

VETERANS' AND SURVIVORS' BENEFITS EXPANSION ACT OF 2002

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 4085) to increase, effective as of December 1, 2002, the rates of disability compensation for veterans with service-connected disabilities and the rates of dependency and indemnity compensation for survivors of certain service-connected disabled veterans, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 4085

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Session assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Veterans' and Survivors' Benefits Expansion Act of 2002".

SEC. 2. INCREASE IN RATES OF DISABILITY COMPENSATION AND DEPENDENCY AND INDEMNITY COMPENSATION.

(a) RATE ADJUSTMENT.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall, effective on December 1, 2002, 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, 2002.

(2) Except as provided in paragraph (3), 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, 2002, as a result of a determination under section 215(i) of such Act (42 U.S.C. 415(i)).

(3) Each dollar amount increased pursuant to paragraph (2) shall, if not a whole dollar amount, 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.

(e) 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 2003, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall publish in the Federal Register the amounts specified in subsection (b), as increased pursuant to that section.

SEC. 3. RETENTION OF DEPENDENCY AND INDEMNITY COMPENSATION FOR SURVIVING SPOUSES REMARRYING AFTER AGE 65.

(a) EXCEPTION TO TERMINATION OF BENEFITS UPON REMARRIAGE.—Paragraph (2) of section 103(d) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by striking "if the remarriage" and all that follows and inserting "if—

"(A) the remarriage occurs after the surviving spouse attains age 65 ;

"(B) the remarriage has been terminated by death; or

"(C) the remarriage has been terminated by divorce, unless the Secretary determines that the divorce was secured through fraud or collusion."

(b) CONFORMING AMENDMENTS.—Paragraph (4) of such section is amended—

(1) by striking "The first month" and all that follows through "shall be" and inserting the following "When eligibility for benefits for a surviving spouse is restored by reason of this subsection, the first month of eligibility for such benefits shall be"; and

(2) in subparagraph (A), by striking "described in" and inserting "with a remarriage described in subparagraph (B) or (C) of".

(c) INCLUSION OF DEATH COMPENSATION AMONG RESTORED BENEFITS.—Subparagraph (A) of paragraph (5) of such section is amended to read as follows:

"(A) Sections 1121 and 1311, relating to death compensation and dependency and indemnity compensation, respectively."

(d) APPLICATION FOR BENEFITS.—In the case of an individual who but for having remarried would be eligible for dependency and indemnity compensation under section 1311 of title 38, United States Code, or death compensation under section 1121 of such title, and whose remarriage was before the date of the enactment of this Act and after the individual had attained age 65, the individual shall be eligible for such compensation by reason of the amendments made by subsection (a) only if the individual submits an application for such compensation to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs not later than the end of the one-year period beginning on the date of the enactment of this Act.

(e) COORDINATION OF BENEFITS.—Section 1311 of such title is amended by adding at the end the following new subsection:

"(e) In the case of an individual who is eligible for dependency and indemnity compensation under this section by reason of section 103(d)(2)(A) of this title who is also eligible for benefits under another provision of law by reason of such individual's status as the surviving spouse of a veteran, then, notwithstanding any other provision of law, no reduction in benefits under such other provision of law shall be made by reason of such individual's eligibility for benefits under this section."

SEC. 4. UNIFORM HOME LOAN GUARANTY FEES FOR QUALIFYING MEMBERS OF THE SELECTED RESERVE AND ACTIVE DUTY VETERANS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Paragraph (2) of section 3729(b) of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) by inserting "(A)" after "(2)";

(2) by inserting "for any loan closed after September 30, 2005" after "paragraph (1)"; and

(3) by adding at the end the following:

"(B) The loan fee table referred to in paragraph (1) for any loan closed during the period beginning on October 1, 2002, and ending on September 30, 2005, is as follows:

