title 38, United States Code, to improve compensation benefits for veterans in certain cases of impairment of vision involving both eyes. I strongly support veterans and more specifically blind veterans. I am a co-sponsor of this legislation. A few weeks ago I introduced H.R. 1240, the ''Vision Impairment Specialist Training Act'' to help our Nation's blind veterans.

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 797 modifies the standard of awarding disability compensation to veterans for loss of vision to require payment of compensation for impairment of vision involving both eyes due to a service-connected and non-service connected disability.

There are 160,000 legally blind veterans in the United States, but only 44,000 are currently enrolled in Veterans Health Administration services. In addition, it is estimated that there are over 1 million low-vision veterans in the United States, and incidences of blindness among the total veteran population of 26 million are expected to increase by about 40% over the next few years. This is because the most prevalent causes of legal blindness and low vision are age-related, and the average age of the veteran population is increasing; the current average age is about 80 years old.

Members of the armed forces are important to our Nation and we show them our appreciation by taking care of them after they no longer serve. It is important to amend title 38 to ensure that our veterans are taken care of and that they receive the compensation that they deserve. Their service to this nation could never be repaid my monetary means, but we can ensure that the veterans that faithfully served our country are taken care of and amending this legislation sends a message to our veterans that we care about their health and well being long after their duty has expired.

In addition to enhancing compensation benefits for veterans, H.R. 797 requires the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide the Secretary of Health and Human Services with information for comparison with the National Directory of New Hires to determine eligibility for certain benefits and services. This process ensures that the proper protocol is followed in issuance of these benefits and that the benefits are distributed to the proper recipients.

Mr. Speaker, I support H.R. 797 and I urge all members to do likewise.

INTRODUCTION OF THE ''RE-EMPOWERMENT OF SKILLED AND PROFESSIONAL EMPLOYEES AND CONSTRUCTION AND TRADES WORKERS (RESPECT) ACT.''

HON. ROBERT E. ANDREWS

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 22, 2007

Mr. ANDREWS. Madam Speaker, today I rise to fight for middle class Americans by introducing the ''Re-empowerment of Skilled and Professional Employees and Construction and Tradesworkers (RESPECT) Act.'' Day after day, middle class families are struggling to survive as their real incomes decline and the costs of basic necessities increase. A major contributor to this middle class squeeze is the decline in workers' freedom to organize and collectively bargain. Organized workers earn more, have greater access to healthcare benefits, and are more likely to have guaranteed pensions than unorganized workers. When workers get their fair share, the economy benefits and the middle class grows stronger.

Yet the freedom to organize and collectively bargain has been under severe assault in recent decades, thanks to weak federal labor laws in dire need of reform. It has also been rolled back by a number of misguided decisions by the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) in the last few years. These decisions have operated to strip millions of workers entirely of their freedom to organize. The RESPECT Act serves to restore that freedom by addressing a series of decisions which stray dramatically from and undermine the original intent of the National Labor Relations Board and which fly in the face of common sense. This bill provides clarity in the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) on one aspect of the fundamental question of coverage: who is an employee and who is a supervisor.

Last year, the NLRB issued a trio of decisions, collectively often referred to as the ''Kentucky River'' decisions, which eviscerated the meanings of ''employee'' and ''supervisor'' under the NLRA. The NLRA protects employees' freedom to organize and collectively bargain. Supervisors are not considered employees and are therefore not covered by the Act's protections. If an individual is determined to be a supervisor, she has no right to organize, no right to engage in concerted activity with her fellow employees, and no right to collectively bargain. Every fundamental right protected by the Act may turn on this question of whether she is a supervisor or an employee. The Kentucky River decisions dramatically expanded the definition of supervisor far beyond the limits that the framers of the Act intended and far beyond the limits of common sense. In so doing, it stripped an estimated 8 million workers—particularly skilled and professional employees—of the freedom to organize.

In the workplace, people know who the supervisor is. A supervisor has the power to discipline, reward, promote, hire, and/or fire employees. The legislative history of the NLRA reflects these common sense understandings of who is or is not a supervisor. Congress drafted the NLRA to exclude from its protections only genuine supervisors with true management prerogatives, not minor supervisory employees, professionals, or skilled workers.

Yet the NLRB ignored common sense and legislative history in the Kentucky River decisions. For professional and skilled employees, who often provide direction to other employees, the NLRB's action is devastating. A nurse who directs another person to conduct a single, discrete task, such as clipping a patient's toenails, would be considered to have supervisory authority under these recent decisions. So would a nurse who assigns a patient to a nurse for a single shift.

A carpenter who tells an apprentice how to form a joint would also be considered to have supervisory authority. These skilled and professional workers have no power to promote, discipline, reward, hire, or fire—and yet they would be supervisors, according to the NLRB, even if they only held the authority to ''direct'' a person on single, discrete tasks just 10 percent of the time. Having been classified as a supervisor without realizing it, these employees may be subject to lawful discipline for trying to organize a union when they thought they were employees with every right to organize.

