

or affect the Federal Reserve Board's ability under its pricing principles to determine what constitutes a major service category.

The House recedes to the Senate on a funds availability study.

EVALUATION AND REPORT BY THE  
COMPTROLLER GENERAL

*House Bill*

The House bill contains no similar provision.

*Senate Amendment*

Section 16 of the Senate amendment provides for the Comptroller General of the United States to evaluate the implementation and administration of this bill within 5 years.

*Conference Agreement*

The House recedes to the Senate.

DEPOSITARY SERVICES EFFICIENCY AND COST  
REDUCTION

*House Bill*

The House bill contains no similar provision.

*Senate Amendment*

The Senate amendment contains no similar provision.

*Conference Agreement.*

The Conference Agreement includes language requested by the Department of Treasury which authorizes the Treasury Department to directly compensate financial institutions that provide depository services to the Federal Government.

Additionally, the Conference Agreement includes language requested by Federal Reserve Board to effect technical changes to the Federal Reserve Act in the way currency is collateralized which will allow for greater liquidity in case of a national emergency.

EFFECTIVE DATE

*House Bill*

Section 15 establishes the effective date as 18 months after the date of enactment.

*Senate Amendment*

Section 18 establishes the effective date as 12 months after the date of enactment.

*Conference Agreement*

The House recedes to the Senate.

For consideration of the House bill and the Senate amendment, and modifications committed to conference:

MICHAEL G. OXLEY,  
SPENCER BACHUS,  
STEVEN C. LATOURETTE,  
MELISSA A. HART,  
PATRICK J. TIBERI,  
BARNEY FRANKS,  
HAROLD E. FORD, JR.,

*Managers on the Part of the House.*

RICHARD C. SHELBY,  
ROBERT F. BENNETT,  
WAYNE ALLARD,  
PAUL S. SARBANES,  
TIM JOHNSON,

*Managers on the Part of the Senate.*

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from New York (Mr. TOWNS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. TOWNS addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from New York (Mrs. MALONEY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mrs. MALONEY. addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

CALLING ON REPUBLICAN LEADERSHIP TO BRING H.R. 303, A BILL TO END CONCURRENT RECEIPT, TO THE FLOOR OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 7, 2003, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WATERS) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Ms. WATERS. Madam Speaker, I rise this afternoon to talk about an issue of fundamental unfairness which burdens many of our veterans: concurrent receipt. I organized this Special Order to focus attention on the unfairness of the concurrent receipt law and to give Members the opportunity to demand that the Republican leadership bring to the floor H.R. 303, the bill that would end concurrent receipt.

Madam Speaker, today we will hear Democratic Members from districts throughout the Nation call for an end of concurrent receipt. Concurrent receipt is a Civil War-era law that prevents disabled veterans from receiving both military retirement and veterans disability benefits. Under the law, for every dollar that a veteran receives in disability pay, \$1 is taken away from their retirement pay. The effect of the concurrent receipt law is to tax a veteran for being injured while serving in the military. This is an extremely unfair burden that we place on our wounded veterans.

Madam Speaker, America's veterans have made huge sacrifices in order to protect our freedoms. We should not repay their sacrifice by denying them the benefits they have earned and deserve. Congress must repeal the concurrent receipt law.

Over the past several years, there has been a strong bipartisan effort to repeal this law. In this Congress, the bill to repeal concurrent receipt, H.R. 303, has 370 cosponsors. The gentleman from Florida (Mr. BILIRAKIS), a long-time Republican Member, is a sponsor of H.R. 303. Madam Speaker, 370 cosponsors is an extraordinary number of cosponsors for any bill. As all of us know, there are few bills introduced in this body that have 370 cosponsors. There are even fewer bills that do not come to the floor for action by Members of the House.

Yet despite this tremendous bipartisan support, the House Republican leadership, as well as the White House, has refused to support this bill. In fact, the Secretary of Defense has said that he would recommend that the President veto any legislation that includes language which would eliminate concurrent receipt. The House Republican leadership continues to ignore the will of the Members, and our constituents, and refuses even to allow H.R. 303 to come to the floor for action.

The opponents of this bill say that it will cost too much money. They cite a study from the Congressional Budget Office which estimates that it would cost the Federal Government \$3 billion

in fiscal year 2004 to cover the 400,000 eligible veterans. It is incredible that the opponents would offer such a poor excuse for why they refuse even to bring this bill to the floor.

□ 1745

Give me a break.

Mr. Speaker and Members, the Bush administration has spent almost \$80 billion in Iraq and Afghanistan and is seeking a supplemental appropriation of \$87 billion for the war in Iraq and Iraqi reconstruction. Yet, the administration will not seek the resources required to protect the retirement pay of veterans who had the misfortune of becoming disabled while serving their country. What a cruel, sick joke. These veterans earn their retirement pay, and they deserve both a full retirement benefit and their disability compensation.

We must not walk away from our obligations. How can we put a price on the service that these men and women gave to our country? How can we put a price on going through life without a limb or without the ability to see or hear? They did their job with bravery and dedication. Now, we must do ours. The Federal Government should provide full benefits to veterans who protected our people. Simple fairness and decency requires it.

Because of the opposition of the Republican leadership to this bill, Democrats have had to file a discharge petition in an attempt to bring H.R. 303 to the floor and force consideration of this bill. A successful discharge petition requires 218 signatures. To date, however, even though H.R. 303 has 370 cosponsors, there are only 203 signatures on the discharge petition.