"LOAN FEE TABLE

Type of loan	Veteran	Other obligor
(A)(i) Initial loan described in section 3710(a) to purchase or construct a dwelling with 0-down, or any other initial loan described in section 3710(a) other than with 5-down or 10-down (closed before October 1, 2008)	2.00	NA
(A)(ii) Initial loan described in section 3710(a) to purchase or construct a dwelling with 0-down, or any other initial loan described in section 3710(a) other than with 5-down or 10-down (closed on or after October 1, 2008)	1.25	NA
(B)(i) Subsequent loan described in section 3710(a) to purchase or construct a dwelling with 0-down, or any other subsequent loan described in section 3710(a) (closed before October 1, 2008)	3.00	NA
(B)(ii) Subsequent loan described in section 3710(a) to purchase or construct a dwelling with 0-down, or any other subsequent loan described in section 3710(a) (closed on or after October 1, 2008)	1.25	NA
(C)(i) Loan described in section 3710(a) to purchase or construct a dwelling with 5-down (closed before October 1, 2008)	1.50	NA
(C)(ii) Loan described in section 3710(a) to purchase or construct a dwelling with 5-down (closed on or after October 1, 2008)	0.75	NA

“LOAN FEE TABLE—Continued

Type of loan	Veteran	Other obligor
(D)(i) Initial loan described in section 3710(a) to purchase or construct a dwelling with 10-down (closed before October 1, 2008)	1.25	NA
(D)(ii) Initial loan described in section 3710(a) to purchase or construct a dwelling with 10-down (closed on or after October 1, 2008)	0.50	NA
(E) Interest rate reduction refinancing loan	0.50	NA
(F) Direct loan under section 3711	1.00	NA
(G) Manufactured home loan under section 3712 (other than an interest rate reduction refinancing loan)	1.00	NA
(H) Loan to Native American veteran under section 3762 (other than an interest rate reduction refinancing loan)	1.25	NA
(I) Loan assumption under section 3714	0.50	0.50
(J) Loan under section 3733(a)	2.25	2.25”.

(b) CONFORMING AMENDMENT.—Paragraph (4)(A) of such section is amended by inserting before the period at the end the following: “, and the term ‘veteran’ means any veteran eligible for the benefits of this chapter”.

SEC. 5. LIFE INSURANCE PROGRAMS.

(a) INCREASE OF VETERANS’ MORTGAGE LIFE INSURANCE COVERAGE TO \$150,000.—(1) Section 2106(b) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by striking “\$90,000” and inserting “\$150,000”.

(2) The amendment made by paragraph (1) shall apply with respect to insurance payable under section 2106 of title 38, United States Code, in the case of a veteran insured under that section who dies on or after the date of enactment of this Act.

(b) AUTHORITY FOR VETERANS’ MORTGAGE LIFE INSURANCE TO BE CARRIED BEYOND AGE 70.—Section 2106 of such title is amended—

(1) in subsection (a), by inserting “age 69 or younger” after “any eligible veteran”; and

(2) in subsection (i), by striking paragraph (2) and redesignating paragraphs (3) and (4) as paragraphs (2) and (3), respectively.

SEC. 6. INCREASE IN AGGREGATE ANNUAL AMOUNT AVAILABLE FOR STATE IMPROVING AGENCIES FOR ADMINISTRATIVE EXPENSES FOR FISCAL YEARS 2003, 2004, AND 2005.

Section 3674(a)(4) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by inserting before the period at the end of the first sentence the following: “, and for each of fiscal years 2003, 2004, and 2005, \$18,000,000”.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH) and the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH).

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 4085, the Veterans’ and Survivors’ Benefits Expansion Act of 2002 will expand and increase a number of important benefits for veterans and their surviving spouses. With more than 2.3 million veterans relying on disability compensation payments, H.R. 4085 provides a much-needed cost-of-living adjustment (COLA), the same as that which is given to Social Security recipients, currently estimated to be about 2.3 percent next year. Sur-

viving spouses and children of veterans who qualify for dependency and indemnity compensation (DIC) would also see their payments increased by the same COLA amount.

For a 100 percent service-connected disabled veteran, this increase would take effect December 1 and will total about \$600 next year in increase. In total, H.R. 4085 will increase disability compensation payments by about \$300 million next year and by more than \$1.5 billion over the next 5 years.

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 4085 would also make a historic change in current law to allow surviving spouses who remarry after the age of 65 to retain their dependency and indemnity compensation as well as health insurance, home loan, and education benefits. Under current law, a surviving spouse of a veteran who is currently eligible for dependency and indemnity compensation, and who remarries, loses his or her eligibility for this and other VA benefits. Sadly, this economic penalty has prevented thousands of older women from enjoying the comforts that come from marriage later in their lives.

