

The heroes of Israeli independence who prevailed against overwhelming odds;

And all those who have defended Israel through decades of struggle and sacrifice, including a fallen hero Americans and Israelis mourned together—Space Shuttle Columbia astronaut Colonel Ilan Ramon, who literally took the Torah to the stars.

This is the spirit that defines the American-Israeli partnership. America stands with Israel now. America will stand with Israel forever.

We will never abandon Israel. We will never abandon Israel.

God bless you. God bless our men and women serving on the frontlines today. And God bless our special relationship between the United States of America and the State of Israel.

## VETERANS EARN AND LEARN ACT

### HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 10, 2003

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, today I am pleased to introduce H.R. 1716, the Veterans Earn and Learn Act. Joining me as original cosponsors are Ranking Member LANE EVANS, and the chairman and ranking member of the Benefits Subcommittee, HENRY BROWN and MICHAEL MICHAUD, respectively.

#### WHY THIS BILL

This measure promotes veterans' employment. It would modernize the on job training (OJT) and apprenticeship programs administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to reflect American business and industry today. H.R. 1716 applies to the following VA educational assistance programs: the All-Volunteer Force Educational Assistance Program (Montgomery GI Bill—Active Duty), chapter 30, title 38 United States Code (U.S.C.); the Post-Vietnam Era Veterans Educational Assistance Program, chapter 32, title 38, U.S.C.; the Vietnam-Era Veterans Educational Assistance Program, chapter 34, title 38, U.S.C.; the Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance Program, chapter 35, title 38, U.S.C., and the Educational Assistance for Members of the Selected Reserve Program, (Montgomery GI Bill—Selected Reserve), chapter 1606, title 10, U.S.C. My colleagues and I intend to introduce a separate bill to modernize Training and Rehabilitation for Veterans with Service-Connected Disabilities under chapter 31, title 38, U.S.C.

I want VA's on-job training and apprenticeship program to reflect today's workplace. I have consulted extensively with representatives of organized labor, business, and industry to obtain their suggestions for improving the design of VA's program. Congress essentially has not changed it since World War II, and we should do so now. I also have consulted informally with VA and the Department of Labor (DOL), in addition to selected states to learn of their experiences in administering these programs. This bill reflects many of their suggestions.

VA's current OJT and apprenticeship programs pay veterans to learn while they earn. Rates for the various chapters differ somewhat, but in general, for the first six months veterans receive a monthly benefit of \$675; for the second six months \$496 monthly, and for the remainder of training \$315 monthly. Con-

gress furnishes these amounts to offset the difference between the training wage and the wage of the fully-trained employee. OJT can last for up to two years. Apprenticeships often last as much as five years.

#### OUR CHALLENGE

Mr. Speaker, classroom training is well known and established under VA's various educational assistance programs, including the current Montgomery GI Bill. But the on job training and apprenticeship opportunities under these programs appear less known and are less used than the college classroom. For example, of the 263,175 veterans using the Montgomery GI Bill (chapter 30) in fiscal year 2001, only 11,277 (4.2 percent) were participating in on-job training and apprenticeship.

Under Secretary for Benefits Daniel L. Cooper advised me by letter on September 11, 2002, that the OJT-apprenticeship "low participation rate is not due to a low number of employers but a low veteran participation. The number of participating employers is constantly changing, but State approving agencies are currently reporting about 7,000 employers who offer one or more VA-approved OJT or apprenticeship programs. Only about 2,200, or not quite 32 percent, have at least one veteran in training and receiving VA education benefits for the training." This is unacceptable. I intend to contact the Secretary of Labor and ask her to place more veterans in these jobs as soon as possible. I also note that 7.2 percent of veterans who used the Vietnam-era GI Bill trained through apprenticeship or OJT. For World War II veterans, about 18 percent trained in this manner. We must do better.

DOL reports that 858 occupations in America offer apprenticeships. Apprenticeable occupations can be categorized as follows: arts; business and administrative support; installation, maintenance and repair; production; science, drafting and computing; and service. Occupations range from boilermaker to bricklayer, carpenter to cook, electrician to emergency medical technician, and pipefitter to police officer.

The state of Missouri is showing the way. Missouri's aggressive efforts to place veterans into OJT and apprenticeships with Missouri employers produces about \$38 million annually in VA education and training benefits. Pennsylvania is reporting similar success. The Governor of Pennsylvania sends each separating servicemember a letter to encourage use of VA education and training benefits.

#### EARNING AND LEARNING

About two-thirds of active-duty servicemembers are married when they separate from the military. "Earning and learning" on the job through an OJT or apprenticeship program approved for veterans' training can be an excellent way for a servicemember to make the transition to civilian life. Because some military occupational skills are not transferable to the civilian economy, the veteran will have to train for a new occupation, or retrain to transfer their military skill to the civilian market. Veterans with military job skills that are transferable to civilian life benefit as well. They can continue working and training on-the-job while meeting the necessary licensing and certification requirements. Employers benefit because hiring veterans is plain and simple a good business decision.

