

The title of the resolution was amended so as to read: "Resolution recommending the integration of the Slovak Republic into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)."

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

#### VETERANS' COMPENSATION COST-OF-LIVING ADJUSTMENT ACT OF 2002

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and concur in the Senate amendments to the bill (H.R. 4085) to amend title 38, United States Code, to provide a cost-of-living increase in the rates of compensation for veterans with service-connected disability and dependency and indemnity compensation for surviving spouses of such veterans, to expand certain benefits for veterans and their survivors, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read 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 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 section 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.*

##### SEC. 3. 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) of section 2, as increased pursuant to that section.*

Amend the title so as to read: "An Act to increase, effective as of December 1, 2002, 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 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' Compensation Cost of Living Adjustment Act of 2002, will provide a cost of living adjustment to disabled veterans and surviving spouses. The amount of the increase will be calculated using the same percentage applicable to Social Security benefits. The percentage amount should be announced later on this week and will be around 1.5 to 2 percent. Upon enactment of this vital legislation, all veterans or qualified survivors of veterans who receive disability compensation payments will receive the COLA effective December 1 of this year.

Mr. Speaker, the House originally passed this COLA legislation back in May with a number of other very important provisions. On September 26, however, the Senate struck out those other provisions and sent us back the bill that is before us today. While I am urging my colleagues to support H.R. 4085, as amended, I want to assure them that we are continuing to work with our colleagues in the other body to reach agreement on these other vital provisions.

Specifically, those provisions would:

Authorize dependency and indemnity compensation benefits for the surviving spouse of a veteran who remarries after attaining the age of 65. These surviving spouses would also be eligible for supplemental VA-sponsored health coverage, education, and housing loan benefits to the same extent as if they had not remarried.

We also saw a provision stripped out that we again will seek to find another home that reduced the home loan fee charges qualifying members of the Selected Reserve to the same level charged active-duty veterans.

We also had a provision dealing with increased veterans' mortgage life insurance coverage from \$90,000 to

\$150,000; and authorized veterans over the age of 70 to continue coverage under the veterans' mortgage life insurance.

The House bill, Mr. Speaker, also contained a provision to authorize funding for State-approving agencies, the entities that are responsible for certifying schools' eligibility for participation in the Montgomery GI Bill for the next 3 years. Because of the urgency of continuing their funding, following consideration of H.R. 4085, we will shortly take up legislation that provides a 1-year authorization.

Mr. Speaker, as this session draws to a close, I am hopeful that we will see action completed on these and a number of important veterans measures that the House has passed, but that have not been acted on by the other body. Among the House bills still pending in the other body are:

Number one, H.R. 3253, the Department of Veterans Affairs Emergency Preparedness Act of 2002, which would expand the Department of VA's role in homeland security, creating new research centers to counter biological, chemical, and radiological terrorism. H.R. 3253 originally passed the House on May 20 and was subsequently amended and approved by the Senate on August 1. After intensive negotiations with our colleagues in the Senate, a compromise agreement was reached by both sides, and the House agreed to the compromise version on September 17. We are now awaiting action by the Senate on this legislation.

Number two, H.R. 3645, the Veterans Health Care and Procurement Improvement Act of 2002 passed the House on July 22, which would reform VA health care procurement practices, expand access to VA health care services to Filipino veterans, World War II veterans, and provide additional dental services to former POWs.

Number three, H.R. 4015, the Jobs for Veterans Act, passed the House on May 21 and would reform veterans job training and placement programs in the Department of Labor through a new system of incentives and accountability.

Number four, H.R. 3423 would reform eligibility for burial at Arlington National Cemetery and was passed by the House on December 20 of last year. This legislation makes a couple of commonsense changes to recognize that reservists who die in the line of duty or who would qualify for burial but for their age at death, deserve the honor of an Arlington burial should they and their families so choose.

Number five, H.R. 4940, the Arlington National Cemetery Burial Eligibility Act, passed the House on July 22nd. This is the third time that the House has approved a comprehensive review and overhaul of Arlington's rules, and we will continue to work with our colleagues in the other body on this major legislation.