Mr. Speaker, as my colleagues know, when a man and woman serve our Nation in the Armed Forces, we not only benefit from their service, but also from that of their spouse, who make their own sacrifices supporting their family on the home front. We should stop penalizing these brave women and men who have already lost so much, and are now looking for companionship in their twilight years.

This provision has been championed in the House by the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs vice chairman, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. BILIRAKIS). I want to commend him for his continuing work, and his commitment on behalf of veterans and their spouses.

Let me say to my colleagues that we had hoped to bring forward legislation that contained a lower age limit; we wanted to get to 55 years, but budgetary constraints and questionable CBO scoring have prevented us from

doing that. Instead, our legislation in essence would make a down payment to these Gold Star wives who have given our Nation so much. We will be monitoring the actual implementation costs of this provision so that we can revisit it in the future. While today’s action is historic, let me assure these brave women that it is just the beginning of the process and not the end of the process. H.R. 4085 also contains several other provisions which the distinguished chairman of the Subcommittee on Benefits will be outlining in a moment.

Finally, I just want to say that I am grateful to the chairman, the gentleman from Idaho (Mr. SIMPSON), gentleman from Texas (Mr. REYES), the ranking member, and again my good friend, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS), for working with us on this legislation and for helping to bring it to the floor today.

Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from Idaho (Mr. SIMPSON).

Mr. SIMPSON. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from New Jersey for yielding me this time and for his unwavering support of our veterans.

Mr. Speaker, many veterans and their survivors will be served as a result of the enhancements included in H.R. 4085, the Veterans’ and Survivors’ Benefits Expansion Act of 2002.

Section 2 provides an annual cost-of-living adjustment effective December 1, 2002, to service-connected veterans as well as those survivors receiving dependency and indemnity compensation. The Congress has approved a COLA every fiscal year since 1976; and as in the past, the percentage increase will mirror the COLA the Social Security recipients receive.

Section 3 would allow surviving spouses who remarry after age 65 to retain their dependency and indemnity compensation, death compensation, VA health insurance, and education and home loan benefits. Additionally, those spouses who remarry after age 65, but prior to enactment of this bill, will

have 1 year to reapply for their benefits. DIC is the only Federal survivor annuity that terminates when the spouse remarries.

It is important, as the chairman stated, that I reiterate that this is the first step in enhancing the benefits for these spouses. The Subcommittee on Benefits considered a number of ways to enhance these benefits, including lowering the age at which spouses could remarry and retain benefits; but with the budget constraints we are working under, we just could not do more at this time. I want to thank the vice chairman of the committee, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. BILIRAKIS), for his leadership on this provision.

Section 4 would lower the home loan fees that members of the Selected Reserve pay to equal the fees paid by the active duty veterans. Again, because of budget constraints, we have had to sunset this provision in fiscal year 2005. We will reexamine the policy at that time.

Section 5 would increase coverage from \$90,000 to \$150,000 under the Veterans' Mortgage Life Insurance program, as well as permit coverage of this insurance to veterans beyond age 70. Currently, the coverage is terminated after the veteran's 69th birthday.

Lastly, section 6 would increase the funding for State approving agencies from \$14 million to \$18 million for the next 3 fiscal years.

Mr. Speaker, I want to recognize the subcommittee's ranking member, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. REYES), for the opportunity to work with him in writing this bill. I also want to thank the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS) and the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER) for their input on the home loan insurance provisions and, again, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. BILIRAKIS) for his support for the Gold Star Wives. I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 4085.

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

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

I want to thank the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH), our committee chairman; and the gentleman from Idaho (Mr. SIMPSON), our Subcommittee on Benefits chairman; and the gentleman from Texas (Mr. REYES), ranking member, for their important bipartisan work on this important measure. This is a bill strongly supported by Members of both sides of the aisle.

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 4085, the Veterans' and Survivors' Benefits Expansion Act of 2002, provides a cost-of-living adjustment to veterans receiving service-connected disability compensation and the survivors in receipt of DIC. This ensures the value of their hard-earned benefits will not be reduced because of cost-of-living increases.

The bill contains provisions derived from measures introduced by my colleagues, the gentleman from Florida

(Mr. BILIRAKIS) and the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER), two outstanding advocates for our Nation's veterans.

