

home district, told me that the Improving Job Opportunities for Veterans Act will add to his company's existing outreach to our veterans. Currently, they employ 150 veterans. Now they will do even more. I applaud their efforts and of other companies who want to hire vets.

I hope this bill helps employers connect to the great pool of talent of those returning from military service.

Mr. MICHAUD. Mr. Speaker, at this time I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from California (Mr. TAKANO).

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Maine for yielding.

I rise today to support the increased job opportunities embodied in H.R. 1412 and the changes it makes to the on-the-job training and apprenticeship programs at the Department of Veterans Affairs. I want to thank the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. COFFMAN) for introducing this bill and the Veterans' Affairs Committee leadership, Chairman MILLER, Ranking Member MICHAUD, and subcommittee Chairman FLORES for moving this bill through committee.

This legislation will expand access for veterans to on-the-job training and apprenticeships, and assist employers in hiring veterans who have shown time and again that their real-world experience, leadership, and countless other skills are great resources for American companies. By reducing the percentage of salary paid to a veteran participating in one of these programs, this bill would make it more attractive for companies to hire veterans doing on-the-job training and apprenticeships.

It is our hope that these opportunities will help bridge the employment gaps veterans are currently experiencing. Unfortunately, it is also clear from our subcommittee work that the Department of Veterans Affairs could be doing a better job advertising this great benefit. The more veterans and employers know about these benefits, the more opportunities veterans can have in the job market.

I am proud to support this legislation and urge my colleagues from both sides of the aisle to support it as well.

Mr. Speaker, I am very proud of the bipartisan spirit of the Veterans' Affairs Committee.

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, we have no more speakers at this time, and so if Mr. MICHAUD is ready to close, we are prepared to close.

Mr. MICHAUD. Mr. Speaker, I, too, have no further Members who wish to speak, but I do want to, in closing, emphasize that veterans are an asset to any organization, whether it is in the private or public sector. They make the organization better, and they improve the bottom line. This bill is very timely and is very important for our veterans.

I also want to thank, once again, Mr. TAKANO for his leadership on this issue. In his life before he became a Member

of Congress, he was in the community college system, and he knows about training and how important apprenticeship programs are. So I encourage my colleagues to support this legislation.

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

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, once again I encourage all Members to support H.R. 1412, as amended.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Mrs. KIRKPATRICK. Mr. Speaker, today, I rise in support of H.R. 1412, The Improving Job Opportunities for Veterans Act.

This bipartisan bill helps our Nation's veterans get the training they need to build a stronger future.

It improves and increases the awareness and availability of on-the-job training and apprenticeship programs.

After all they have sacrificed for our country, we should do our part to ensure veterans have good training and good job opportunities.

I thank my colleagues from both sides of the aisle—Mr. COFFMAN and Mr. TAKANO—for introducing this bill.

Helping our veterans isn't a partisan issue—it's a national responsibility.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MILLER) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 1412, as amended.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds being in the affirmative, the ayes have it.

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

AMERICAN HEROES COLA ACT

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 570) to amend title 38, United States Code, to provide for annual cost-of-living adjustments to be made automatically by law each year in the rates of disability compensation for veterans with service-connected disabilities and the rates of dependency and indemnity compensation for survivors of certain service-connected disabled veterans, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 570

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 "American Heroes COLA Act".

SEC. 2. AUTOMATIC ANNUAL INCREASE IN RATES OF DISABILITY COMPENSATION AND DEPENDENCY AND INDEMNITY COMPENSATION.

(a) INDEXING TO SOCIAL SECURITY INCREASES.—Section 5312 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new subsection:

"(d)(1) Whenever there is an increase in benefit amounts payable under title II of the

Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 401 et seq.) as a result of a determination made under section 215(i) of such Act (42 U.S.C. 415(i)), the Secretary shall, effective on the date of such increase in benefit amounts, increase the dollar amounts in effect for the payment of disability compensation and dependency and indemnity compensation by the Secretary, as specified in paragraph (2), as such amounts were in effect immediately before the date of such increase in benefit amounts payable under title II of the Social Security Act, by the same percentage as the percentage by which such benefit amounts are increased, but only if such percentage increase is calculated using the Bureau of Labor Statistics Consumer Price Index for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers.

"(2) The dollar amounts to be increased pursuant to paragraph (1) are the following:

"(A) WARTIME DISABILITY COMPENSATION.—Each of the dollar amounts in effect under section 1114 of this title.

"(B) ADDITIONAL COMPENSATION FOR DEPENDENTS.—Each of the dollar amounts in effect under section 1115(1) of this title.

"(C) CLOTHING ALLOWANCE.—The dollar amount in effect under section 1162 of this title.

