

Mr. CASTLE. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. KUCINICH. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. KUCINICH) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 2707, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

BELATED THANK YOU TO THE MERCHANT MARINERS OF WORLD WAR II ACT OF 2007

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 23) to amend title 46, United States Code, to provide benefits to certain individuals who served in the United States merchant marine (including the Army Transport Service and the Naval Transport Service) during World War II, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 23

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

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Belated Thank You to the Merchant Mariners of World War II Act of 2007".

SEC. 2. PAYMENTS TO INDIVIDUALS WHO SERVED DURING WORLD WAR II IN THE UNITED STATES MERCHANT MARINE.

(a) ESTABLISHMENT OF COMPENSATION FUND.—Subchapter II of chapter 5 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new section:

“§ 532. Merchant Mariner Equity Compensation Fund

“(a) COMPENSATION FUND.—(1) There is in the general fund of the Treasury a fund to be known as the ‘Merchant Mariner Equity Compensation Fund’ (in this section referred to as the ‘compensation fund’).

“(2) Subject to the availability of appropriations for such purpose, amounts in the fund shall be available to the Secretary without fiscal year limitation to make payments to eligible individuals in accordance with this section.

“(b) ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS.—(1) An eligible individual is an individual who—

“(A) before October 1, 2009, submits to the Secretary an application containing such information and assurances as the Secretary may require;

“(B) has not received benefits under the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944 (Public Law 78-346); and

“(C) has engaged in qualified service.

“(2) For purposes of paragraph (1), a person has engaged in qualified service if, between December 7, 1941, and December 31, 1946, the person—

“(A) was a member of the United States merchant marine (including the Army Transport Service and the Naval Transport Service) serving as a crewmember of a vessel that was—

“(i) operated by the War Shipping Administration or the Office of Defense Transporta-

tion (or an agent of the Administration or Office);

“(ii) operated in waters other than inland waters, the Great Lakes, and other lakes, bays, and harbors of the United States;

“(iii) under contract or charter to, or property of, the Government of the United States; and

“(iv) serving the Armed Forces; and

“(B) while so serving, was licensed or otherwise documented for service as a crewmember of such a vessel by an officer or employee of the United States authorized to license or document the person for such service.

“(c) AMOUNT OF PAYMENTS.—The Secretary shall make a monthly payment out of the compensation fund in the amount of \$1,000 to an eligible individual. The Secretary shall make such payments to eligible individuals in the order in which the Secretary receives the applications of the eligible individuals.

“(d) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—(1) There are authorized to be appropriated to the compensation fund amounts as follows:

“(A) For fiscal year 2008, \$120,000,000.

“(B) For fiscal year 2009, \$108,000,000.

“(C) For fiscal year 2010, \$97,000,000.

“(D) For fiscal year 2011, \$85,000,000.

“(E) For fiscal year 2012, \$75,000,000.

“(2) Funds appropriated to carry out this section shall remain available until expended.

“(e) REPORTS.—The Secretary shall include, in documents submitted to Congress by the Secretary in support of the President’s budget for each fiscal year, detailed information on the operation of the compensation fund, including the number of applicants, the number of eligible individuals receiving benefits, the amounts paid out of the compensation fund, the administration of the compensation fund, and an estimate of the amounts necessary to fully fund the compensation fund for that fiscal year and each of the three subsequent fiscal years.

“(f) REGULATIONS.—The Secretary shall prescribe regulations to carry out this section.”.

(b) REGULATIONS.—Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall prescribe the regulations required under section 532(f) of title 38, United States Code, as added by subsection (a).

(c) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections at the beginning of such chapter is amended by inserting after the item related to section 531 the following new item:

“532. Merchant Mariner Equity Compensation Fund.”.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER) and the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. BOOZMAN) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California.

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, before I get to these specific bills, let me just say, as chairman of the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs, we are at a critical time in our Nation in dealing with our veterans. George Washington said it best over 200 years ago when he stated that “the morale of our active duty troops depends foremost on how they sense they’re going to be treated when they come home.” So we have a lot of work to do.