The bill also includes a provision of H.R. 2095, which I introduced. For the next 3 years, the additional funding fee now imposed upon members of the Selected Reserve for the use of the home loan guarantee program will be eliminated. In addition, the bill increases the maximum amount of VMLI to \$150,000. This will enable about 90 percent of veterans' families to have their mortgage paid off in the event of a veteran's death.

I am pleased to support additional funding for State approving agencies provided in this measure so that they can fulfill their responsibilities to ensure the quality of education and training provided by the Montgomery GI Bill.

I want to thank the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH), our chairman; and the gentleman from Florida (Mr. BILIRAKIS), our vice chairman; and our chairman of the subcommittee, the gentleman from Idaho (Mr. SIMPSON); and the ranking member of the subcommittee, the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER) for their contributions to this very important legislation.

Mr. Speaker, what we are seeing here today is the best of bipartisanship under the leadership that we have come together on to help our veterans. It not only is a reflection of this committee and its leadership, but also I think an example for the other committees; and I salute again our chairman and I thank him for his hard work.

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

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my good friend for his comments and for working so well with us on these important bills, the whole package.

Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the distinguished gentleman from Florida (Mr. BILIRAKIS), the vice chairman of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I thank the chairman for yielding me this time, and I thank him and the gentleman from Idaho (Mr. SIMPSON) and the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS) for their kind remarks.

I rise in strong support, Mr. Speaker, of all of the veterans bills we are considering today; however, I do want to focus my remarks, as so many others already have done, on H.R. 4085, the bill at hand.

In addition to providing an annual cost-of-living adjustment to disabled veterans and their survivors, this bill addresses an issue that I have been working on for a number of years. Dependency and indemnity compensation, DIC, is the benefit accorded to the surviving dependents of those members of the Armed Forces who died while on active duty or a service-connected cause. DIC is the only Federal annuity

program that does not allow a widow who is receiving compensation to remarry at an older age and retain her annuity. Last year, I reintroduced legislation which provides that the remarriage of the surviving spouse of a veteran after age 55 should not result in termination of dependency and indemnity compensation.

I have heard, and I am sure we all have, Mr. Speaker, from military widows from across the country who have found someone they would like to spend the rest of their lives with, but cannot afford to do so because of the current law. They have expressed deep frustrations about not being able to remarry. Mr. Speaker, these are people who have sacrificed, who have suffered. I have always said that it is the families who really sacrifice even more and have even more of a burden than the actual person in the military. Many of these women lost their husbands at a very young age and have been alone for a long, long time. They have finally found someone to share their lives with, but they are afraid to remarry because they will lose their DIC benefits.

I would like to thank the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH), the chairman of the committee; the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS), the ranking member; the gentleman from Idaho (Mr. SIMPSON), the chairman of the Subcommittee on Benefits; and the gentleman from Texas (Mr. REYES), the ranking member of the subcommittee; and primarily the majority and minority staffs for working with me to include a DIC remarriage provision in H.R. 4085. Due to funding constraints, my original provision had to be modified. The legislation we are considering today provides that remarriage of a surviving spouse of a veteran after age 65 should not result in termination of DIC or eligibility for CHAMPVA medical care, education and housing loan benefits.

Those surviving spouses that remarried after age 65, prior to the enactment of this legislation, will have 1 year, and I hope that we will continue to get this word to them, will have 1 year from the date of enactment to reapply for benefits.

While we all would have preferred to be able to allow for remarriage at an earlier age, I do believe that the bill before us will provide a significant benefit to the surviving spouses of veterans. As I understand it, there will be report language requiring the VA to track the number of spouses applying for reinstatement of benefits, which should provide our committee with more accurate data than is currently available.

□ 1500

It is my hope that we will be able to readdress this issue in the future, and adjust the remarriage age from 65 to 55 to bring the DIC program in line with other Federal annuity programs.

I also urge my colleagues to support H.R. 4085 and other veterans' bills before us today.

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

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the distinguished gentleman from New York (Mr. GILMAN), chairman emeritus of the Committee on International Relations.

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

Mr. GILMAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of H.R. 4085, the Veterans Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2002. I commend our distinguished chairman of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH), the ranking member of the committee, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS), and the gentleman from Florida (Mr. BILIRAKIS), for their strong support of this measure.