Nearly every Democrat has signed the discharge petition, but only two Republicans have signed. Because of the opposition of the Republican leadership, not even Congressman BILIRAKIS, the sponsor of H.R. 303, has signed the discharge petition.

Mr. Speaker, it is shameful that the Republican leadership has strong-armed their Members into not supporting the discharge petition on H.R. 303 and prevented the Congress from providing this essential relief to our veterans.

The Republican leadership's unfair and outrageous refusal to bring H.R. 303 to the floor for action is harming our veterans and keeping many veterans from obtaining a decent quality of life. Unfortunately, there are hundreds of thousands of veterans suffering under the concurrent receipt law. Because the United States military is committed to missions throughout the world that will result in additional veterans becoming disabled, the number of veterans who will be subjected to this tax will only grow.

Unfortunately, this is only one of the many policies that this administration and the Republican party have adopted which harms our veterans. For example, although it is not uncommon for a

veteran to wait 6 months or more to see a doctor, the Republicans' budget did not provide enough funding to shorten these waiting periods.

Mr. Speaker, it is disappointing to see the President constantly using our veterans for photo-ops, but when it comes to providing the necessary funding to give our veterans a good quality of life, the Republicans are nowhere to be found.

We, Democrats, have another way. We appreciate the sacrifice that all veterans have made and believe that the government must provide the necessary funding for veterans to receive the medical, educational, and other benefits they need and deserve. We particularly appreciate the men and women who were injured while serving their country and believe we should provide them with their full retirement benefits, as well as their full disability compensation.

Mr. Speaker, I urge this body to pass H.R. 303 and help our disabled veterans.

Mr. Speaker, I yield time to the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WOOLSEY).

Ms. WOOLSEY. Madam Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WATERS) for calling this special order together because it is a very important subject.

Today in Iraq, our Nation is creating more than 130,000 veterans. These future veterans are fulfilling their duty to America in a time of war. We must commit to fulfill our own responsibilities to them in times of peace.

Three hundred and seventy Members of the House of Representatives are on record supporting a concurrent receipt bill to provide full health and retirement benefits for our Nation's veterans, but when the time came to actually bring this important legislation before the House of Representatives for a vote, 201 Democrats and only two Republicans signed their names to bring the bill to the floor of the House. It takes 218 names and signatures in order to force the majority party to bring this issue before us.

Concurrent receipt should not be a Democrat issue, and it should not be a Republican issue. Instead, this is an issue of fulfilling our commitment to those who have proven their commitment to us, to our Nation's veterans. The White House has estimated the health and retirement benefits for our veterans will cost \$58 billion over the next 10 years. That is \$6 billion a year to support the troops who have sacrificed for this country.

This is the same President that recently came to the Congress requesting \$87 billion to pay for our war in Iraq that he announced many months ago had ended. The President's \$87 billion supplemental request includes money for museums and memorials in Iraq, radios and phones for Iraqi businesses, and computer training and graduate school for Iraqi citizens. Certainly, we must invest in restoring the stability in a war-torn country, but these pro-

grams are not more important than health care for America's veterans.

What kind of message does this sent to our veterans and our troops currently in the field when the President tells them that paying for Iraqis to go to graduate school is more important than paying for veteran's health care? We are talking about men and women who fought for America, who were wounded for America, who have lost friends who have died for America. But when the time comes to pay their health bills, America's purse is shot. This is worse than irresponsible. It is downright dishonorable.

President Bush said last year that every country around the world, and I quote him, "is either with us or against us," unquote. Our veterans deserve to ask the same question. "Mr. President, are you with America's veterans or against them? Will you fight for them the way they are fighting for you?"

Ms. WATERS. Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. SANDLIN).

Mr. SANDLIN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to ask several questions. Why does the Republican leadership in this House want to put an additional tax on our veterans? Why does the Republican leadership in this House oppose eliminating the disabled veterans tax? Why is it okay to eliminate taxes for millionaires in this country, our most privileged, but not eliminate tax for our veterans? Why is that, Mr. Speaker? Why?

Mr. Speaker, as you know, under current law, disabled American veterans who are entitled to military retirement benefits have their retirement benefits reduced dollar for dollar by the amount they receive in disability payments. Now, they earn their military retirement, and they earn disability pay. However, these amounts are all set against each other.

Why does the Republican leadership and the administration support such a situation for our veterans in this country?

Military retirees and veterans with service-connected disabilities are the only Federal employees subject to this offset and are essentially funding their own disability benefits. They are funding their disability with their own money that they earned serving this country. As a result, the disabled veterans tax, that is supported by the administration and the Republican leadership, subjects our Nation's veterans to worse treatment than any other class of Federal retirees, bar none.

The Bush administration contends that allowing military veterans to draw their earned benefits is too costly, and it competes with funding that we need for other very important matters, such as tax cuts for millionaires.

A dollar is a dollar. While the Republican leadership has concluded that devoting \$58 billion over 10 years to relieve an unconscionable burden for nearly 700,000 of our Nation's veterans

is a budget buster, they see absolutely no problem of giving away approximately \$90 billion over that same period to 184,000 people in this country that are making \$1 million or more per year. The hypocrisy of that is shocking. It is galling, and it is shameful.

The other body is doing the right thing. In its version of the fiscal year 2004 Defense authorization legislation, the Senate has provided for full and immediate disability payments without any offset from the military retirement benefit to which they are entitled. That is doing the right thing.

Mr. Speaker, we can do the right thing in this House. We can stand up for the veterans against the Republican leadership, Mr. Speaker, and against the administration, and say we are going to do the right thing. We are fighting to pass bipartisan legislation on this side, H.R. 303, the Retired Pay Restoration Act, to help the more than 700,000 disabled veterans who are military retirees.