We have a Secretary who has announced his resignation. Recently, just last week, the Dole-Shalala Commis-

sion released its report on some major changes for the VA and the DoD for the way we deal with our veterans and our wounded warriors. We need someone in that position, I think, who will shake things up a bit, who will not only do the Dole-Shalala recommendations, but go further and really talk to two bureaucracies that have to do business far better than what they do. Too often, VA means for our veterans “veterans adversary” instead of “veterans advocate.”

We have older veterans, like we’re going to be dealing with in the bill up now, and we are going to have hundreds of thousands of new veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan. It’s a critical job that we must do. And I always say, no matter where we are in the war in Iraq, we’re going to make sure that every young man and woman who comes back from the war gets all the love, the care, the attention, the honor, the dignity that a Nation can bestow.

So we have a big job to do. And this package of bills we have today addressed both older veterans that we still have to care for and make sure any injustices that came up in their treatment are taken care of, as well as the needs that are so critical, whether they be brain injury or PTSD of the new veterans. We have to deal with both groups, and we have to do it right.

I want to speak now on H.R. 23, the Belated Thank You to the Merchant Mariners of World War II Act.

This is a bill that is six decades overdue, Mr. Speaker. And I think today we are on the verge of doing a historic thing, that is, providing a way to finally give the heroic merchant mariners of World War II the belated compensation that they’ve so richly earned and deserve.

I think this Congress not only has to treat those new veterans coming back from Iraq, but we have the responsibility to correct the wrongs of the past, and this is one of the grave injustices that deserves rectification.

There are over 250 Members of this House who have cosponsored H.R. 23. But for those who haven’t, let me tell you about the sad history of these forgotten heroes. The Merchant Mariners of World War II traversed the dangerous U-boat laden waters of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, faced down fierce attacks from enemy aircraft, and were instrumental in every theater of war by carrying 95 percent of all tanks, supplies and troops during World War II. As a result, they suffered the highest casualty rate of any of the military branches.

It is indisputable that the allied forces would not have been able to begin, sustain or end World War II in victory without their valiant and selfless service. It is also indisputable, Mr. Speaker, that these men now are entitled to be compensated for their service.

After the war, they did not receive the recognition as veterans, or the benefits of the unprecedented GI Bill of

1944, which, in many people's minds, they had earned. We all know the profound effects of that GI Bill on building the middle class. We all know that the education and ability to buy homes led to the creation of the success of the generations following World War II.

At the signing of that bill in 1944, the GI Bill, which gave these veterans unprecedented education, housing, small business loans and health benefits, President Roosevelt himself declared, "I trust Congress will soon provide similar opportunities to members of the merchant marine, who have risked their lives time and time again during war for the welfare of their country." Succeeding Congresses up until now have never done that.

Their fight for equity continued for all the time since then, and even for the time after they finally attained veteran status after a lengthy court battle that was decided in 1987, which by then, 40 years after the war, over 125,000 merchant mariners had died.

We've had the distinct privilege at the Veterans' Affairs Committee of receiving the heart-wrenching testimony of some of these veterans, one of whom was a named party in the lawsuit which finally gave him veteran status, a merchant mariner named Stanley Willner. Stanley was captured, interned, beaten, starved and tortured as a POW for 3 years. In fact, he was actually one of the unfortunate groups of allied forces that were forced to build the infamous bridge over the River Kwai. Upon release, he weighed a mere 74 pounds. When he returned home, his wife didn't recognize him, but neither did his country. He received just 2 weeks of medical care and little else for his service to this Nation. What a miscarriage of justice.

Mr. Speaker, it was only due to a sad confluence of powerful events after the war that this country did not bestow the brave men of the World War II Merchant Marine with veteran status. Their service was recognized by all the leaders of the Allied Forces from Generals MacArthur to Eisenhower.

