACTIVE MILITARY, NAVAL, OR AIR SERVICE".**—Section 101(24) of title 38, United States Code, is amended to read as follows:

"(24) The term "active military, naval, or air service" includes—

"(A) active duty;

"(B) any period of active duty for training during which the individual concerned was disabled or died from a disease or injury incurred or aggravated in line of duty; and

"(C) any period of inactive duty training during which the individual concerned was disabled or died—

"(i) from an injury incurred or aggravated in line of duty; or

"(ii) from an acute myocardial infarction, a cardiac arrest, or a cerebrovascular accident occurring during such training."

(b) **TRAVEL TO OR FROM TRAINING DUTY.**—Section 106(d) of such title is amended—

(1) by inserting "(1)" after "(d)";

(2) by redesignating paragraphs (1) and (2) as subparagraphs (A) and (B), respectively;

(3) by inserting "or covered disease" after "injury" each place it appears;

(4) by designating the second sentence as paragraph (2);

(5) by designating the third sentence as paragraph (3); and

(6) by adding at the end the following new paragraph:

"(4) For purposes of this subsection, the term 'covered disease' means any of the following:

"(A) Acute myocardial infarction.

"(B) A cardiac arrest.

"(C) A cerebrovascular accident."

SEC. 202. COMPENSATION TO BE PAID AT SO-CALLED "K" RATE FOR SERVICE-CONNECTED LOSS OF ONE OR BOTH BREASTS DUE TO RADICAL MASTECTOMY.

Section 1114(k) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by inserting "or one or both breasts due to a radical mastectomy or modified radical mastectomy," after "loss or loss of use of one or more creative organs,".

TITLE III—VETERANS LIFE INSURANCE

SEC. 301. ELIGIBILITY OF CERTAIN MEMBERS OF THE INDIVIDUAL READY RESERVE FOR SERVICEMEMBERS' GROUP LIFE INSURANCE.

(a) **ELIGIBILITY.**—Section 1965(5) of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) by striking "and" at the end of subparagraph (B);

(2) by redesignating subparagraph (C) as subparagraph (D); and

(3) by inserting after subparagraph (B) the following new subparagraph (C):

"(C) a person who volunteers for assignment to a mobilization category in the Individual Ready Reserve, as defined in section 12304(i)(1) of title 10; and"

(b) **CONFORMING AMENDMENTS.**—Sections 1967(a), 1968(a), and 1969(a)(2)(A) of such title are amended by striking "section 1965(5)(B) of this title" each place it appears and inserting "subparagraphs (B) or (C) of section 1965(5) of this title".

(c) **EFFECTIVE DATE.**—The amendments made by this section take effect on October 1, 2000.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mrs. EMERSON). Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. STUMP) and the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. STUMP).

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

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. STUMP. Madam 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 therein on H.R. 4850.

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

There was no objection.

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

H.R. 4850 is the Veterans Benefits Act of 2000. The bill includes a cost-of-living adjustment for VA disability compensation and survivors benefits. It also includes a number of changes in program eligibility and benefit improvements.

I urge my colleagues to support passage of H.R. 4850.

Madam Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

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

Madam Speaker, I want to thank the chairman of the committee, the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. STUMP), for bringing this legislation to the floor today. I believe all Members of this body can fully support the Veterans Benefits Act of 2000, H.R. 4850. Among other provisions, this act provides a cost-of-living adjustment to service-connected disabled veterans and DIC beneficiaries. As a result, these important benefits will be increased to keep pace with the cost of living.

The bill also recognizes the sacrifices made by two special groups of veterans, those who serve in the Guard and Reserve and suffer a heart attack or stroke while on inactive duty for training. These conditions will now be recognized as service connected. Madam Speaker, I also particularly want to commend and thank the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. STUPAK) for his effective leadership on this important provision.

I am pleased that this bill incorporates the provisions of H.R. 3998 which I introduced to provide special monthly compensation to veterans who are service connected for a radical mastectomy.

This is a good bill. I urge my colleagues to vote in favor of it.

Madam Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. STUMP. Madam Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from New York (Mr. QUINN), the chairman of the Subcommittee on Benefits.

Mr. QUINN. Madam Speaker, I want to note the opportunity for us to talk with the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER) this morning and others.