We believe on this side that it is important that our disabled military retirees receive both the disability pay and retirement pay that they have earned and that they deserve. It is critical for the administration to stop penalizing our disabled veterans at the very time we have our military in harm's way. We have to stop penalizing disabled veterans, if we are going to fulfill our commitment to those who served the country. Let us respect our veterans. Let us do the right thing and give our veterans what they have earned.

Ms. WATERS. Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from North Dakota (Mr. POMEROY).

Mr. POMEROY. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WATERS) and my colleagues for organizing this very important special order, because I believe the information brought forward in this debate will be of great surprise to most of the people that might happen to listen to this discussion. Certainly, the people I represent in North Dakota, I believe, are largely unaware of the fact that we, essentially, have a disabled veterans tax.

This tax is imposed when you have someone that has earned a military retirement and on the other hand also had a disability payment from service in the military as a result of a service-connected injury resulting in permanent disability. The disabled veterans tax occurs when you have a 100 percent reduction of the retirement benefit by the disability payment receipt.

So let me make it simple. The injured veteran receiving a disability payment would, upon retiring from the military, have their military retirement reduced 100 percent by the amount of the disability payment. Now, if that is not a disabled veterans tax, I do not know what is. And it is completely unacceptable. There is not another classification of Federal employee treated in this fashion. There is

not a civil service employee upon getting their Federal retirement that would have their Federal retirement reduced by their military disability. Only those who have made a career of distinction and honor in serving our military have their retirement reduced 100 percent in the value of the disability benefit received.

We have to change this bill. This is a law that is on the books that is having a pernicious and unfair effect on our veterans. We need to act and we need to act now.

I commend the Republican sponsor of the legislation that wants to address this for bringing this before the Chamber. I am certainly pleased to participate. It ought to be bipartisan, if anything before us should be bipartisan.

□ 1800

Unfortunately, we have seen majority leadership refuse to bring this matter up for a vote. In fact, notwithstanding the very strong support reflected by the number of cosponsors, as reflected by the number of signatures on the discharge petition, we have seen them refuse to allow us for a vote.

Is it not ironic that as we seek to advance this very important relief for our veterans, we are not even allowed a vote on this matter? Our veterans are fighting, have fought, for democracy; our soldiers today are fighting for democracy, and yet when it comes to this important question, the majority leadership is not allowing democracy in this House because they are not allowing us to vote on this proposition.

In order to bust through this deadlock imposed by the majority leadership, we have brought forward a discharge petition which has now been signed by 203 Members of the House, including two Republican Members, all of the Democratic Members and two Republican Members.

I would ask the majority leadership if at least you will not allow us a vote, for goodness sake, discharge your members. Let them vote their conscience by signing a discharge petition and bringing it to the floor over your expressed wishes to the contrary. Let them serve their constituents on this one, not the majority leadership. Let them represent the veterans in their districts that are having their benefits unfairly taxed by the Federal Government.

Finally, if that is too much to ask, if it is too much to ask to bring this to a vote, if it is too much to ask to allow majority leadership to discharge their Members, to sign a discharge petition, then I would say to my friends in the majority, on this one you have to stand with your people irrespective of your leadership. Come up to the well. Sign the discharge petition. You have veterans who are having their retirement benefits reduced and reduced unfairly, reduced for suffering a service-connected disability. This must end.

If your leadership cannot see that, surely you can. And if you have ques-

tions about it, all you have to do is ask the veterans organizations so capably representing the veterans in your district. Ask your American Legion commander what he thinks of this matter. Ask the Veterans of Foreign Wars commander what they think of this matter. Ask the Disabled Veterans of America in your district what they think of this matter. That will quickly bring you to the conclusion that it is time for this tax to end. It is time for this House to have some democracy on this question. It is time for us to vote on getting the veterans the relief they need and they so richly deserve.

I thank the gentlewoman for letting me participate in this discussion.

Ms. WATERS. Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentlewoman from California (Mrs. DAVIS).

Mrs. DAVIS of California. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to urge this body to seriously consider our treatment of those who sacrificed nearly everything for our country. I am referring to America's disabled veterans and the archaic law that prevents them from receiving both their retirement pension and disability compensation, two payments that they earned.

Unfortunately, across our Nation, hundreds of thousands of veterans are denied their full retirement pay because we have yet to correct a senseless law passed 112 years ago. In California's 53rd Congressional District, a district that I am very proud to represent, 2,659 disabled veterans collectively lose out on \$13 million in VA benefits each year.

Since coming to Congress, I have heard from my veterans and I can tell you many of them struggle to get by each month because our government withholds so much from their pensions. Please understand, Mr. Speaker, we are talking about the brave men and women who sustained the most severe injuries to defend this Nation and to protect our liberties.

Take, for example, a 69-year-old Air Force lieutenant colonel from San Diego who has a 100 percent disability rating from exposure to Agent Orange during the Vietnam War. After 28 years of dedication, he retired only to learn that it was true. His hard-earned retirement pay would be offset dollar for dollar from his disability compensation. This proud veteran wrote me just recently and told me that he has finally given up on this government. He has communicated with his elected leaders about this inequity ever since he retired, and unfortunately, he has been told the same thing over and over again. Do not worry. Legislation is pending. We will pass concurrent receipt soon and take care of this for you.