"(D) DEPENDENCY AND INDEMNITY COMPENSATION TO SURVIVING SPOUSE.—Each of the dollar amounts in effect under subsections (a) through (d) of section 1311 of such title.

"(E) DEPENDENCY AND INDEMNITY COMPENSATION TO CHILDREN.—Each of the dollar amounts in effect under sections 1313(a) and 1314 of such title.

"(3) Whenever there is an increase under paragraph (1) in amounts in effect for the payment of disability compensation and dependency and indemnity compensation, the Secretary shall publish such amounts, as increased pursuant to such paragraph, in the Federal Register at the same time as the material required by section 215(i)(2)(D) of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 415(i)(2)(D)) is published by reason of a determination under section 215(i) of such Act (42 U.S.C. 415(i)).

"(4) During the period beginning on the date of the enactment of this subsection and ending on September 30, 2018, each dollar amount increased under paragraph (1), if not a whole dollar amount, shall be rounded to the next lower whole dollar amount.

"(5) The Secretary of Veterans Affairs may adjust administratively, consistent with the increases made under subsection (a), the rates of disability compensation payable to persons under section 10 of Public Law 85-857 (72 Stat. 1263) who have not received compensation under chapter 11 of this title."

(b) EFFECTIVE DATE.—Subsection (d) of section 5312 of title 38, United States Code, as added by subsection (a) of this section, shall take effect on December 1, 2014.

SEC. 3. INCREASE IN RATE OF SPECIAL MONTHLY COMPENSATION FOR SEVERELY INJURED VETERANS.

(a) INCREASE.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Section 1114(r) of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(A) in paragraph (1), by striking "\$2,002" and inserting "\$3,163"; and

(B) in paragraph (2), by striking "\$2,983" and inserting "\$4,713".

(2) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendments made by paragraph (1) shall take effect on December 1, 2014.

(b) TEMPORARY RATES.—During the period beginning on December 1, 2014, and ending on September 30, 2018, section 1114(r) of title 38, United States Code, as amended by subsection (a), shall be applied—

(1) in paragraph (1), by substituting "\$2,742" for "\$3,163"; and

(2) in paragraph (2), by substituting "\$4085" for "\$4,713".

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MILLER) and the gentleman from Maine (Mr. MICHAUD) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Florida.

□ 1250

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and add any extraneous material that they may have on H.R. 570, as amended.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Florida?

There was no objection.

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I might consume.

The author of the underlying bill, Mr. RUNYAN of New Jersey, has put forward a bipartisan proposal to make permanent the veterans cost-of-living adjustment. Currently, Congress must adopt annual COLA bills to ensure that payments to disabled veterans and survivors do not erode due to inflation.

Mr. RUNYAN's bill, which my amendment incorporates, would make this annual, and sometimes dangerously delayed, practice a thing of the past. A coalition of veterans groups expressed strong concern with some other elements of the underlying bill, which my amendment now seeks to address.

First, the concern was expressed that the bill would permanently extend the 20-year practice of rounding veterans COLA increases down to the next lower whole dollar. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that extending the round-down authority saves, relative to the baseline, over \$1.3 billion over a 10-year period.

The veterans coalition was concerned about the cumulative effect that the permanent round-down would have, as well as the moral principle associated with logging savings on the backs of our disabled veterans.

To meet that concern, I worked with our ranking member to, first, sunset the round-down authority after 5 years, and second, we agreed with the committee's markup to find a way to reinvest savings associated with the round-down by improving benefits for other disabled veterans.

I am pleased to announce that my amendment contains such an improvement that it is now enthusiastically supported by the veterans groups.

Our bipartisan work would significantly increase the special monthly compensation payments made to our most severely disabled veterans by 30 percent through the year 2018, then 50 percent thereafter. This is a payment that goes to support catastrophically disabled veterans who are in need of aid and attendance. These are veterans who are missing limbs, totally blind, deaf, or who are so disabled that they

require the need of special care in the home, all as a result of their military service.

Clearly, it's our duty to ensure that these most deserving service-disabled veterans are well-cared for, and my amendment to H.R. 570 will be a significant step in that direction.

And finally, the service organizations were concerned about the potential application of the so-called chained CPI at some point in the future that could potentially affect veterans COLAs. To allay that concern, my amendment specifies that the permanent veterans COLA only would be continued to the extent that the current inflationary index that is used now, the CPI for urban wage earners and clerical workers, continues in force.

I'm very pleased to say that, with the changes in my amendment, we now have a bill that can be supported by the veterans it is intended to benefit.

With that, I reserve the balance of my time.

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 570, as amended, the American Heroes COLA Act.