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I will include a list of quotes regarding their courageous service in the RECORD. I will also add a letter from the four maritime unions, the American Maritime Officers, the International Organization of Masters, Mates and Pilots, the Marine Engineers' Beneficial Association, and the Seafarers International Union, expressing their strong support for H.R. 23, as amended.

Mr. Speaker, the time has come to right this enduring wrong. To me, failing to correct the injustice suffered by the merchant mariners for the past six decades is equivalent to an employer telling a group of 20-year-olds at the same company doing the same job that 85 percent of them will receive additional health, education, housing, and loan assistance benefits for the rest of their lives for their service, but the re-

maintaining 15 percent would not. Then, over 40 years later, the employer is forced to recognize the mistake and informs the 15 percent, sorry, we will give you what has not expired, but nothing else.

Where is the fairness? Where is the equity? How do you measure the loss of these benefits, the missed opportunities and the dreams unrealized? That is what H.R. 23 tries to make up for, to create the semblance of equity that the mariners of World War II so richly deserve by providing a monthly stipend to qualifying mariners on a first-come-first-served basis.

JULY 27, 2007.

Hon. BOB FILNER,
Chairman, Committee on Veterans' Affairs,
House of Representatives, Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: We are writing on behalf of the undersigned American maritime labor organizations to express our strong support for H.R. 23, the "Belated Thank You to the Merchant Mariners of World War II Act of 2007" as amended. The organizations we represent have the privilege of including among our retired and active seagoing members individuals who served our country with honor and distinction during World War II. These World War II merchant mariners are truly representative of the "Greatest Generation", and we are extremely proud of them and the example they have set for all merchant mariners who continue to respond to our Nation's call whenever and wherever they are needed.

General Colin Powell, following the Persian Gulf War, said that: "Since I became Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, I have come to appreciate first-hand why our Merchant Marine has long been called our Nation's fourth arm of defense. The American seafarer provides an essential service to the well-being of our Nation as was demonstrated so clearly during Operation Desert Shield and Desert Storm. . . ."

We agree wholeheartedly with you that the enactment of H.R. 23 is necessary "to correct an injustice that has been inflicted upon a group of World War II veterans, the World War II United States merchant mariners." We sincerely thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your initiative in working to address this injustice by sponsoring legislation to provide long-overdue recognition and benefits to World War II merchant mariners. We are also grateful to your colleagues who have cosponsored H.R. 23 and for their decision to add their names to the bipartisan supporters who are committed to working with you and with us for the enactment of H.R. 23 this year.

There is not, nor should there be, any debate as to the invaluable service given by American merchant mariners during World War II. In fact, World War II merchant mariners suffered the highest casualty rate of any of the branches of the Armed Forces, other than the United States Marine Corps, as they delivered troops, tanks, food, fuel and other needed equipment and material to every theater of World War II. Enemy forces sank more than 800 merchant vessels between 1941 and 1944 alone.

As General of the Army, Allied Expeditionary Forces in Europe, Dwight David Eisenhower stated, "When final victory is ours there is no organization that will share its credit more deservedly than the Merchant Marine." Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Theater, said that "The Merchant Marine . . . has repeatedly proved its right to be considered as an integral part of our fighting team."

General of the Army Douglas MacArthur, speaking of the merchant seamen who sup-

ported the liberation of the Philippines, stated that "With us they have shared the heaviest enemy fire. On these Islands I have ordered them off their ships and into foxholes when their ships became untenable targets of attack. At our side they have suffered in bloodshed and death . . . They have contributed tremendously to our success. I hold no branch in higher esteem than the Merchant Marine Service."

Finally, President Franklin Roosevelt eloquently and accurately summed up the contributions of America's World War II merchant mariners, telling the country and the world that they "have written one of its most brilliant chapters. They have delivered the goods when and where needed in every theater of operations and across every ocean in the biggest, the most difficult and most dangerous job ever taken."