Because of these decisions, over 8 million American workers are denied their fundamental freedom of association today. As the dissent pointed out in one of the decisions, 34 million Americans may fall into this category of workers stripped of their statutory rights by 2012.

The impact of the Kentucky River decisions is already being felt, particularly in the health care industry, where respect for workers' rights is critical to efficient health care delivery and high quality patient care. In a case in Utah, an NLRB Regional Director, applying the NLRB's new definition of ''supervisor,'' found that virtually all of the registered nurses in a potential bargaining unit, 64 out of 88, were designated as supervisors, with the remaining 24 nurses excluded only because they had less than one year's service. Those remaining nurses will likely qualify as supervisors after they have completed their first year of nursing. Absurd decisions breed absurd results. As the New York Times explained in an October 7, 2006 editorial: ''[R]esponsibilities like making out a schedule do not amount to management. If they did, interns would be the only non-managers in many of today's workplaces.''

The Kentucky River decisions are not an anomaly for the current Board. In the last five years, the Board has repeatedly ruled to deny or restrict the fundamental rights of entire categories of workers. These include 45,000 disabled workers who lost their right to organize; 51,000 teaching and research assistants who lost their right to organize; and 2 million temporary workers who have had their right to organize severely curtailed.

The RESPECT Act will make two simple and clarifying changes to the definition of supervisor under the NLRA. It will: (1) eliminate the terms ''assign'' and ''responsibility to direct'' from the list of supervisory duties; and (2) require that employees possess supervisory duties during a majority of their work time in order to be excluded from coverage under the Act as a supervisor. Eliminating ''assign'' and ''responsibility to direct'' from the supervisor definition will effectuate Congress' intent to define supervisors as only those individuals who have genuine management prerogatives and the real authority to affect employees' terms of employment. As the NLRB has proven, these terms are open to abuse and misinterpretation, far afield from their common-sense and originally intended meanings, by those seeking to roll back workers' freedoms.

Requiring that employees possess supervisory duties for a majority of their work time will create a fair, bright-line rule when determining whether an individual is a supervisor. Someone who possesses a modicum of supervisory authority a minority of the time should not be denied their fundamental rights.

Madam Speaker, the NLRA guarantees the freedom to organize and collectively bargain for America's private sector workforce. That freedom is a fundamental human right and a proven key to a strong middle class. It is unconscionable that the rights of an estimated 8 million Americans—and many more in coming years—be put at risk by such deeply flawed decisionmaking as we have seen in the Kentucky River line of cases. The RESPECT Act does nothing more than clarify the law to ensure it is not misinterpreted or undermined on

a fundamental question of coverage. All workers, including skilled and professional workers, have the right to organize. The RESPECT Act does not allow true supervisors to engage in organizing or collective bargaining. But it ensures that those individuals who are excluded from the NLRA's protections due to their supervisory status do indeed carry the genuine prerogatives of management. I urge all of my colleagues to stand with me as we fight to return these fundamental protections to millions workers who deserve the chance to win livable wages, fair benefits, decent working conditions, and a brighter future for their families.

HONORING STEPHEN TRACHTENBERG AS HE STEPS DOWN AS PRESIDENT OF GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

HON. CLIFF STEARNS

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 22, 2007

Mr. STEARNS. Madam Speaker, when I graduated from George Washington, I like to sometimes think only a few years ago, I did not realize that I would be so involved with the school later in my life. President Trachtenberg has made these efforts a joy and an honor, and we will miss his leadership.

His tenure as president transformed the university, marking major advancements across the board. Since taking the helm in 1988, the academics of GW have skyrocketed. The SAT scores of incoming students rose by 200 points and a significant percentage of students are now drawn from the top 10 percent of high school classes.

While enriching the academic environment at George Washington, President Trachtenberg also enhanced the financial situation. The school enjoyed a balanced budget under each year of your tenure, generating an endowment of nearly $1 billion, up almost $800 million since you started in 1988.

As Steve has often noted, GW has eight schools, over 100 programs, and nearly 20,000 students. And he adds, ''GW is more than a university, it is also a community.'' Through his outstanding efforts, the university encompasses academics, research, entertainment, and an enjoyable experience for students, faculty and staff.

In total, 30 years of his amazing career went into leading a major university. He deserves more time at home, applying his energy and talents to his personal life. I understand his wife Francine is retired, but still very active in promoting the community's interest, and I bet she could use his help.

It has been an honor to work with President Trachtenberg on behalf of George Washington University—his tireless efforts have yielded immeasurable results—the school, Washington, D.C., our nation, and the world are better because of them.