I wish to thank Mr. RUNYAN, the sponsor of H.R. 570, and the chairman of the Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs Subcommittee, as well as Ms. TITUS, our subcommittee ranking member, for their hard work on this measure.

I'd also like to thank Chairman MILLER for working closely with me, and with the veterans groups, to make the key improvements in this particular bill.

H.R. 570 would permanently index the annual veterans cost-of-living adjustment, or COLA, to the increase provided to Social Security beneficiaries, but only if the Social Security COLA continues to be determined using the current methodologies.

This guards against automatically passing on any decrease to veterans that result from any future actions to implement a chained CPI regime.

Second, H.R. 570 extends a COLA round-down provision set to expire this year for 5 years, instead of making it permanent. This round-down provision was implemented many years ago as a means of budget savings, and many veterans groups voiced opposition to making such a decrease permanent.

Third, the savings generated from the round-down extension will be reinvested in veterans programs, namely, increasing the monthly amount provided to some of our veterans most in need of assistance and care.

H.R. 570 would increase the amount of what is called a "special monthly compensation" paid to catastrophically disabled veterans in need of aid and attendance. This monthly amount would be increased from \$2,002 to \$3,163, and for those most in need of care from \$2,983 to \$4,713. These final payments would be phased in to comply with PAYGO requirements.

H.R. 570, as amended, is a good bill, and I urge my colleagues to support this measure.

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

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, at this time I'm happy to yield such time as he might consume to the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. RUNYAN), the chairman of the Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs.

Mr. RUNYAN. Chairman MILLER, thank you and Ranking Member Mr. MICHAUD for bringing this bill to the floor.

H.R. 570 is the American Heroes COLA Act. This bill, which I introduced at the beginning of the 113th Congress, seeks to make permanent the annual increase to veterans disability compensation rates and other benefits by tying these increases to the cost-of-living adjustments for Social Security benefits.

With the passage of this act, veterans will no longer again have to depend on congressional action to receive an increase to the cost-of-living adjustment they have more than earned through their service. Instead, these increases will become automatic from year to year.

As chairman of the Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs, I am honored again to sponsor this legislation. I'm proud to have our subcommittee ranking member, Ms. TITUS, as the lead cosponsor of the bill.

Mr. Speaker, I also support the amendment offered by Chairman MILLER of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs to use the savings generated by H.R. 570 to increase the rate of special monthly compensation paid to our most tragically wounded veterans, and I encourage all Members to support H.R. 570.

Mr. MICHAUD. Mr. Speaker, at this time I'd like to yield 4 minutes to the gentlewoman from Nevada (Ms. TITUS).

Ms. TITUS. Thank you, Ranking Member MICHAUD, for yielding and for your work and leadership on this critical issue that affects our Nation's heroes.

I support the American Heroes COLA Act, H.R. 570, which I introduced, along with my colleague and subcommittee chairman, JOHN RUNYAN. This is important legislation that will protect our disabled veterans and their families' financial security.

Unlike with Social Security COLA increases, which are calculated automatically, Congress must act each year to provide veterans with their COLA increases they need and deserve. Our Nation's heroes should receive their full compensation payment each year as well in a timely fashion, removed from the occasional logjam here on Capitol Hill. Their livelihood should not be held hostage by political forces.

Nevada's veterans have struggled during this tough economic climate. Their rates of unemployment and homelessness are disproportionately

high, and as the cost of living has increased, so have their problems. And I know this is true of veterans around the country.

By permanently adjusting benefits to include automatic cost-of-living increases we are providing critical peace of mind to those who have bravely served our country. They will have the knowledge of knowing that assistance will be there.

Chairman RUNYAN and I have worked closely to improve this legislation since we first introduced the bill in February, and I fully support the amended version we are considering today. Changes concerning the round-down practice and the chained CPI are changes that will strengthen the bill.

I appreciate also the input we received from a number of veterans service organizations and believe that this improved version of the legislation clearly addresses their concerns.

In effect, H.R. 570 will direct the VA to increase rates of disability compensation for veterans with service-connected disabilities, as well as the rates of dependency and indemnity compensation for the survivors of veterans with specific service-connected claims.

The bill will protect veterans benefits from deteriorating over time as the costs of housing, medicine, food and clothing and utilities all increase.

□ 1300

I want to echo Ranking Member MICHAUD's sentiments regarding the importance of having these adjustments occur annually, regularly, and dependably. It's essential that Congress provide for the needs of our heroes, the brave men and women who answered the call to serve in our armed services, and for their families as well.

I thank Chairman MILLER and Chairman RUNYAN for their work on this important issue, and I urge my colleagues to support the American Heroes COLA Act.