Well, Mr. Speaker, it has been 17 years since he retired and nothing has been done. It is time to show our disabled veterans that we value the incredible sacrifice they made and are making for us. It is time to repeal the disabled veterans tax and end this mistreatment once and for all.

Right now, this Congress is faced with the ability to finally deliver meaningful concurrent receipt legislation to the President. We need only a few more signatures on the discharge petition to bring the Retired Pay Restoration Act to the House floor. I urge my colleagues to sign this petition and take us a step closer to overturning this inequity.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman for bringing this forward.

Ms. WATERS. Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER).

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WATERS) for taking the leadership on this, as she has done on so many issues in this Congress.

I want to add my voice to urge all of our colleagues to listen to the voice of our veterans. Find it in your hearts once and for all, this unjust disabled veterans tax.

A resident of my congressional district, the 51st in California, in San Diego, named Miguel Gonzalez, was wounded in service and declared eligible for VA disability compensation. After retiring from the military, he was also entitled to his retired pay, as every American is entitled to their retired pay. But unlike every other Federal employee, Mr. Speaker, for every dollar that he receives in his disability compensation, he gives back to the government a dollar from his retirement. What an unfair and demoralizing tax on the brief bravest and best in our Nation.

Today this tax is especially galling as we ask and expect our young men and women to fight the threats of terrorism. There has recently been an uproar, justifiably, about the charge that wounded servicemembers were billed for their hospital bills as they lay recovering from their wounds. They got a bill for the food while they were in the hospital.

I cannot see any difference between that case and the case we are talking about this evening, except that the disabled veterans tax costs our servicemembers much more than the hospital bill that we were so upset by. Why were we expecting the young men and women who spent the better part of their lives in service to their country to pay for their own retirement? It does not make sense, and it is an insult to these veterans.

Last year we passed this concurrent receipt in the House and in the Senate, and in a secret conference committee backed by the President of the United States it was removed. The will of the Congress, the will of the American people was frustrated by a secret meeting of a few people in concert with the White House.

Now we are trying a new process: 200 of our colleagues have signed the discharge petition, a process to get this to the floor in spite of the leadership's unwillingness to do so. We can get, with 218 signatures, we can move this bill

from the committee where it is stalled, to the full House of Representatives for a vote. We know it will pass, 370 members of this body have already signed on to it. A lot of them do not seem to have the courage to sign the discharge petition and that should not even be necessary.

It is shameful that we must resort to such a means to get a vote on this bill which would end this disabled veterans tax.

We are told that this bill will cost money. What does not? But it is a matter of priorities. We are willing to give our troops everything for their fighting in Iraq, now it is \$87 billion for the next few months, but why are we not willing to give them all they need when they return home? What is our highest priority if not caring for our Nation's veterans? It seems to be tax cuts for the wealthiest of us all.

We must send a message to the men and women who right this moment are fighting in Iraq. They did not hesitate when called to duty. Many are serving much longer than anticipated. Some are returning home with disabilities that they will have to live with for the rest of their life.

What kind of nation are we? We must tell them that we value their service and that we value them. We must let them know that their Nation will honor them, not just in word, but in deed. Service-connected military retirees, I think we all know, have earned their retirement pay. They deserve their disability compensation. Let us not make them wait any longer for justice to prevail. We must end the disabled veterans tax.

Ms. WATERS. Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentlewoman from Nevada (Ms. BERKLEY).

Ms. BERKLEY. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WATERS) for organizing this special order.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to discuss an issue that is very important to the veterans that I represent. In my district, Las Vegas, Nevada, I hear from veterans every day regarding the disabled veterans tax.

Las Vegas has one of the fastest growing veterans populations in the country, and about 2,500 of these brave veterans lose military retirement benefits due to this unjust tax. Each of these individuals who was disabled due to service to our Nation loses thousands of dollars every year. That is thousands of dollars that can cover their health care costs, enable them to support their families, pay their rents, buy food and improve the quality of their lives.

Under this unfair tax, disabled veterans who retire from the military lose \$1 from their military retirement pay for every dollar they receive for a service-connected disability. When a retired Marine Corps major from Nevada was diagnosed with Lou Gehrig's disease, he lost more than \$2,000 in monthly retirement pay because of the

disabled veterans tax. To make up for that loss of income, his wife, instead of being able to cut back on her hours so that she could care for him, instead she had to work overtime just to make ends meet at home.

But as unfair as this tax is to our disabled military retirees, what is more shocking, what is more unconscionable is the Republican leadership that will not let us vote on this legislation that would correct this long-standing inequity.

There are over 300 cosponsors of H.R. 303 which would eliminate the disabled veterans tax. And more than 200 members of Congress have signed the discharge petition to force H.R. 303 onto the floor for a vote.

Mr. Speaker, the Republican leadership says they support veterans and they say they support ending the disabled veterans tax, yet they refuse to do what is right for veterans and bring H.R. 303 to the floor for a vote.

I invite my colleagues on the other side of the aisle to stand up and take care of the folks back home. The Republican leadership must put this bill on the floor for a vote. We should honor the commitments that we made to those who fought and are currently fighting around the world for our great Nation.

Support for our veterans is more than rousing rhetoric. It is more than a photo op. It is doing what is fair and moral to fulfill our duties and promises to them. We owe it to our veterans to keep our word, and Congress must take action to end this unfair tax on our veterans. We must take action now.

Ms. WATERS. Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. STRICKLAND).

Mr. STRICKLAND. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my friend from California (Ms. WATERS) for yielding to me.