The resourcefulness and reliability former servicemembers bring to the workplace is exemplary. As First Lady Laura Bush has noted,

veterans bring something else to the workplace that is hard to find—"the greatest in character, commitment, and resolve."

#### WHAT OUR BILL WOULD DO

Mr. Speaker, here is what the Veterans Earn and Learn Act would accomplish:

Section one would state Congressional purposes for VA's OJT and apprenticeship programs in both the private and public sectors of our economy. These include: helping employers hire and retain skilled workers; establishing a link between training afforded to servicemembers while serving in the Armed Forces and training available in civilian settings for purposes of occupational licensing and credentialing; and developing a more highly educated and productive workforce.

Section two would modify OJT and apprenticeship benefit entitlements computation under the chapter 34 and 35 programs to be the same as the entitlement rate for the chapter 30, 32 and 1606 programs. Under current law, VA calculates chapter 30, 32, and 1606 programs based on monthly VA payment amounts rather than based on the amount of time spent in training. This "dollars used" versus "time spent" method helps the trainee conserve entitlement while participating in the OJT or apprenticeship program. This approach makes additional entitlement available for other educational pursuits, such as earning an associate degree in a specialized technology or meeting other licensing or credentialing requirements.

Section three would establish an incentive payment for program participants who finish their apprenticeship training early. As an incentive for trainees to complete their apprenticeship or attain journeyworker status early, our bill would require VA to pay the trainee a lump sum payment for the months of VA entitlement remaining that would have been needed to complete the apprenticeship. This approach would remove the current disincentive to gain journeyworker status in competency-based apprenticeships as soon as the veteran is ready.

Section four would increase the monthly VA benefit for trainees who simultaneously pursue apprenticeships or on-job training and related post-secondary classroom education training. This provision would apply whether the trainee was pursuing both forms of training as a requirement of the apprenticeship or voluntarily under the trainee's own initiative. For example, under this measure, the total VA would pay for simultaneous training could not exceed the full-time classroom rate, which currently is \$900 per month. Current law increases the benefit to \$985 per month on October 1, 2003.

Section five would codify and strengthen VA authority to pay benefits for competency-based apprenticeships. In today's workplace, apprenticeships may be structured based upon a specific period of time, commonly known as a time-based program. Apprenticeships may also be based on the demonstration of successful mastery of skills, commonly known as a competency-based program, or training may be based upon a combination of the two. In the case of a competency-based learning program, the bill requires VA to take into consideration the approximate term of the program recommended in registered apprenticeship program standards recognized by the Secretary of Labor. Apprenticeships offered in industries that choose not to register with the Secretary of Labor, and that are approved for

veterans' training by a state approving agency, would continue to serve as legitimate training and learning opportunities for beneficiaries. This section would also furnish the VA Secretary the authority to use up to \$3 million to develop the computer systems and procedures needed to carry out provisions of the bill.

Section six would require the VA Secretary to establish a pilot program to furnish on-job benefits to claims adjudicators training in its disability compensation, dependency and indemnity (DIC), and pension programs. I note that two of VA's four regional offices that adjudicate educational assistance claims offer such training. This pilot is unique because it would waive the current two-year maximum for on-job training. VA employees who adjudicate disability, DIC, and pension claims require three years to qualify as journeymen. I believe this provision has the potential to increase VA's ability to recruit and retain former servicemembers in these important positions, especially given the aging of VA's workforce.

Section seven would require certain coordination of information among the Departments of Veterans Affairs, Defense, and Labor with respect to on-job training. This provision would do two things. First, at the time of a servicemember's separation from active duty, the Secretary of Defense would be required to furnish to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs information concerning each registered apprenticeship pursued by the servicemember during his or her active duty service. Second, it would require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, in conjunction with the Secretary of Labor, to encourage and assist states and private organizations to accord credit to servicemembers for skills in any related apprenticeship the servicemember may pursue in civilian life. I applaud the Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard for moving in this direction through its U.S. Military Apprenticeship Program (USMAP). But more can be done.

#### LEADERSHIP

Mr. Speaker, leadership abounds in serving America's sons and daughters who have protected our freedoms. Let me mention just a few examples:

The Non Commissioned Officers Association of the United States for some 30 years has held job fairs for separating servicemembers at home, as well as abroad;

The American Legion, through its Economic Commission, has played a major leadership role in creating opportunities to help veterans meet civilian licensing and credentialing requirements;

The U.S. Army Ordnance Corps, on its own initiative, has exhibited leadership in linking training of its soldiers in many military specialties with civilian licensing and credentialing bodies so military time will count toward such requirements;

The AFL-CIO's Center for Military Recruitment, Assessment and Veterans Employment, has initiated its Helmets to Hard Hats program in its Building and Construction Trades Department to link veterans possessing construction/building trades skills to learn-and-earn opportunities with companies nationwide;

The Communication Workers of America has an on-going initiative to connect high-tech employers with high-performing veterans whose military occupational training makes them job-ready immediately;

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Center for Workforce Preparation has initiated a pilot

program in San Diego called 'Operation Transition' to examine ways to link veterans and their spouses with employers; and

The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States is a partner in the innovative vetsjobs.com program.