We are proud to be here today to consider H.R. 4850, the Veterans Benefits Act of 2000. H.R. 4850 combines four bills that were referred to the Subcommittee on Benefits, H.R. 3816, H.R. 3998, H.R. 4131, and H.R. 4376.

Briefly, Madam Speaker, the Veterans Benefits Act provides a COLA, cost-of-living adjustment, effective December 1, 2000, for service-connected and survivor benefits. It also provides that a stroke or a heart attack suffered by a Reservist during inactive duty training shall be considered service connected for purposes of VA benefits.

It adds the service-connected loss of one or both breasts due to a radical mastectomy to the list of disabilities entitled to an additional special monthly compensation. And, finally, extends service members' group life insurance eligibility to members of the Individual Ready Reserve.

I would like to thank the ranking member and my partner on the subcommittee, the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER), for his help in bringing this bill to the floor today. I would also like to thank the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. STUPAK), who is not a member of the committee but had the foresight to bring to our attention and worked with us on the provision affecting Reservists who suffer a heart attack or stroke while performing weekend drills.

The benefits improvements in this bill will have an effect on a large number of veterans across the country. I urge my colleagues to support it.

Mr. EVANS. Madam Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER).

Mr. FILNER. Madam Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding time. I thank the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. STUMP), the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS), and the gentleman from New York (Mr. QUINN), the chairman of our Subcommittee on Benefits, for crafting H.R. 4850. I think everyone in this body can support this very important measure.

This measure is important to the financial well-being of our disabled veterans and their survivors. It ensures a cost-of-living increase so that VA benefits will not erode due to increases in the cost of living. It also recognizes the important contributions made to our Nation's security by members of the National Guard and Reserve. In fact, section 102 of the bill incorporates provisions that were introduced separately by the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. STUPAK), who will speak in a few minutes. He recognized that certain members of the Guard and Reserve who suffer a heart attack or stroke while serving on inactive duty for training are unfairly denied service connection for those conditions. So I thank the gentleman from Michigan now for his leadership in getting this important provision.

Section 202 of the bill is taken from a bill, H.R. 3998, introduced by the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS), our ranking member. This will provide veterans who are service connected due to a radical mastectomy with the additional compensation currently provided to veterans who are service connected for loss or loss of use of other body parts. This bill was recommended to us in the 1998 report of VA's Advisory Committee on Women Veterans.

Finally, section 301 of the bill will ensure that service members who volunteer for assignment to a mobilization category in the Ready Reserves will have access to VA life insurance. This is a simple thing but is very im-

portant because if we expect these service members to put their lives on the line for our Nation, we must assure that their survivors will be compensated if they are asked to pay the ultimate price for their service.

I ask for a unanimous vote on this very important measure.

Mr. EVANS. Madam Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. REYES), a member of the committee.

Mr. REYES. Madam Speaker, today I rise in support of H.R. 4850, the Veterans Benefits Act. I want to thank the chairman and ranking member of our committee as well as the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. STUPAK) for his leadership on this bill. This bill provides serious improvement in services and benefits to our veterans. With H.R. 4850, we are providing important cost-of-living adjustments for compensation paid to veterans with service-connected disabilities as well as their dependents, along with enhancing other benefit programs providing compensation and life insurance benefits.

□ 1030

Moreover, with the increasing number of Guard and Reserve members of our Armed Services that are being called upon to defend our Nation, the diseases and the symptoms that they suffer should be considered service connected just as if they were on active duty status.

Under current law, if a Guard member or a Reservist on inactive duty training suffers a heart attack or stroke, the disability is characterized as due to a disease and is not considered service connected.

This bill simply corrects this situation by allowing those on inactive duty for training as to count this as service connected for the purposes of Veterans benefits.

Furthermore, with the increasing number of female veterans, I am proud that this bill amends Federal veterans' benefits provisions to provide a monthly rate of compensation for the service-connected loss of one or both breasts due to the radical or modified radical mastectomy. This bill finally creates parity for breast cancer along the same lines as other visible physical disabilities.

Lastly, the bill expands the eligibility of veterans to participate in group life insurance programs.

Madam Speaker, when Reservists are called up for quick deployments, the need for insurance to cover these men and women for loss of life during acts of war is paramount. As it is, as regular insurance, their regular insurance, does not cover these types of situations.

This bill fulfills our obligation to make sure that our men and women in uniform of the Reserves who are putting their lives on the line for their country have the same opportunity to gain security for themselves and their families through our life insurance programs.