We are talking about ending the disabled veterans tax. Now, there may be people listening or watching who do not fully understand what we mean when we say disabled veterans tax. Well, let me just explain it briefly.

We know that disabled military retirees are the only Federal employees forced to pay for their own disability. Dollar for dollar they have got to give up their pension benefits in order to collect their disability benefits. We know that over 600,000, maybe some of them are watching today, 600,000 disabled veterans across this country, 10,000 disabled veterans in my State of Ohio, are paying millions of dollars every year because of this tax that we are trying to eliminate.

We know that the administration and the President himself, the President cannot escape this issue.

□ 1815

The Bush administration has told Congress that if we pass legislation to eliminate this unfair disabled veterans' tax, that the President will veto the legislation.

So what is Congress going to do? What are we going to do? Most of my

Democratic colleagues have signed what we call a discharge petition. When the leadership of this House refuses to bring a bill to the floor, we have a mechanism called the discharge petition, and if we can get 218 Members of this House to sign that petition, that bill comes to the floor automatically.

How many have signed this discharge petition? Two hundred and three Members have signed this petition. We need 218 signatures to bring the bill to the floor. How many Republicans have signed this petition? Only two. Two hundred and one Democrats have signed the petition, only two Members of the Republican party. I am proud to say that every Democrat from the State of Ohio has signed this petition, and I am disappointed that not a single Republican from the State of Ohio has signed the discharge petition.

Why are they not signing the petition? I suspect it is because their leadership is telling them that they better had not, they better had not buck the leadership, there is a price to pay if they go against the leadership. Who are we here to represent, the leadership of the Republican party or the men and women, especially the disabled veterans, who have voted for us and sent us to represent them in this Chamber?

People listening may think, well, this is just a Democrat harangue against the Republicans, this is just a partisan issue, but I have, here in my hands, a news release that was sent out by the national veterans' groups. I will tell my colleagues who they are: The AMVETS, the Disabled American Veterans, the Military Order of the Purple Heart, the Paralyzed Veterans of America, the Vietnam Veterans of America. They put a heading on their press release that is pretty strong. They say, Congress declares war against disabled veterans, and I would like to share with my colleagues just some of the things these national representatives of the veterans have said in their press release.

They begin by saying, The House majority leadership has shown callous contempt for the sacrifices of America's defenders by attempting to impose overly restrictive conditions that would limit benefits for disabilities from military service. That is what these organizations say.

They continue, An untold number of men and women will return from Iraq and the war on terror with disabilities. The military and veterans' organizations worry that many of them will not be able to directly identify or prove the origin of their ailments, but that certainly does not mean that they should be ignored. Any suggestion to the contrary is outrageous and shameful, they say.

Then they conclude their press release by saying, Our Nation is engaged in a war with a hostile enemy that would willingly kill innocent civilians. Yet it seems that some members of our government would shortchange those who protect us.

They continue, Disabled veterans should not have to fight their own government for the benefits they have earned. In a callous effort to limit government's obligations to our former, current and future defenders, authors of the provision in the Defense authorization bill took it upon themselves to rewrite the law regarding benefits for disabled veterans.

That is what the national veterans' organizations are saying. This is not just a Democratic attack upon the Republican leadership or upon the President. We can solve this problem quickly. If we just had a few more Republicans who would walk down here to the well of the House and put their signatures on this discharge petition, within a matter of hours that bill would be brought to this floor, and we could end the disabled veterans' tax.

Probably a lot of veterans are watching today or families of veterans or just simply Americans who care about veterans. I think it is fair for me to point out that President Bush is willing to spend millions in Iraq to develop a ZIP code system, but he is not willing to spend for America's veterans. He is willing to spend millions building roads in Iraq, but he is neglecting to provide for our veterans. He is willing to spend millions to build hospitals and clinics in Iraq, but he is unwilling to support eliminating this disabled veterans' tax.

We need to get our priorities right, and I hope the people in this country start letting the Members of this House who are unwilling to sign this discharge petition know how they feel about it. Every Member of this House who goes back to their Districts this weekend should be confronted with veterans saying, sir or ma'am, have you signed the discharge petition, and if you have not, why not?

Ms. WATERS. Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. RUPPERSBERGER).

Mr. RUPPERSBERGER. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman for yielding to me.

Mr. Speaker, this issue goes beyond politics. I sincerely respect and honor the active and retired members of our Armed Forces, as well as their families. I believe they deserve the respect of all Americans, and that respect should be demonstrated through words and actions.

The concurrent receipts issue was new to me when I first took Federal office. Learning about a policy that is tantamount to taxing veterans for being disabled infuriates me, and ending it simply makes sense. That is why I chose to cosponsor H.R. 303 and look forward to its passage in the House.

I am obviously not the only Member of this Chamber to feel this way. H.R. 303 has 366 cosponsors which is about as bipartisan as legislation can get these days. The idea of ending this disability tax appears to make sense to a supermajority, and we should have passed it months ago.

Here we are again, in yet another Congress, with concurrent receipts locked up in committee since January of this year, a full nine months ago. Our actions are not matching our words. Veterans' groups and individuals across the country and in my home district, the 2nd Congressional District of Maryland, have told me that passing H.R. 303 is one of their top priorities. They want it sooner rather than later, and frankly, they deserve it.

We seem to understand this on this side of the aisle, but we do not have the power to report it out of committee. We do not have the power to bring it to the floor, and we do not have the majority to pass it, but with 366 cosponsors, that should not matter.