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

Mr. MICHAUD. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. O'Rourke).

Mr. O'Rourke. I would also like to thank the chair of the subcommittee and the ranking member for sponsoring this legislation and the chairman and ranking member of the full committee for bringing it forward. I'm pleased to be a cosponsor of the American Heroes COLA Act.

Yesterday, I had the opportunity to visit Arlington National Cemetery with other Members of Congress and had the opportunity to place a wreath on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. This incredibly moving and grounding experience reminded me of the ultimate sacrifice given by so many of our veterans.

For those who return from service wounded or develop disabilities as they age, veterans benefits are what allow them and their families to live in some

level of comfort. These modest benefits are often the difference between paying the mortgage and putting food on the table or going without. The legislation before us offers veterans security and guarantees that cost-of-living adjustments will happen automatically and not depend on yearly congressional approval.

In addition, H.R. 570 will substantially increase benefits for the most severely disabled veterans receiving special monthly compensation. The bill also protects veterans from benefits cuts should a chained CPI be adopted for Social Security. While I oppose adoption of the chained CPI for Social Security, I think it is important we act now to take the issue off the table for veterans benefits.

I represent thousands of El Paso veterans who have served our country and rely on VA benefits to make ends meet. They deserve the security of knowing those benefits will be adjusted when their cost of living rises.

I urge all of my colleagues to support this legislation.

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, we have no further requests for time. We're prepared to close, if the ranking member is as well.

Mr. MICHAUD. In closing, Mr. Speaker, H.R. 570, as amended, is a solid piece of legislation that the veterans service organizations support, that the committee supports, and I would urge my colleagues to support this bill.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I once again urge all of my colleagues to support H.R. 570, as amended, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mrs. KIRKPATRICK. Mr. Speaker, today, I rise in support of H.R. 570, the American Heroes COLA Act.

I am proud to cosponsor this bipartisan bill because it helps our Nation's veterans.

More specifically, it helps veterans with service-related disabilities.

H.R. 570 would make their annual cost-of-living adjustments automatic for their disability compensation.

Making this process automatic would finally allow veterans to count on their cost of living adjustment every year instead of waiting around on Congress.

I thank my colleagues from both sides of the aisle—Mr. RUNYON and Ms. TITUS—for introducing this bill.

Helping our veterans isn't a partisan issue—it's a national responsibility.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MILLER) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 570, 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 provide for annual cost-of-living adjustments to be made automati-

cally by law each year in the rates of disability compensation for veterans with service-connected disabilities and the rates of dependency and indemnity compensation for survivors of certain service-connected disabled veterans, and for other purposes."

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

AWARDING CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL TO FIRST SPECIAL SERVICE FORCE

Mr. COTTON. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 324) to grant the Congressional Gold Medal, collectively, to the First Special Service Force, in recognition of its superior 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. 324

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

SECTION 1. FINDINGS.

Congress finds the following:

(1) The First Special Service Force (the "Force"), a military unit composed of volunteers from the United States and Canada, was activated in July 1942 at Fort Harrison near Helena, Montana.

(2) The Force was initially intended to target military and industrial installations that were supporting the German war effort, including important hydroelectric plants, which would severely limit the production of strategic materials used by the Axis powers.

(3) From July 1942 through June 1943, volunteers of the Force trained in hazardous, arctic conditions in the mountains of western Montana, and in the waterways of Camp Bradford, Virginia.

(4) The combat echelon of the Force totaled 1,800 soldiers, half from the United States and half from Canada.

(5) The Force also contained a service battalion, composed of 800 members from the United States, that provided important support for the combat troops.

(6) A special bond developed between the Canadian and United States soldiers, who were not segregated by country, although the commander of the Force was a United States colonel.

(7) The Force was the only unit formed during World War II that consisted of troops from Canada and the United States.

(8) In October 1943, the Force went to Italy, where it fought in battles south of Cassino, including Monte La Difensa and Monte Majo, two mountain peaks that were a critical anchor of the German defense line.

(9) During the night of December 3, 1943, the Force ascended to the top of the precipitous face of Monte La Difensa, where the Force suffered heavy casualties and overcame fierce resistance to overtake the German line.

(10) After the battle for La Difensa, the Force continued to fight tough battles at high altitudes, in rugged terrain, and in severe weather.

(11) After battles on the strongly defended Italian peaks of Samucro, Vischiataro, and Remetanea, the size of the Force had been reduced from 1,800 soldiers to fewer than 500.

(12) For 4 months in 1944, the Force engaged in raids and aggressive patrols at the Anzio Beachhead.

(13) On June 4, 1944, members of the Force were among the first Allied troops to liberate Rome.