Number six, H.R. 5055, legislation to authorize a memorial marker in Arlington National Cemetery honoring

veterans who fought in the Battle of the Bulge. That passed on July 22 as well. We have a preliminary agreement with our Senate colleagues on this and look forward to working with them and taking final action on that before this session closes sine die.

Number seven, H.R. 811, the Veterans Hospital Emergency Repair Act, which passed the House on March 27, 2001, and H.R. 4514, the Veterans Major Medical Facilities Construction Act of 2002, which passed the House on May 21, are both extremely important pieces of legislation designed to protect and preserve the invaluable infrastructure of the Veterans Health Administration. For the past several years, VA's construction programs have been seriously underfunded. It is imperative that we take action, prompt action, to ensure that hospitals, clinics, research centers, and other VA medical centers are properly maintained and modernized when necessary.

Mr. Speaker, there is still much more important work that we hope to accomplish in the waning days of the 107th Congress. There is already much that has been accomplished. Major new laws were enacted to substantially improve the GI Bill, reinvigorate our Nation's efforts to end homelessness among veterans, to better compensate service-connected veterans and their survivors, as well as dramatically increase funding for veterans health care services. This has indeed been a highly-productive year for veterans legislation in the House, and I salute all of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle for their assistance and their cooperation and for working as a team on behalf of our Nation's veterans.

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

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 4085. This measure provides a cost-of-living increase for our Nation's veterans. It will assure our Nation's veterans that the value of their benefits will not be reduced due to cost-of-living increases. I want to start out by thanking the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH) for his leadership on this bill, as well as many other bills during the session that he alluded to.

I also want to thank the gentleman from Idaho (Mr. SIMPSON), the chairman of the Subcommittee on Benefits, and the gentleman from Texas (Mr. REYES), the ranking democratic member of the subcommittee, for their support of this legislation. This bill deserves the support of every Member of this body, and I urge my colleagues to vote for this legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I also rise today to publicly thank a member of the committee's Democratic staff for her exceptional service to our Nation's veterans. Beth Kilker, executive assistant to the Subcommittee on Benefits, will be retiring this December after almost 25 years of outstanding service to the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs and our Nation's veterans.

Beth began her career working for the FBI. After working for the FBI and the House Select Committee on Assassinations, Beth joined the committee staff in March of 1978 as a staff assistant. She has been a dedicated and effective advocate for our veterans and their families. She is highly respected by veterans' service organizations as well as employees of the Departments of Veterans Affairs, Labor and Defense. Everybody Beth has worked for has become her friend. Committee members will miss Beth's helpfulness, her smile, and her sense of humor as well. Our Nation's veterans will be hurt by losing her presence and the diligent efforts she has made to resolve problems and to bring problems to the attention of VA officials. I want to thank her for her years of great service and her many acts of kindness. Beth, we will miss you deeply and sorrowfully, and we thank you for the years of service you have given to this country.

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

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from New York (Mr. GILMAN).

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

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

Mr. Speaker, I want to commend our chairman of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH), for his wonderful, diligent work on behalf of our veterans throughout our Nation. They have had a great deal of reduction of benefits, of health care, and our chairman has been continually keeping a lookout for whatever he can do to be of assistance to our veterans. He deserves the adulation of all of us for what he is doing.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in support of H.R. 4085. It provides effective cost-of-living adjustments for the rates of our disability compensation for veterans with service-connected disabilities and to the rates of dependency and indemnity compensation for survivors of certain service-connected disabled veterans. That percentage amount is going to be equal to the increase for benefits provided under the Social Security Act, something that is long overdue. It certainly will provide the kind of assistance that is sorely needed by veterans throughout our Nation.

I want to thank our chairman once again for watching over our veterans in his committee and for doing whatever is needed.

Mr. EVANS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3½ minutes to the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER).

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I see the gentleman from New York (Mr. GILMAN) leaving. He has thanked all the members of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

The gentleman from New York has been basically a de facto member of this committee for so long. He has been here for every piece of legislation and has supported our veterans. Not only is the Committee on International Relations going to miss him, but we are going to miss him very much when he retires.