So my Democratic colleague from Georgia filed a motion to discharge the bill to bring it to the floor. The entire Democratic Caucus has signed that petition, and as of today, two Republicans have signed on. Could someone please explain to me 366 cosponsors and only 203 signatures to discharge? What is going on?

I have heard that the majority leadership in the House and Senate are considering offering some version of concurrent receipts in the Department of Defense authorization. Some would prefer to wait for that option. I ask them, how much longer must we make our veterans wait when the language the veterans support, the bill they want, has already been introduced, has already been referred to committee and is ready for a vote and that is H.R. 303?

The veterans' disability tax or concurrent receipts, whatever one likes to call it, has been a partisan football in the political game for a while now. I cannot comment on that, I am a freshman, and this is my first try for the end zone on this bill. Whether Democrats or Republicans win or lose in this game, the veterans do need our help. Our citizens, who served and sacrificed for freedom we enjoy every day, deserve better. If the majority leadership is serious about that issue, then let us just bring H.R. 303 to the floor and vote on it. They control the agenda, and they can bring it to the floor today, right now.

Are words of respect enough? Should we not show the veterans how much we truly do respect them and their action and their sacrifices, including their families? Our side of the aisle has. We have done everything within our power. We have cosponsored the bill. We have signed the discharge petition. We have come to the floor today to speak on behalf of this bill, and we have vowed to vote for it when it reaches the floor. Our actions have matched our words.

We challenge our colleagues on the other side of the aisle to do the same.

Ms. WATERS. Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentlewoman from New York (Mrs. MCCARTHY).

Mrs. MCCARTHY of New York. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman for organizing this for tonight.

I rise to ask why? Why are we not giving our veterans what they deserve? Time and time again we are reminded of the great sacrifices made by this Nation's veterans. These are people who sacrificed their lives for our lives, for our country, for our rights and freedoms.

I am honored to represent a large amount of veterans, and now they need our help, but unfortunately, the House Republican leadership is turning its back on our veterans.

Currently, there is an outmoded and unfair system dating back to the Civil War of compensation for disabled veterans who are retired from the military. Under current law, veterans who are entitled to both a retirement benefit for the military service and service-connected disability compensation are not able to receive both retirement and disability payments. This is an outrage. I do not understand. Here we are Representatives in this House, we are talking about spending \$87 billion on a war and our young men and women are over in Iraq fighting for our freedoms, and yet we will not take care of the great veterans that have already preserved this for us.

H.R. 303, the concurrent receipt bill and/or ending disability veterans' tax, has over 370 Members. I know down here in Washington I have learned an awful lot. Usually, one would think if we had 370 people on a bill, it is going to fly through. That means 370 people, Representatives from across the country, agree bipartisanly this is something that we should be doing. Yet, we cannot bring it up on the House floor. The Republican leadership refuses to bring it onto the floor.

There is a discharge petition, which a lot of people that are listening to this might not understand. If we cannot get a bill through committee to be talked about and onto the floor, we have a right to try and get Members to sign a discharge petition so that we are forced to bring it onto the floor. We have 203 signatures; we need more. And our veterans out there, please write their Congressman, e-mail them, tell them this is what they need.

The Republican leadership does not want to bring the bill to the floor for a vote. The Republican-led Senate passed this provision in the Defense authorization bill. Yet, the House Republican leadership refuses to bring it to the floor of the House. Veterans' policy should be nonpartisan, but unfortunately, at the cost of the veterans, it has become a partisan issue.

Mr. Speaker, we should all be standing together for our veterans. I implore the House Republican leadership to bring it on to the floor. Let there be an up and down vote. Very easily, who is supporting our veterans and who is not, and let us give our veterans what they rightly deserve. After all, they have done so much for us. This is the least we can do for them.

The last couple of weekends I have been meeting with so many veterans'

groups, and this is the only thing they are talking about. Last Friday, I was at Northport Hospital and talking to so many prisoners of war that have survived from the Korean War, and they are saying why? Are you waiting for us all to die? Is that what you are doing, to save some money? I do not understand it. We have our young men and women that are going to be our future veterans. If we do not keep our promise, why should they care about defending this country? We have to make a difference.

Ms. WATERS. Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentlewoman from New York (Mrs. MALONEY).

□ 1830

Mrs. MALONEY. Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for yielding to me, for organizing this Special Order, and really for her outstanding leadership not only on behalf of veterans, but in so many areas of deep concern and importance to our Nation.

I join her and many of my colleagues, well over 366 colleagues, to be specific, in calling for an end to the disabled veterans tax. The government decided many years ago, in 1891, to take disability benefits from retirees, to take it away from our veterans when they retired. It was wrong then, it is wrong now, and we need to change it.

Common sense tells us that there is a tremendous difference between what you receive for retirement and what you receive for a disability. If you are disabled, you have an injury. You may live in pain for the rest of your life, and you are entitled to that disability benefit. Veterans are likewise entitled to their retirement.

To show how outrageous this policy is, you could have a veteran who was injured and they decide to retire because of that injury. They then get disability benefits. But if another veteran who is injured decides to serve 20 years before he retires, when he or she retires, they only get their retirement. They do not get the disability benefit. In the private sector, if you have a disability, you get a disability benefit. If you retire, you get your retirement.

So this is a tremendously unfair policy, particularly when there are so many men and women risking their lives for our security. As we stand on this floor, they are in harm's way in Afghanistan and in Iraq, and we should change this unfair policy.

I must say that like many Americans I had a yellow ribbon in front of my apartment building for Ryan Dixon, my neighbor, who, in my opinion, is a great hero. He was part of the Special Forces. He served in Iraq. Thank God, he came back safe and he was not injured. But there are many other men and women who are injured, in Afghanistan and in Iraq, and they are entitled to their disability benefits.