JUDICIAL DISCLOSURE RESPONSIBILITY ACT

SPEECH OF

HON. SHEILA JACKSON-LEE

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 21, 2007

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I strongly support H.R. 1130, the ''Judicial Disclosure Responsibility Act,'' because it extends until December 31, 2009, the authority conferred by the Congress on the Judicial Conference to redact personal and sensitive information from the published financial disclosure reports of judges and judiciary employees who have been threatened or otherwise have particular security risks.

Mr. Speaker, as I stated, H.R. 1130 would temporarily extend the authority of the Judicial Conference to withhold from disclosure certain personal and sensitive information of judges and judicial employees. In addition, the bill expressly provides that concern for the safety of a judge's family as well as that of the judge is sufficient grounds to exercise the authority given. The bill, however, requires the Judicial Conference to provide detailed reports regarding such redactions to Congress.

Mr. Speaker, the financial disclosure requirements were imposed by Congress in 1978 in response to the constitutional issues surrounding the Watergate crisis and the resignation of President Richard M. Nixon. The Ethics in Government Act was passed in 1978 and promotes ethics and openness in government by establishing rules of conduct for federal employees to reduce corruption and prevent the improper use of knowledge gained while employed by the government, and more broadly to prevent the appearance of impropriety.

The Ethics in Government Act of 1978 (''Act'') applies to all branches of government, including the federal judiciary. Persons covered by the Act are required to disclose personal and financial information each year, including the source and amount of income, other than that earned as employees of the United States government received during the preceding calendar year. They must also disclose the source, description, and value of gifts for which the aggregate value is more than a certain minimal amount received from any source other than a relative; the source and description of reimbursements; the identity and category of value of property interests; the identity and category value of liabilities owed to creditors other than certain immediate family members; and other financial information. Under the Act, these reports are made public.

Among the types of sensitive personal information that might be disclosed in these reports are personal residences, the workplace of spouses, the name and location of a child's school; and an employee's vacation home.

In 1998, 20 years after the enactment of the Ethics in Government Act, the potential of these types of disclosures to place individual judges at serious risk of personal harm had become manifest. In 1979, U.S. District Court Judge John Wood, Jr., was fatally shot outside of his home by assassin Charles Harrelson. The murder contract had been placed by Texas drug lord Jamiel Chagra, who was awaiting trial before the judge.

In 1988, U.S. District Court Judge Richard Daronco was murdered at his house by Charles Koster, the father of the unsuccessful plaintiff in a discrimination case. The following year, U.S. Circuit Court Judge Richard Vance was killed by a letter bomb sent to his home. The letter bomb was attributed to racist animus against Judge Vance for writing an opinion reversing a lower-court ruling to lift an 18–year desegregation order from the Duval County, Florida schools.

In light of these and other tragedies, Congress responded by adding a new subsection to the Ethics in Government Act temporarily authorizing the Judicial Conference to redact information from judges' financial disclosure reports under certain circumstances. Under that subsection, a report may be redacted ''(i) to the extent necessary to protect the individual who filed the report; and (ii) for as long as the danger to such individual exists.'' The Act further charged the U.S. Judicial Conference, in consultation which the Department of Justice, with the task of submitting to the House and Senate Committees on the Judiciary an annual report documenting redactions.

In 2001, the House of Representatives approved a bill striking the sunset clause and making the redaction authority permanent but the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee did not concur. The Senate was concerned that such authority could hamper the effectiveness of the judicial confirmation and oversight process by unwarranted reliance on the redaction authority to avoid revealing stock holdings and other financial assets, and in some cases, the complete withholding of all financial information contrary to the intent of the statute. Ultimately, Senate recommended extending the redaction authority for 4 more years, until December 31, 2005. This authority has now expired and necessitates the extension provided by H.R. 1130.

Mr. Speaker, the Judiciary Committee considered and properly rejected permanently granting this authority to the Judicial Conference because of the legitimate concern that such authority could be abused in such a way as to withhold information that properly should be disclosed. A temporary 4-year extension, on the other hand, would effectively allow for a more in-depth investigation of areas of concern before Congress must decide whether to make the authority permanent. I believe this is the most prudent way to proceed.

Mr. Speaker, I support H.R. 1130 because it preserves an important means of protecting the safety of those who work in the federal judiciary. Particularly in this age of the global war on terror, the danger faced by federal judges, judicial officers, and court personnel is real, as illustrated by the three murders noted above. The recent and tragic murder of U.S. District Court Judge Joan Humphrey Letkow's husband and mother reminds us that the danger has not abated.

For all of these reasons, Mr. Speaker, I support H.R. 1130 and urge by colleagues to do likewise.

186TH ANNIVERSARY OF GREEK INDEPENDENCE DAY

HON. THELMA D. DRAKE

OF VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 22, 2007

Mrs. DRAKE. Madam Speaker, I rise today in honor of the 186th Anniversary of Greek Independence Day.