This measure authorizes a cost-of-living adjustment to the veterans who receive disability compensation and dependency and indemnity compensation to the surviving spouses of our prisoners of war who received complete disability at time of death due to service-related injuries. This will be effective as of December 1 of this year.

Congress has approved an annual cost-of-living adjustment to these veterans and survivors since 1976.

This legislation also provides that remarriage of the surviving spouse of a veteran after age 65 will not result in any termination of any dependency and indemnity compensation eligibility for CHAMPVA medical care, education, and housing loan benefits.

Those surviving spouses who remarried after age 65 prior to enactment of the bill will have 1 year from the date of enactment to reapply for these benefits.

This measure also provides that, through fiscal year 2006, the home loan fees charged qualifying members of the selected reserve be equal to those fees charged to active duty veterans.

Finally, the measure increases veterans' mortgage life insurance coverage from \$90,000 to \$150,000, allowing veterans over the age of 70 to continue coverage under veterans' mortgage life insurance, a very important measure.

Mr. Speaker, I believe this is meritorious legislation, and an appropriate and deserving response by this legislative body to the sacrifices made by our Nation's veterans and their families, especially those recently engaged in our war on terrorism.

I urge my colleagues to fully support this measure.

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the gentleman from New York (Chairman GILMAN) for his comments. Although not a member of the committee, he is

ever faithful on veterans' legislation, always here, and we thank him for his contribution.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 4085.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. LATOURETTE). Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from New Jersey?

There was no objection.

Mr. HASTINGS of Florida. Mr. Speaker, this bill on the floor today will significantly improve the lives of the veterans who have served us so honorably. H.R. 4085, the Veterans Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act, provides an annual cost-of-living increase for veterans, and increases compensation for disabled veterans and their dependents and survivors. The committee estimates that the increase will be 2.3%. This bill also increases indemnity compensation for survivors of certain service-connected disabled veterans. Of significance in this legislation is the measure providing that the surviving spouse of a veteran who remarries after the age 65 would not lose his or her dependency and indemnity compensation payments, eligibility for medical care, or education and housing loan benefits. Also, that veterans over age 70 could maintain coverage under this program, which currently is canceled at age 70.

This bill before us supports our veterans and I believe this legislation will significantly improve their lives. I urge my distinguished colleagues on both sides of the aisle to join me in supporting this legislation.

Ms. CARSON of Indiana. Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank Chairman SMITH and Ranking Member EVANS for their hard work in corraling all these important and diverse provisions and including them into one bill that covers all aspects of veterans and their survivors life.

Increasing the funding for the state approving agencies by \$4 million a year will help the Indiana State Department of Veterans Affairs determine if the beneficiaries of the Montgomery GI Bill are getting the education promised to them when they entered service for our nation. The 5,216 Hoosier veterans who used GI Bill payments for their education deserve the best education we can give.

Reservists would be offered VA home loans at the same cost that active duty military receive. Today's military is more dependent on our nation's citizen soldiers serving in the Reserves than ever. They could be called up to serve overseas or across the country, away from their families and their homes for extended periods of time. It is only right that all men and women who put their lives on the line for this country be eligible for these home loans. The men and women from Indiana, who live and work there, whose kids go to school and they pay taxes deserve the same rights as active duty military.

The spouse of a veteran suffered and served for our country almost as much as the veteran. They took care of the family and moving the house from base to base across the country so the servicemember could focus on his or her job for this nation. If widowed, and they find someone special with whom to

spend the rest of their days, one worry they should not have is about their benefits. This bill will rectify that worry by allowing surviving spouses to retain benefits if they remarry at 65.

Most importantly, Mr. Speaker, is the increase in the cost of living adjustment for disabled veterans. The veterans of Indiana with service connected disabilities will appreciate an increase in their cost of living allowance, to allow them to be able to afford what could be considered the smaller things in life, but which make the quality of life more enjoyable. This increase will be tied to the increase in Social Security benefits, which is estimated to be 2.3% on December 1, 2002, when this COLA will go into effect.

Mr. Speaker, I support this bill and support the veterans of Indiana and this country.