Our Nation's veterans deserve nothing less than the benefits which they are entitled to, and we owe them an enormous debt of gratitude for their

service to the Nation. It is time that we showed them our thanks by correcting this unjust and very unfair law. So I urge the majority, finally, to show its commitment to providing relief to the veterans across the country who rely on these critical benefits to live.

I really feel that it is a disincentive for people to stay in the military, to know that they will not receive their just retirement and disability benefits. So I call upon my colleagues, and particularly the leadership on the other side of the aisle, to bring this bill to the floor so that we can correct this injustice to our veterans.

Ms. WATERS. Mr. Speaker, may I inquire as to the time left on the hour.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. KLINE). The gentleman from California has 8 minutes remaining.

Ms. WATERS. Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to yield to the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. MARSHALL), who has truly been a leader on this issue all over the country, and he is the Member who filed the discharge petition.

Mr. MARSHALL. Mr. Speaker, I want to start by thanking the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WATERS) for organizing this, and I want to thank all of my Democrat colleagues who have spoken here today about a subject that is very important for our country, and actually is a national disgrace.

I visited a soldier who was wounded in Walter Reed not too long ago. He had come back from Iraq. He had an injury that is very similar to the injury that General Shinseki suffered earlier in his career. He had lost part of his foot. General Shinseki chose to stay in the military. He had a full career. He had a wonderful career and just retired as chief of staff of the Army.

This young man and I talked a little bit. I had been wounded in Vietnam, and I felt like maybe I could give him some solace by saying, look, they are going to be able to repair your foot; you are going to be able to stay in the military and have a career like General Shinseki had; somebody that everybody in the Army is very proud of. And he replied, sir, they tell me it is a better deal to get out.

Now, a lot of Americans do not know what I am talking about. For years, it has been referred to as concurrent receipt. It is a prohibition on receiving retirement benefits and disability benefits. Because that young man was injured in Iraq, lost part of his foot, he is going to be entitled to receive disability benefits. I was injured in Vietnam. I have shrapnel in my left leg. I get disability benefits. I have been getting disability benefits for 30-some-odd years. I get those benefits despite the fact that I only served my country 2 years. Had I stayed in the service and served my country for 20 years or more and been entitled to military retirement benefits, I would not get any disability benefits. Serve more, get less. It makes no sense.

And that is what that young man was referring to as he lay in his bed in Walter Reed. It is a better deal for me to get out of the Army because I will get my disability benefits. If I stay in the Army, serve my country more, I will not get my disability benefits; they will be taken away from me.

Well, we are calling this problem the disabled veterans tax, and many Members of Congress want to end the disabled veterans tax. Unfortunately, we have not been able to do that. The gentlewoman from California (Ms. PELOSI), our leader, gave me an opportunity to file a discharge petition, which I did. The discharge petition is designed to force a vote on this issue. I know if we get a vote we will pass it and we will end this tax on disabled veterans. The question is whether or not we will get a vote.

Now, I have had the honor and the pleasure over the last month or two to speak to many veterans groups. I spoke to the National Convention of the American Legion, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Disabled American Veterans, Vietnam Veterans of America, and many, many others. The key to whether or not we are going to be successful in ending what is a national disgrace is those of you who are watching this program today and others.

Veterans need to continue to put the pressure on. Those of you who do not know much about this issue and want to learn more about it can go to the Web site of any of the veterans organizations. You will find it either under the name of concurrent receipt or disabled veterans tax. You can go to my Web site, and you will get an awful lot of information about it. It is the congressional Web site for Jim Marshall.

We will not get this done by ourselves. Democrats can push as hard as they want to. They will not be successful. It is going to require the involvement of folks who are watching this show and all of the veterans who are interested in ending what is a national disgrace. We have 366 Members of Congress who have signed on to the legislation that would end the disabled veterans tax. We just cannot get a vote on it. We keep the pressure up, we can get the vote. At the very least, if we keep the pressure up, what we will do is get a giant step in the right direction proposed by the administration. I hope one or the other happens.

There needs to be some relief given to veterans. There is no excuse in this country for somebody like me, who served for a lesser period of time, to receive more than somebody who served more. With that, Mr. Speaker, I want to once again thank the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WATERS) for having led us today.

Ms. WATERS. Mr. Speaker, I certainly thank the gentlewoman from Georgia.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank not only the gentleman from Georgia but all of my colleagues who spoke this evening. We are spending so much time

on this issue because our veterans should be special and should be very important to all of the Members of Congress and to public policymakers in general.

Our veterans have been so loyal, not just to our country because of their service but they are always loyal to the Commander in Chief. They have allowed themselves to be misused, to be ignored, and to be marginalized too much, and particularly by this administration. We find ourselves fighting and the veterans are scratching and clawing trying to just get the kind of benefits that they deserve.

They are in these veterans hospitals across the Nation waiting in line for service, cannot get appointments. We do not have enough beds for them in nursing care homes. And now we hear about this particular issue on the floor tonight, and it seems to me that the President of the United States would put an end to this. This is a Commander in Chief that is now saying that he needs \$87 billion more to continue the war in Iraq? We are going to have more veterans who will be disabled, who will come home, who will have to suffer this great injustice.

This is the President who has already spent \$79 billion and who is coming back for more. And this is the President, along with others in the administration, who is talking about we all have to make sacrifices. Our soldiers are dying, our soldiers are being crippled and disabled. They are losing their limbs. How long do we have to beg? How long do we have to plead with this President?