Clearly, the various aspects of this bill serve the needs of today's veterans, and they raise the level and quality of benefits for them and for their families. It is long overdue.

With this legislation, we improve and fulfill our obligation to better serve our male and female veterans, Reservists, Guardsmen and their families, who have sacrificed for the American ideal and interests around the world.

I, therefore, strongly support this legislation and urge Members of the House to unanimously pass this bill.

Mr. EVANS. Madam Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. STUPAK).

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

Madam Speaker, first I would like to commend the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. STUMP), the chairman of the committee, and the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS), the ranking member, the gentleman from New York, (Mr. QUINN) and the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER) for their hard work in helping me bring forth part of this legislation.

It was really their work and the work of their staff that put together H.R. 4850, which incorporates several very worthy bills to help our veterans and their families, including my bill, H.R. 3816.

My bill closes an exceptionally problematic loophole brought to my attention by the Pearce family of Traverse City, Michigan. Master Sergeant Ron Pearce was a full-time employee of the Michigan National Guard who suffered a heart attack while performing required physical fitness tests, a part of the inactive duty training requirements.

Master Sergeant Pearce had a history of heart trouble and in the past had been exempted from the fitness test on recommendation of his doctor. He was ordered to take the test as a condition of his continued employment with the Michigan National Guard.

He passed away as a direct result of this fitness test, leaving behind a wife and family with no means of support. The VA first approved and then denied benefits to his family. My bill, now part of the larger bill, would consider heart attacks and strokes suffered by National Guard and Reserve personnel while on inactive duty for training to be service connected for the purpose of VA benefits.

Madam Speaker, I strongly urge support of this legislation. I am happy that the loophole will be closed and more families will not have to suffer as the Pearce family has.

I strongly urge Members to vote yes on this bill. I once again would like to thank the distinguished gentleman from Arizona (Mr. STUMP), the chairman of the Committee on Veterans Affairs; the distinguished gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS), the ranking member, for their inclusion of my legislation in their bill.

Mr. EVANS. Madam Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. STUMP. Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS), the ranking member, for all of his assistance, as well as the gentleman from New York (Mr. QUINN), chairman of the Subcommittee on Benefits, and the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER).

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of several veterans' bills that the House is considering today. First, H.R. 4850, the Veterans' Benefits Act of 2000, will increase, effective December 1, 2000, 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. 4850, I am pleased that we are acting to provide disabled veterans and their survivors with an annual COLA.

H.R. 4850 includes several other important provisions. Under the measure, a stroke or heart attack suffered or aggravated by a reservist during inactive duty training will be considered service-connected. This will allow reservists to receive disability compensation for these conditions if they become disabled while on inactive duty training. H.R. 4850 would also provide a special monthly compensation for the service-connected loss of one or both breasts due to a radical mastectomy, at the same rate as that for a service-connected "loss or loss of use of one or more creative organs." Finally, H.R. 4850 will permit certain members of the Individual Ready Reserve to participate in the Servicemembers Group Life Insurance program.

The second veterans' bill we are considering today, the Veterans Claims Assistance Act of 2000, would eliminate the requirement that a claimant first submit a "well-grounded claim" before receiving assistance from the VA Secretary. A well-grounded claim for service-connected disability benefits would be one that included supporting medical opinion and evidence.

H.R. 4864 would require the VA Secretary to make a reasonable effort to obtain relevant records identified and authorized by the claimant. The VA Secretary would also have to provide a medical examination if warranted. H.R. 4864 would permit veterans who had claims denied or dismissed by the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims to request a review of those claims within two years of enactment. Finally, H.R. 4864 would require other federal agencies to furnish relevant records to the VA at no cost to the claimant.

The VA has a long history of assisting veterans to obtain government and other records which may substantiate their claim for benefits. However, last year, the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims held that the VA had no authority to develop claims that are not well-grounded. Anyone who has ever had to deal with a bureaucracy knows how frustrating it can be, and the Court's decision had a devastating impact on a veteran's ability to develop his or her claim. H.R. 4864 reaffirms the government's obligation to assist our nation's veterans in developing their benefit claims,

and I am honored to be an original cosponsor of this legislation.