Mr. REYES. Mr. Speaker, I thank our Committee Chairman, CHRIS SMITH, our Democratic Ranking Member, LANE EVANS, and my good friend MIKE SIMPSON, Chairman of the Subcommittee on Benefits, for their work in promptly bringing H.R. 4085 to the floor. It is always good to see members of this Committee from both sides of the aisle working together to improve benefits for our Nation's veterans and their family members.

I am pleased that we will again be increasing the monthly benefit paid to disabled veterans and their survivors according to increases in the consumer price index. We must never allow the value of compensation paid to our Nation's veterans to decrease because of changes in the cost of living.

I support the provision drawn from H.R. 1108 which would allow the surviving spouses of veterans who remarry after age 65 to retain their Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) and related benefits. I am pleased that the amended bill includes, as I requested, the small number of survivors receiving benefits under the older death compensation program. I also believe that surviving spouses who have already remarried after age 65 should have an opportunity to have benefits reinstated if they request reinstatement within one year after enactment of the bill. I would prefer that the age at which remarriage would be allowed be 55, as Mr. BILIRAKIS, the author of the original bill, requested. Nonetheless, I recognize the difficulty in obtaining accurate cost estimates from the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) when a new program, without historical data is proposed. As CBO stated the cost of this program "could be much higher or much lower, depending upon the portion of eligible people that apply for this benefit." I believe that the cost will be much lower and expect that data concerning the new program will provide us with a more realistic basis on which to cost future legislation to make the age at which remarriage is allowed, consistent with other federal programs.

I agree with my friend the distinguished Ranking Member of the Full Committee, LANE EVANS, that Members of the Selected Reserve should not be required to pay an extra fee in order to qualify for a home loan through the Department of Veterans Affairs. As the attached sheet "Comparison of Fiscal Year Liquidation Rates Reservists vs All Others" indicates, the foreclosure rates for reservists is more than a full percentage point lower than all others. As we ask Members of the Selected Reserve to assume more and more responsibility for national defense, we must provide

them with commensurate benefits. I support removing the additional and unjustified funding fee imposed on the Selected Reserve, as provided by H.R. 2095, for three years and hope that funding will enable us to make this reduction permanent in the future.

Mr. Speaker, no one has a stronger claim on the public fisc, than those veterans who have been severely disabled as a result of their military service. The provisions in H.R. 4085, drawn from Mr. FILNER'S bill, H.R. 2222, will provide veterans who qualify for the Vet-

erans' Mortgage Life Insurance (VMLI) programs, closer toward the goal of meeting the needs of these veterans in the 21st century. By increasing the amount of the mortgage insurance to \$150,000, and by eliminating the current requirement that the insurance be terminated at age 70, our severely disabled veterans will be assured that in the event of their death, their home mortgage can be paid off. If we can not afford to help our Nation's most severely disabled veterans, who can we afford to help?

As an original cosponsor with our Subcommittee Chairman, MIKE SIMPSON, our Full Committee Chairman CHRIS SMITH, and our Ranking Democratic Member, LANE EVANS, I fully support additional funding for the State Approving Agencies. When we ask that agencies assume additional responsibilities, Congress must provide the resources to see that those responsibilities can be met.

I urge all Members of the House to support our Nation's veterans and this bipartisan bill.

COMPARISON OF FISCAL YEAR LIQUIDATION RATES RESERVISTS VERSUS ALL OTHERS AS OF END OF MONTH, MARCH 2002

Fiscal year*	Total guaranteed	Total fore-closed	%	All others				Reservists				Reservist rate compared to All Others Rate	
				Total No.	% of total	Frcl		Total No.	% of total	Frcl			
						No.	%			No.	%		
2001	265,306	83	0.03	256,858	96.8	82	0.03	8,448	3.2	1	0.01	62.9%	Lower
2000	184,494	1,227	0.67	177,645	96.3	1,196	0.67	6,849	3.7	31	0.45	32.8%	Lower
1999	403,936	5,508	1.36	391,069	96.8	5,385	1.38	12,867	3.2	123	0.96	30.6%	Lower
1998	408,930	9,946	2.43	395,332	96.7	9,707	2.46	13,598	3.3	239	1.76	28.4%	Lower
1997	260,326	10,946	4.20	250,310	96.2	10,668	4.26	10,016	3.8	278	2.78	34.9%	Lower
1996	314,825	19,427	6.17	303,878	96.5	18,939	6.23	10,947	3.5	488	4.46	28.5%	Lower
1995	249,670	17,110	6.85	240,345	96.3	16,645	6.93	9,325	3.7	465	4.99	28.0%	Lower
1994	493,441	29,018	5.88	483,474	98.0	28,534	5.90	9,967	2.0	484	4.86	17.7%	Lower
1993	475,038	27,593	5.81	469,346	98.8	27,327	5.82	5,692	1.2	266	4.67	19.7%	Lower
	3,055,966	120,858	3.95	2,968,257	97.1	118,483	3.99	87,709	2.9	2,375	2.71	32.2%	Lower