#### PARTNERS

Mr. Speaker, lastly I'd like to commend the many organizations that have offered suggestions for this bill:

AFL-CIO; American Portland Cement Alliance; Associated Building and Contractors, Inc.; Associated General Contractors of America; College and University Professional Association for Human Resources; Communication Workers of America; International Union of Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers; International Brotherhood of Teamsters; International Organization of Masters, Mates, and Pilots; Iron Workers International; Labor Policy Association; Laborers' International Union of North America; Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education; National Association of Manufacturers; National Association of State Approving Agencies; Nebraska Department of Education; Pennsylvania Department of Education; Sheet Metal Workers International Association; Society for Human Resource Management; Transport Union of America; United Association of Journeymen and Apprentices of the Plumbing, Pipefitting, and Sprinkler Fitting Industry; United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America; and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

I encourage my colleagues to add their names in support of this timely legislation.

#### TRIBUTE TO THE BOULDER CITY FIRE DEPARTMENT

#### HON. JON C. PORTER

OF NEVADA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 10, 2003

Mr. PORTER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate the Boulder City Fire Department for obtaining a Class 2 Insurance Service Offices, ISO, rating. The ISO Class 2 rating is obtained by less than one percent of the fire departments in the country and is made possible by the dedication and skill of Boulder City Fire Chief Dean Molburg and the firemen of Boulder City.

As a former mayor of Boulder City, and its current Congressman, I am proud that Boulder City has been recognized for its excellent fire coverage. The courage and commitment to public service shown every day by Boulder City firefighters is an example for all of us. They, and all Nevada first responders, have my thanks and full support.

REGARDING: (ARMY SGT. EDWARD  
J. ANGUIANO)

#### HON. SOLOMON P. ORTIZ

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 10, 2003

Mr. ORTIZ. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to Sgt. Edward J. Anguiano, a missing soldier from Los Fresnos, Texas. Sgt. Anguiano, assigned to the 3rd Combat Support Battalion out of Ft. Stewart, GA, is an

Army mechanic who graduated from Hanna High School.

The 24-year-old serviceman has not been seen since his convoy was ambushed March 29 in Iraq. He remains one of the few U.S. soldiers whose status is unresolved.

His mother's anguish is evident in her question the day she was told Edward was missing: "Does it mean that he is dead and they can't find him or that he is alive and they can't find him? What does that mean?" That is a painful limbo for a parent and family.

There's a yellow ribbon tied to a tree in front of Edward's home on Melon Street for him. He is one of several soldiers believed captured by Iraqis in an ambush on their supply convoy at An Nasiriyah in southern Iraq.

Edward, like all the servicemen for our nation, is an outstanding and brave young man. This soft-spoken soldier is a survivor who is motivated, disciplined, and attentive—all traits his family is depending on to help him survive in captivity.

His family is clinging to the memory of the last time they saw him, at Christmas.

His family has said that Edward did not express fear of battle or doubts about serving in the military. He was doing what he wanted to be doing. They are finding strength in their faith and through prayer.

I ask my colleagues to remember Sgt. Edward J. Anguiano and continue to pray that he is found soon. Please pray, too, for his family: his mother, San Juanita Anguiano; his two sisters, Rebecca and Jennifer Garzoria; and his uncle, Vicente Anguiano Jr.—a veteran like so many other family members.

#### ADDRESS OF MAJORITY LEADER TOM DELAY ON RECEIVING THE FRIEND OF ISRAEL AWARD

#### HON. TOM LANTOS

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 10, 2003

Mr. LANTOS. Mr. Speaker, I would like to call the attention of my colleagues to an outstanding speech given by Majority Leader Tom DeLay. His remarks were made when he received the "Friend of Israel Award" at the Washington Briefing of Stand for Israel—an organization under the aegis of the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews. This statement is of unmistakable importance in its application of American values and moral clarity to the political problems of the Middle East.

Mr. Speaker, the acts of terrorists—blowing up school buses, bombing markets, killing innocent children—are unmatched in their cowardice. I fully share Congressman DeLay's belief that murderers should neither be trusted nor rewarded for their crimes. He eloquently stated: "As a friend of Israel, and a lover of liberty for all God's children, we must reject any suggestion that its government negotiation from weakness, stand on an even moral footing with suicide bombers or trust the promises of terrorists." These words should serve as the foundation of U.S. Peacemaking in the Middle East.

Majority Leader DELAY understands that there can be no such thing as even-handedness between good and evil. As Americans we can do nothing less. America did not