I thank the gentleman very so much on behalf of the Nation's veterans.

Mr. GILMAN. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. FILNER. I yield to the gentleman from New York.

Mr. GILMAN. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for his kind remarks.

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I thank the chairman also for his leadership of the committee and thank the ranking member, the gentleman from Illinois, Mr. EVANS.

As we have listed all the bills we have passed and the Senate has not, it is very disheartening. Maybe we all need to march over there as a group. Anyway, whatever support the chairman needs for getting some action, I am sure all of us on both sides of the aisle would be willing to join him, because he has led us through this whole year in a very incredibly effective way. We need to finish this year with some positive legislation, so please call on us if we can help in any way.

Mr. Speaker, clearly the Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act is a very important piece of legislation. It is to make sure that our veterans who are receiving service-connected compensation benefits and their survivors who are receiving dependency and indemnity compensation do not fall further behind in their compensation. It will have the same percentage as the increase in benefits paid to Social Security beneficiaries.

Mr. Speaker, we know that ever since September 11 we have been especially grateful to our veterans and our public safety officers for their contributions to this Nation, contributions that make it possible for us to live and work in our democracy; but certainly this is something that we have to follow through on, not only just as we recall September 11. When they have become disabled in their service to our Nation, it is our obligation to provide for these men and women when they have fulfilled their military duty.

It is important and vital that we continue to provide incentives for new recruits to our Armed Forces. We must let young men and women know that they, too, will be noticed, their dedication will be provided for, and a grateful Nation will not forget them.

The cost of housing, food, health care, all the basics of living are increasing, so an annual cost-of-living increase for our veterans is critically needed and one important way we can demonstrate our support and our thanks. Let us all vote for H.R. 4085.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to add my thanks to the thanks of the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS) to Beth, Beth

Kilker, who is retiring. She has served, of course, as the executive assistant for our Subcommittee on Benefits, has kept us all in line and has kept us all moving and kept us all in good humor. She knew when to make sure we got all our work done, and she rewarded us with chocolates, sometimes, or other benefits.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to again thank Ms. Kilker for her service. I have heard the words “dedicated” and “effective,” and I think that summarizes it. She has worked for veterans in the years that she has been with our committee. All the veterans of our Nation can join in thanking her for her effective service. I thank Beth Kilker.

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

Mr. Speaker, I want to join my colleagues, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS) and the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER), and really the entire committee on both sides of the aisle, in praising the long and distinguished service of Beth Kilker, Elizabeth Kilker.

Elizabeth Kilker has served with the committee for almost 25 years. I have been on the committee for 22 years, Mr. Speaker. I have known her. I have admired her. She is always a positive force. She has worked with chairmen and ranking members from Texas, Mississippi, Arizona, Arkansas, Illinois, and now New Jersey.

Throughout these years she has been extraordinarily helpful, effective, and always positive, perhaps something she learned at Immaculate Heart Academy in Girardville, Pennsylvania. But she certainly has brought a real sense of class, distinction and is, as I said, a very, very effective person.

The committee has not just been blessed, but the veterans themselves have been blessed. They have been enriched by her service, they will miss her, and may God bless everything that she does going forward.

Mr. UDALL of New Mexico. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of the passage of H.R. 4085, the Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2002. I am proud to be a co-sponsor of this very important legislation.

Throughout the history of our great nation, the members of the U.S. Armed Forces have risen to the challenge of defending our democracy and freedom. However, in retirement and in periods of disability, these brave men, women, or their surviving spouses, frequently face a new challenge—the monthly struggle to make ends meet.

H.R. 4085 will help alleviate these monetary concerns through a cost of living increase in all veterans' benefits, and will provide a greater sense of financial security to spouses that survive the veteran into their older years.

I believe that we must continue to show our well-deserved respect and gratitude to the retired and disabled members of our military forces, and appropriately compensate them and their loved ones for their sacrifices. Accordingly, I would like to reiterate my support for the passage of this important bill.