*Based on Date of Loan. (AMH-26A2B) 5/02/2002.
Source: SAS GILFYLIQ. File: H:\gy-26\265\26A2B\excel\reservist and service frcl rates.xls

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. 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 New Jersey (Mr. SMITH) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 4085, as amended.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds of those present have voted in the affirmative.

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. 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.

ROBERT J. DOLE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS MEDICAL CENTER

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 4608) to name the Department of Veterans Affairs medical center in Wichita, Kansas, as the "Robert J. Dole Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center," as amended.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 4608

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. NAME OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS MEDICAL AND REGIONAL OFFICE CENTER, WICHITA, KANSAS.

The Department of Veterans Affairs Medical and Regional Office Center in Wichita, Kansas, shall after the date of the enactment of this Act be known and designated as the "Robert J. Dole Department of Veterans Affairs Medical and Re-

gional Office Center". Any reference to such medical center in any law, regulation, map, document, record, or other paper of the United States shall be considered to be a reference to the Robert J. Dole Department of Veterans Affairs Medical and Regional Office Center.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH) and the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH).

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from Kansas (Mr. MORAN), the chief sponsor of this legislation and chairman of the Subcommittee on Health of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

Mr. MORAN of Kansas. Mr. Speaker, I am proud to sponsor H.R. 4608 to name the Department of Medical Affairs Medical and Regional Office Center in Wichita, Kansas the Robert J. Dole Department of Veterans Affairs Medical and Regional Office Center.

Though he is often remembered today for his service to our country as a congressman, a U.S. Senator, and a Presidential contender, Bob Dole's courage and determination on the field of battle in World War II as a second lieutenant is what we are here today to recognize. His bravery in battle truly reflects the character of this Kansan.

Dole is a native of Russell, Kansas, population 4,500, just 25 miles from my hometown. As an energetic young man, Dole gained popularity with the young and old in that Russell community while working at the local soda fountain. A good student and a good athlete in high school, Dole had little trouble enrolling at the University of Kansas to pursue his lifelong dream of becoming a physician.

But Dole's life, like the lives of millions of other men and women of his generation, was changed when the U.S.

entered World War II. Never before had there been such an assault on our country's way of life, and America was calling on its young men and women to fight to defend our freedoms.

In 1942, while a sophomore at the University of Kansas, Dole enlisted in the U.S. Army. After attending basic training in Texas, he was eager to defend his country, and transferred to the Army Specialized Training Program in New York City. It did not take long for Dole to establish himself as a leader. He was accepted into Officer Candidate School, and traveled to Georgia for his training. He entered as a corporal and graduated 2 years later in 1944 as Second Lieutenant Robert J. Dole. He was then sent to Italy in the midst of some of the fiercest fighting toward the end of World War II.

That next spring, Dole was assigned to head a platoon in the Tenth Mountain Division after the previous lieutenant in charge had been killed. On an April morning that spring, Dole led his troops into battle in northern Italy. In his own words, Dole describes that day, a day that would forever change his life. I quote Bob Dole:

"On the morning of April 14, we were part of a major assault. Pinned down by sniper and small-arms fire, I chose a small squad to help me find a safer route up the slope. We ran into a hail of German machine gunfire. I tossed a grenade at a farmhouse from which the bullets were spraying, and then pulled the lifeless form of my platoon's radio-man into a foxhole. Scrambling back out again, I felt a sharp sting in my back. Most likely it was an exploding shell that smashed my right shoulder, scattering metal fragments along its path.

"I lay down in the dirt, paralyzed from the neck down, until Technical Sergeant Frank Carafa dragged me to safety. My second in command, Sergeant Stan Kuschik, gave me a shot of