Yet despite this record of exemplary, indispensable service to America's war efforts, merchant mariners were not given the formal recognition and benefits granted other services by the Congress through the G.I. Bill of Rights in 1945. In fact, no legislation to recognize the contributions made by World War II merchant mariners was enacted until Congress extended limited veterans' status to these gallant American citizens in 1988.

We believe, as you have stated Mr. Chairman, that it is time to correct this injustice. We believe our country has an obligation to the remaining World War II merchant mariners to fully acknowledge their service and to give them the measure of benefit called for in H.R. 23. We ask you and your colleagues to take the first step in righting this wrong by voting to pass H.R. 23 during its consideration by the House of Representatives.

We again thank you and the Members of your Committee for the support you have shown for the World War II merchant mariners. We stand ready to provide whatever additional information you may need.

Sincerely,

THOMAS BETHEL,
President, American
Maritime Officers.

TIMOTHY A. BROWN,
President, Inter-
national Organization
of Masters,
Mates & Pilots.

RON DAVIS,
President, Marine En-
gineers' Beneficial
Association.

MICHAEL SACCO,
President, Seafarers
International Union.

MARITIME TRADES DEPARTMENT,
AMERICAN FEDERATION OF LABOR
AND CONGRESS OF INDUSTRIAL OR-
GANIZATIONS,

Washington, DC, July 27, 2007.

Hon. BOB FILNER,
Chairman, Committee on Veterans' Affairs,
House of Representatives, Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: The Maritime Trades Department, AFL-CIO and its 23 affiliated unions express our strong support for H.R. 23, "The Belated Thank You to the Merchant Mariners of World War II Act of 2007." We also offer our own "Thank You" for your tireless efforts to correct a decades-long injustice, which have incurred the respect and admiration of maritime workers from one end of this country to the other.

Except for an incomplete recognition in 1988, when the Department of Defense agreed to award service medals to civilian mariners who served in World War II and allow them the privilege of being buried with veterans' honors, the contribution of an entire generation of World War II veterans—maritime's

own version of “the Greatest Generation”—has been slighted. U.S. civilian mariners who served in World War II suffered one of the highest casualty rates of any of the branches of the Armed Forces. As Winston Churchill and other great leaders of the time noted during and after the war, the role that these brave mariners played in keeping Great Britain and Russia supplied during the darkest days of World War II had a profound effect on the outcome of the war.

Churchill, of course, called them “unsung heroes in dungarees.” Dwight Eisenhower noted that, “When final victory is ours, there is no organization that will share in its credit more deservedly than the merchant marine.” Franklin Delano Roosevelt said that when the history of the war is recorded, the men and women of the U.S.-flag merchant marine will “have written one of its most brilliant chapters.”

While the Murmansk run and the deadly cross-Atlantic transports were the best-known contributions of U.S. civilian mariners, they certainly were not the only ones. The U.S.-flag merchant marine played a central role in every theater of operations, including the Pacific, where Douglas MacArthur noted, “With us, they have shared the heaviest enemy fire.” Given this record, it was inconceivable that civilian mariners were denied any formal recognition for their important contributions to the war effort. You have called it an historical injustice of the highest order. And you are right.

By providing eligible civilian mariners with appropriate benefits, this legislation sends a clear message that the United States government will always honor the contributions of loyal, patriotic Americans. Coming at a time when this country is embroiled in several conflicts abroad, it is an important message that needs to be delivered. The House of Representatives should pass this bill.

The men and women of the U.S.-flag merchant marine are unwavering in their support of our country and its troops in harm’s way. The fact that you and your colleagues understand that and have been persistent in trying to correct a long-standing oversight also sends another message that needs to be heard. By providing this Nation with a reliable source of sealift and a skilled manpower pool of civilian mariners, the U.S.-flag merchant marine will continue to play an important role in the defense of this Nation.

Sincerely,

MICHAEL SACCO,
President.

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

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

Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate Mr. FILNER for his leadership in bringing this bill forward and that of the staff on both sides. The legislation before us, H.R. 23, as amended, would provide \$1,000 monthly payment to World War II mariners.