Mr. REYES. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 4085, the Veterans' and Survivors' Benefits Expansion Act of 2002, of which I am an original cosponsor. This bill increases the rates, through a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA), of veterans' disability compensation for dependants, the clothing allowance for certain disabled adult children, and dependency and indemnity compensation (DIC) for surviving spouses and children. This bill would rightly allow veterans and survivors to receive the same percentage increase in benefits as are paid to Social Security beneficiaries.

I would like to thank the distinguished Chairman of our Committee, Mr. CHRISTOPHER SMITH, as well as the distinguished Ranking Member, Mr. LANE EVANS, for their hard work in bringing this bill to the floor.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to take this opportunity to recognize the service of Ms. Beth Kilker. Beth has been a hardworking member of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee staff for over 20 years. I would like to wish her the best on her retirement and congratulate her for all of her outstanding contributions to the Committee.

Mr. GILMAN. Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate our colleague the distinguished chairman of our Veterans Committee, the gentleman from New Jersey Representative SMITH on H.R. 4085 and the outstanding work he has done in our Veterans Committee. This bill provides a cost-of-living adjustment to the rates of disability compensation for veterans with service-connected disabilities and to the rates of dependency and indemnity compensation for survivors of certain service-connected disabled veterans. The percentage amount will be equal to the increase for benefits provided under the Social Security Act, which is calculated based upon changes in the Consumer Price Index.

The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall increase the dollar amounts in effect for the payment of disability compensation and dependency and indemnity compensation by the Secretary.

This bill allows additional compensation for dependents, clothing allowance, new Disability Indemnity and Compensation (DIC) rates for surviving spouses with minor children, additional DIC for disability and for dependent children.

The Secretary is required to adjust administratively, consistent with the increases made, the rates of disability compensation payable to persons who are not in receipt of compensation payable pursuant to chapter 11.

Our Veterans Committee is commended for recognizing this need for benefits for our veterans and I urge its adoption.

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 back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. CALVERT). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH) that the House suspend the rules and concur in the Senate amendments to the bill, H.R. 4085.

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

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

AMENDING TITLE 38, UNITED STATES CODE, TO INCREASE AMOUNTS AVAILABLE TO STATE APPROVING AGENCIES TO ASCERTAIN QUALIFICATIONS OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 3731) to amend title 38, United States Code, to increase amounts available to State approving agencies to ascertain the qualifications of educational institutions for furnishing courses of education to veterans and eligible persons under the Montgomery GI Bill and under other programs of education administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs, as amended.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 3731

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

**SECTION 1. INCREASE IN AGGREGATE ANNUAL AMOUNT AVAILABLE FOR STATE APPROVING AGENCIES FOR ADMINISTRATIVE EXPENSES FOR FISCAL YEAR 2003.**

(a) IN GENERAL.—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 fiscal year 2003, \$14,000,000”.

(b) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendment made by subsection (a) shall take effect on October 1, 2002.

**SEC. 2. FEE FOR LOAN ASSUMPTION.**

(a) IN GENERAL.—(1) For the period described in paragraph (2), the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall apply section 3729(b)(2)(I) of title 38, United States Code, by substituting “1.00” for “0.50” each place it appears.

(2) The period referred to in paragraph (1) is the period that begins on the date of the enactment of this Act and ends on September 30, 2003.

(b) TECHNICAL AMENDMENT.—(1) Section 3703(e)(2)(A) of such title is amended by striking “3729(b)” and inserting “3729(b)(2)(I)”.

(2) The amendment made by paragraph (1) shall take effect as if included in the enactment of section 402 of the Veterans Benefits and Health Care Improvement Act of 2000 (Public Law 106-419, 114 Stat. 1861).

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, as chairman of the committee, I rise in strong support of H.R. 3731, as amended, which would increase funding for State approving agencies from \$13 million to \$14 million for fiscal year 2003.

Since World War II, Mr. Speaker, Congress has relied on the SAAs to ensure the quality of education and training offered to our Nation's veterans