I am here tonight, along with my colleagues, to ask my colleagues on the other side of the aisle to please sign that discharge petition. Please send a message to the veterans that during this time when we are at war, at a time when many of those who watch us on television who are fighting in Iraq, who may be the victim of some sniper's bullet any time, any day, let them know that should something happen, should they be crippled, should they lose a limb that they can depend on their government to see to it that they get both their retirement and the disability benefits that they deserve. I do not think that is too much to ask, Mr. Speaker.

I certainly feel a little bit ashamed this evening that we have to carry this debate this far. I served on the Committee on Veterans' Affairs when I first came to the Congress of the United States. I interacted with all of the service organizations. I made a lot of friends, and I discovered at that time that there are many in the Congress who will wave the red, white, and blue flag and they will talk the talk; but they will not walk the walk. They will not stand up and ask for the dollars. They will not defend the services. They will not even take the time to help the veterans fight through the bureaucracy of veterans affairs to get the benefits that are coming to them.

My office makes this its number one priority. Not only do we work for the veterans, we have had to organize a whole chapter of the Vietnam-era veterans in my district because they were being ignored and they were not being serviced. We think that that is the least that a Member of Congress can do, to service the veterans, to fight for them, to make sure that they get justice. And on this issue, this should be the highest priority of our veterans agenda.

Mrs. LOWEY. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of eliminating the tax on disabled veterans, and thank my colleague MAXINE WATERS for organizing the time to discuss this important matter.

Those who spend their career serving our nation in the military deserve our respect and gratitude; yet, military retirees remain the only group of federal employees who must waive retirement pay in order to receive VA disability compensation. Our nation is stronger and more secure because of their service and dedication, and fulfilling our obligations to those who fought for our freedom must always be a national priority.

It is time to stop penalizing the more than 700,000 disabled veterans who are military retirees. Attempts to redefine who qualifies as a disabled veteran are unnecessary, and achieve nothing more than providing benefits to one group of veterans at the expense of others.

The solution is obvious, yet resolution has been difficult, I was disappointed last year when a threatened presidential veto caused the elimination of the veterans tax to be scaled back in the Defense Authorization bill and, again this year when the House Defense Authorization failed to include language to repeal the tax.

At a time when our Nation is asking more men and women to risk their lives and security on behalf of our country, we should make every effort to fulfill our promise to them upon their return. The strength of a nation is measured not only in the might of its military, but also the compassion shown by and to its members.

It is time to put a permanent end to the disabled veterans tax; their commitment to excellence in service to our country should not be answered with deficient services from that country.

Ms. LEE. Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleagues, the gentlewoman from California, Ms. WATERS and the gentleman from Illinois, Ranking Member EVANS for their work on this important issue.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today outraged by the Majority Leadership's continual short-changing of American veterans. I appreciate Members' from both sides of the aisle, who work to support our retired soldiers. I find great irony in the support that this body gives in creating veterans in Afghanistan and Iraq, but the lack of assistance in sustaining these and previous veterans upon their return.

Mr. Speaker, I would appreciate the Republicans and this Administration responding to an outraged constituent who asked me earlier this year if, "We are just going to reward our fighting men with medals and praise, then let them fend for themselves after they have suffered the insults and injuries of war?". How do I respond to this person and others, when I know

that I voted against the VA-HUD appropriations bill which under-funded the Department of Veteran Affairs by an embarrassing \$1.8 billion.

I know that I co-sponsored H.R. 2569, which would authorize concurrent receipt of military retirement pay and VA compensation benefits, make health care for veterans more accessible and affordable, allow veterans' surviving spouses to receive adequate benefits, and expand educational opportunities for reservists. H.R. 2569 further enhances benefits for the families of those killed while on active duty, and gives an essential "thank you" to our troops now returning from Iraq and Afghanistan.

Mr. Speaker, I am a co-sponsor of H.R. 303. This legislation would permit retired members of the armed forces with service-connected disabilities to be paid both military retired pay and veterans' disability compensation. H.R. 303 would rectify the injustice which has penalized those who sacrifice to serve our country for over 100 years. Additionally, I joined my colleagues to sign the discharge petition to bring this legislation to the floor.

As a veteran's daughter, I, along with 365 Members of this body, am frustrated by our constant attempts to support those who sacrificed for this nation. I find it morally reprehensible that this President continues his reckless policy of cutting taxes for the richest 1 percent of this country, yet refuses to guarantee our veterans basic benefits. And I ask: how much longer is this body willing to punish those who sacrifice and suffer for serving and defending this nation?

#### SECURING THE PEACE IN IRAQ

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 7, 2003, the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. SHADEGG) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. SHADEGG. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate this opportunity to open an important discussion before the Congress on the topic of securing the peace in Iraq.

I am going to be brief in my opening remarks, Mr. Speaker, because we have some colleagues here who want to participate in this debate and who have other obligations. But let me simply start by saying that I believe it is absolutely essential for this Nation, now that we have deposed Saddam Hussein, to rebuild that country and to secure for them the peace. And what I mean by that is that it is simply not adequate in this world we live in today to get rid of a dictator like Saddam Hussein and then walk away. Tragically, America has done that all too often in its foreign policy, with disastrous consequences.

There will be discussion on the floor here tonight in the course of this debate of how we did that after World War I. We not only walked away, but we demanded reparations. The result was the rise of an atrocious dictatorship in Germany and another world war.

I want to point to another example just briefly here at the outset of this