The merchant mariners braved great danger and suffered great loss in their service for the allies. This service has been recognized. Since 1988, these wartime merchant mariners have full VA benefits, including health care. This bill goes further than that. It recognizes that these veterans did not have access to the GI Bill when they were young. In providing a monthly payment, H.R. 23 attempts to compensate for the loss of the potential offered by the GI Bill’s educational benefits which

were used by about half of the 16 million veterans of the Second World War.

Thirty other groups also provided military service to the U.S. in World War II and have received veteran status in the same manner as the merchant mariners.

We are a little bit concerned that we were not able in this bill to also help these deserving veterans. These groups include the Women’s Air Force Service Pilots, the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps and the famed Flying Tigers. They served loyally, selflessly and courageously. Their service also contributed directly to victory in 1945, and yet we haven’t been able to accommodate them in this bill. In fairness, their duty must be taken into account. I hope that we can act in the near future and take care of them.

I am also concerned that apparently because of the rules of the House, and I voted for PAYGO, that we couldn’t find the offsets to fund this benefit. So the issue of funding is being passed to the appropriators. It is unclear where we are going to be able to find the approximately \$485 million over the next 5 years to fund the bill.

As a believer in the GI Bill, I certainly cannot dispute the fact that the lack of advantage conferred by GI Bill education benefits disadvantaged merchant mariners and their families in the years following their service.

Mr. Speaker, our merchant mariners provided intrepid and faithful service. Sixty years ago, they paid the heavy price for the freedoms we enjoy today. For that, they certainly deserve our appreciation.

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

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, we have a new Member from New Hampshire that I will call the “not-so-gentle-lady” because she has been incredibly active and taken a leadership role in passage of this bill.

Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as she might consume to the gentlewoman from New Hampshire (Ms. SHEA-PORTER).

Ms. SHEA-PORTER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of H.R. 23. I thank the chairman for his leadership.

Mr. Speaker, I was surprised and saddened to learn from a constituent that in spite of the service of the merchant mariners in World War II, none of them received the same benefits that other soldiers received: no access to the GI Bill, no health benefits, nothing.

As you consider this bill that will finally show our gratitude to the merchant marines of World War II, I would like to recall the words of General Dwight Eisenhower, who understood what their service had given the United States. In 1944 he had this to say: “Every marine in this Allied Command is quick to express his admiration for the loyalty, courage and fortitude of the officers and men of the merchant marine. We count upon their efficiency and their utter devotion to duty as we

do our own; they have never failed us yet and in all the struggles yet to come we know that they will never be deterred by any danger, hardship or privation. When final victory is ours, there is no organization that will share its credit more deservedly than the merchant marine.”

After the war he noted: “Their contribution to final victory will be long remembered.”

It is way past time to remember their devotion to the United States. It is way past time to reward them what they earned. Time is slipping.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this bill, H.R. 23.

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. Speaker, I urge my fellow Members of the House to support this bill. Certainly I will.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

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

Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for his endorsement, support, and leadership on our committee. He has raised some very good questions that I hope our committee will deal with.

Mr. Speaker, without a doubt, these men, now all of them are in their eighties, the average age is 83, in fact, of the remaining 10,000 that are alive, have earned and deserve this delayed compensation. They fought the good fight. They gave our country everything they could.

This is what H.R. 23 will do, provide the merchant mariners with the compensation they earned and have been denied for decades, not just in words, but in deeds.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all the Members of this House for the support of this historical piece of legislation.

Ms. BORDALLO. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 23, the Belated Thank You to the Merchant Mariners of World War II Act of 2007, which is a bill to amend title 46, United States Code, to provide benefits to certain individuals who served in the United States Merchant Marine, including the Army Transport Service and the Naval Transport Service during World War II.