Finally, I am pleased that the House will consider another resolution that I have cosponsored regarding the Persian Gulf War. Next month marks the tenth anniversary of the initial activation of the National Guard and Reserve personnel for Operation Desert Shield and Operation Desert Storm as a consequence of the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq. Over 267,000 members of the National Guard and Reserve were ordered to active duty during the Persian Gulf War, and 57 of them lost their lives in service to their nation.

H. Res. 549 recognizes the historical significance of this anniversary and honors the service and sacrifice of these National Guard and Reserve personnel during Operation Desert Shield and Operation Desert Storm. The resolution also recognizes the growing importance of the National Guard and Reserve to the Security of the United States.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support all three of these important veterans bills.

Mr. WATTS of Oklahoma. Madam Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 4850, the Veterans Benefits Acts of 2000 and H.R. 4864, the Veterans Claims Assistance Act of 2000—two bills that give overdue support and assistance to our Nation's veterans. There are more than 2.6 million veterans receiving disability compensation as of May 2000, and the Department of Veterans Affairs expects expenditures for disability compensation to reach \$15 billion for FY 2000.

H.R. 4850 directs the Veterans Secretary to increase the rates of veterans disability compensation, dependency and indemnity compensation, and additional compensation for dependents, which is equal to the Social Security cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) that will take place on December 1, 2000. Furthermore, this bill provides for a change in the law which states that a stroke or heart attack that is incurred by a member of a reserve component in the performance of duty shall be considered service-connected for the purpose of benefits under law. Finally, H.R. 4850 provides compensation for the service-connected loss of one or both breasts due to a radical mastectomy and will be treated as other service-connected loss of organs or limbs.

In addition to H.R. 4850, I support H.R. 4864 which authorizes the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to assist a claimant in obtaining evidence to establish entitlement to a benefit. The bill requires the Secretary to make reasonable efforts to obtain relevant records that the claimant identifies. Also, it eliminates the requirement that a claimant submit a "well-grounded" claim before the Secretary can assist in obtaining evidence to support a claimant. This is a change as the result of a recent Court of Appeals case that stated the Veterans Administration (VA) could help a veteran obtain records relevant to a claim only after the veteran provided enough evidence to prove that the claim is "well-grounded." This decision led to confusion on the part of the VA as to the meaning and application of the "well grounded" claim requirement. H.R. 4864 clarifies the "well grounded" claim requirement and enables the VA to once again provide as much assistance as possible to veterans.

I fully support these two important bills. I have always believed how our nation treats the veterans has a direct impact upon our ability to attract patriotic young Americans to mili-

tary service. We must ensure our veterans receive proper and fair assistance in a timely manner. If we do not keep faith with our veterans—we will jeopardize the defense of the country.

Mr. STUMP. Madam Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mrs. EMERSON). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. STUMP) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 4850.

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

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

VETERANS CLAIMS ASSISTANCE ACT OF 2000

Mr. STUMP. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 4864) to amend title 38, United States Code, to reaffirm and clarify the duty of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to assist claimants for benefits under laws administered by the Secretary, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 4864

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 "Veterans Claims Assistance Act of 2000".

SEC. 2. CLARIFICATION OF DEFINITION OF "CLAIMANT" FOR PURPOSES OF VETERANS LAWS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Chapter 51 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by inserting before section 5101 the following new section:

"§5100. Definition of 'claimant'"

"For purposes of this chapter, the term 'claimant' means any individual applying for, or submitting a claim for, any benefit under the laws administered by the Secretary."

(b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections at the beginning of such chapter is amended by inserting before the item relating to section 5101 the following new item:

"5100. Definition of 'claimant'."

SEC. 3. ASSISTANCE TO CLAIMANTS.

(a) REAFFIRMATION AND CLARIFICATION OF DUTY TO ASSIST.—Chapter 51 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by striking sections 5102 and 5103 and inserting the following:

"§5102. Applications: forms furnished upon request; notice to claimants of incomplete applications"

"(a) FURNISHING FORMS.—Upon request made in person or in writing by any person claiming or applying for a benefit under the laws administered by the Secretary, the Secretary shall furnish such person, free of all expense, all such printed instructions and forms as may be necessary in establishing such claim."

"(b) INCOMPLETE APPLICATIONS.—If a claimant's application for a benefit under the laws administered by the Secretary is incomplete, the Secretary shall notify the claimant and the claimant's representative, if any, of the information necessary to complete the application. The Secretary shall notify each claimant of any additional information and medical and lay evidence necessary to substantiate the claim. As