United States Merchant Mariners served as a crucial component of America’s seapower force during World War II. Merchant Mariners were responsible for transporting armies and equipment behind enemy lines. Merchant Mariners helped transport not only troops, but also delivered ammunition, provisions, tanks, airplanes, fuel, and other wartime materiel into theater. Their significant contributions were critical in providing logistical support to the United States Armed Forces and that support helped our Armed Forces and allies achieve victory in the war in both the Pacific and European theaters.

Over 243,000 Merchant Mariners served during the Second World War. These brave individuals endured the elements and constant threats from enemy submarines, mines, armed raiders, destroyers, and aircrafts. An estimated 9,300 Merchant Mariners lost their lives during the Second World War. The Merchant Mariner casualty rate was the highest percentage of war-related deaths when compared to each of the military services.

Unlike other military servicemembers, Merchant Mariners were not offered similar opportunities to participate in the G.I. Bill of 1945. H.R. 23 will provide long-awaited parity for these selfless individuals. It is unfortunate that after 60 years these Merchant Mariners have not been provided access to a benefit they deserve. In the spirit of fairness and equity, and in keeping with this Congress's recent and previous actions of providing long-awaited and most deserving recognition to forgotten groups of Americans who served and sacrificed during World War II, I urge passage of H.R. 23.

Today, the United States Merchant Marine continues its tradition of providing an essential component to our national security as the "fourth arm of defense." Our merchant ships bear the brunt of delivering military supplies overseas to our forces and allies. The stark lessons of 20th century conflict prove that a strong Merchant Marine is an essential part of American seapower.

It is time that we thank these brave men and women whose efforts contributed greatly to the success of the United States during the Second World War. I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting H.R. 23, which is sponsored by our colleague from California, Mr. FILNER, the chairman of the House Committee on Veterans Affairs.

Mr. SHAYS. Mr. Speaker, as a cosponsor of H.R. 23, I am pleased to support this legislation on the House floor today.

The duty performed by the U.S. Merchant Marines during World War II was courageous and vital to our national interest. H.R. 23 would direct the Department of Veterans Affairs to pay a monthly benefit of \$1,000 to U.S. Merchant Marine veterans who served in the Army and Navy Transport Services between December 7, 1941, and December 31, 1946, or to their survivors.

During World War II, the Army and Navy Transport Services delivered troops and supplies to the front lines. These men often put their lives in danger to keep supplies flowing, but Merchant Marine veterans were not granted benefits under the G.I. Bill of Rights that Congress enacted in 1945.

All those who served in the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force or Coast Guard were recipients of benefits under the G.I. Bill. The United States Merchant Marine regrettably was not included.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this legislation.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 23, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

The title was amended so as to read: "A Bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish the Merchant Mariner Equity Compensation Fund to provide benefits to certain individuals who served in the United States merchant marine (including the Army Transport Service and the Naval Transport Service) during World War II."

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

VETERANS' BENEFITS IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 2007

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 1315) to amend title 38, United States Code, to provide specially adaptive housing assistance to certain disabled members of the Armed Forces residing temporarily in housing owned by a family member, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 1315

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

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Veterans' Benefits Improvement Act of 2007".

SEC. 2. PROVISION OF SPECIALLY ADAPTIVE HOUSING ASSISTANCE TO DISABLED MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES RESIDING TEMPORARILY IN HOUSING OWNED BY A FAMILY MEMBER.

Section 2102A of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) by redesignating subsections (d) and (e) as subsections (e) and (f), respectively; and

(2) by inserting after subsection (c) the following new subsection (d):

"(d) ASSISTANCE FOR MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES.—The Secretary may provide assistance under subsection (a) to a member of the Armed Forces serving on active duty who is suffering from a disability described in subsection (a)(2) or (b)(2) of section 2101 of this title if such disability is the result of an injury incurred or disease contracted in or aggravated in line of duty in the active military, naval, or air service. Such assistance shall be provided to the same extent as assistance is provided under subsection (a) to veterans eligible for assistance under that subsection and subject to the limitation under subsection (c)."

SEC. 3. VISUAL IMPAIRMENT AND ORIENTATION AND MOBILITY PROFESSIONALS EDUCATION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM.

(a) ESTABLISHMENT OF PROGRAM.—Chapter 76 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new subchapter:

"SUBCHAPTER VIII—VISUAL IMPAIRMENT AND ORIENTATION AND MOBILITY PROFESSIONALS SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

"§ 7691. Authority for program

"As part of the Educational Assistance Program and subject to the availability of appropriations for such purpose, the Secretary shall carry out a scholarship program under this subchapter. The program shall be known as the Department of Veterans Affairs Visual Impairment and Orientation and Mobility Professionals Scholarship Program (hereinafter in this subchapter referred to as the 'Program'). The purpose of the Program is to increase the supply of qualified blind rehabilitation specialists for the Department and the Nation.

"§ 7692. Eligibility; agreement

"(a) ELIGIBILITY.—To be eligible to participate in the Program, an individual must be accepted for enrollment or enrolled (as described in section 7602 of this title) as a full-time or part-time student in a field of education or training described in subsection (b).

"(b) QUALIFYING FIELDS OF EDUCATION OR TRAINING.—A field of education or training described in this subsection is education or training leading to—

"(1) a degree or certificate in visual impairment or orientation and mobility, or a

dual degree or certification in both such areas; and

"(2) appointment or retention in a position under section 7401 of this title.

"(c) AGREEMENT.—(1) An agreement between the Secretary and a participant in the Program shall (in addition to the requirements set forth in section 7604 of this title) include the following:

"(A) The Secretary's agreement to provide the participant with a scholarship under the Program for a specified number (from one to three) of school years during which the participant pursues a course of education or training described in subsection (b) that meets the requirements set forth in section 7602(a) of this title.

"(B) The participant's agreement to serve as a full-time employee in the Veterans Health Administration for a period of three years (hereinafter in this subchapter referred to as the 'period of obligated service') during the six-year period beginning on the date the participant completes the education or training and receives a degree or certificate described in subsection (b)(1).

"(C) The participant's agreement to serve under subparagraph (B) in a Department facility selected by the Secretary.

"(2) In a case in which an extension is granted under section 7673(c)(2) of this title, the number of years for which a scholarship may be provided under the Program shall be the number of school years provided for as a result of the extension.

"(3) In the case of a participant who is a part-time student, the period of obligated service shall be reduced in accordance with the proportion that the number of credit hours carried by such participant in any such school year bears to the number of credit hours required to be carried by a full-time student in the course of training being pursued by the participant, but in no event to less than one year.

"§ 7693. Scholarship

"(a) SCHOLARSHIP.—A scholarship provided to a participant in the Program for a school year shall consist of payment of the tuition (or such portion of the tuition as may be provided under subsection (b)) of the participant for that school year and payment of other reasonable educational expenses (including fees, books, and laboratory expenses) for that school year.

"(b) AMOUNTS.—The total amount of the scholarship payable under subsection (a)—

"(1) in the case of a participant in the Program who is a full-time student, may not exceed \$15,000 for the equivalent of one year of full-time coursework; and

"(2) in the case of a participant in the Program who is a part-time student, shall bear the same ratio to the amount that would be paid under paragraph (1) if the participant were a full-time student in the course of education or training being pursued by the participant as the coursework carried by the participant to full-time coursework in that course of education or training.

"(c) LIMITATIONS ON PERIOD OF PAYMENT.—(1) The maximum number of school years for which a scholarship may be paid under subsection (a) to a participant in the Program shall be six school years.

"(2) A participant in the Program may not receive a scholarship under subsection (a) for more than the equivalent of three years of full-time coursework.

"(d) PAYMENT OF EDUCATIONAL EXPENSES BY EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS.—The Secretary may arrange with an educational institution in which a participant in the Program is enrolled for the payment of the educational expenses described in subsection (a). Such payments may be made without regard to subsections (a) and (b) of section 3324 of title 31.