

GiveBack's 20th Annual Food Distribution. Their efforts provide over 1,500 families in the National Capital Area with wholesome Thanksgiving dinners.

Ransom Miller III founded Project GiveBack in 1995. In its first year, six local families and one shelter received food baskets. Over the next two decades, this small effort grew to serve 3,500 families in locations across the country, including Washington, D.C.; Dallas, Texas; Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; Tulsa, Oklahoma; St. Louis, Missouri; and Denver, Colorado.

Project GiveBack's scope has also grown to include: Children's Toy Drive, to provide toys for children in low-income families; Children's Easter Celebration, to provide a safe and fun atmosphere for children in Southeast D.C. to celebrate the spiritual meaning of Easter; Computer Sponsor Program, to assist local schools and community organizations in the acquisition of more than 100 laptops and personal computers; and Youth EXPOSURE Program, to connect students of various backgrounds and to expose them to a wide range of experiences that will spark career aspirations, ingenuity, and creativity.

Project GiveBack is achieving its mission to be a vehicle for firms and professionals to give back to the communities where they work and live in by coordinating programs that benefit less fortunate individuals and families, with a focus on children. It is the intent of the organization to uplift communities around the United States mentally, spiritually, and economically.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the House to join me in commanding Project GiveBack's volunteers and sponsors and may they soon join the more than 650,000 residents in our nation's capital in thanksgiving for full representation for D.C. in Congress.

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#### WELCOMING ENSLIE COLE DECK

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#### HON. JOHN L. MICA

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, November 20, 2014

Mr. MICA. Mr. Speaker, as I rise today, it is my pleasure to announce the birth of Enslie Cole Deck on November 19, 2014 at Inova Fair Oaks Hospital in Fairfax, Virginia.

Enslie is the daughter of Wiley Deck, my Chief of Staff, and Elizabeth Deck. The former Elizabeth Buckles and Wiley Deck met as staff members in our Washington office. Both of them moved to our Florida District Office in St. Augustine in 2003. They married and had their first child, Emilia Hayward Deck. The Decks returned to Washington, DC in 2011 and now have expanded their family with the arrival of Enslie.

To the Deck and Buckles families, we extend our warmest congratulations and wish them years for continued health and happiness.

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#### LEGISLATIVE HISTORY OF FALEOMAVAEGA'S PROVISION FOR NON-SAMOAN VETERANS MARRIED TO SAMOANS TO QUALIFY FOR VA HOME LOANS

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#### HON. ENI F.H. FALEOMAVAEGA

OF AMERICAN SAMOA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, November 20, 2014

Mr. FALEOMAVAEGA. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to include, for historical purposes, information about a provision for non-Samoan veterans married to Samoans to qualify for VA home loans.

[Press Release, Nov. 10, 2005]

#### HOUSE PASSES VA HOUSING ASSISTANCE BILL AND INCLUDES FALEOMAVAEGA'S PROVISION FOR AMERICAN SAMOAS VETERANS AND THEIR SPOUSES

Congressman Faleomavaega announced today that by a voice vote the House passed H.R. 3665, the Veterans Housing and Employment Improvement Act of 2005 and included Faleomavaega's provision for American Samoas veterans.

I especially want to thank Chairman Steve Buyer and Ranking Member Lane Evans of the Committee on Veterans Affairs and also Chairman John Boozman and Ranking Member Stephanie Herseth of the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity for their leadership in making it possible for Native Americans to participate in the veterans housing loan program, Congressman Faleomavaega said.

I am especially thankful that American Samoas veterans have also been able to participate in this very successful program and I thank my colleagues for working with me to address the concerns of American Samoans without adversely affecting the rights of other tribes. Many Samoans have served in the military and they are allowed to obtain home loans under current law. Other Samoans are married to non-Samoan veterans. Non-native military spouses married to native Samoans have not been able to qualify for the VA home loan program. In part, this is because the Native American Home Loan program excludes the spouses of non-native Americans from qualifying for a VA home loan.

This has been problematic in American Samoa because most land in American Samoa is communal and the VA has only made it possible for Samoans of Tutuila, Manus, Aunu'u, or Swain Islands to qualify for home loans offered by traditional lending institutions because only they can make claim to native land. As a result, non-native spouses of veterans or persons serving in the US Armed Forces who are married to a Samoan have not been able to qualify for a VA home loan. However, the VA has been helpful in assisting the Veterans Affairs Committee and my office in drafting language to rectify this problem and I am pleased that this language has now been included in HR 3665.

As we have agreed, it is our understanding that this language now makes it possible for a non-Samoan military member or veteran to qualify for a VA loan if the non-Samoan military member has a meaningful interest in the housing. A Samoan spouse has been granted permission to build on communal land. It is also our understanding that meaningful interest means that the veteran has the right to reside in the home under tribal laws.

This is good news for our veterans and their spouses. For this reason, I again thank my colleagues for including my provision in this important legislation. I also thank the

VA for its assistance and my good friend Ranking Member Lane Evans of the VA Committee for his tireless efforts and support. The Congressman concluded.

[Press Release, May 22, 2006]

#### HOUSE AND SENATE PASS VETERANS BILL AND INCLUDES FALEOMAVAEGA'S PROVISION FOR NON-SAMOAN VETERANS MARRIED TO SAMOANS TO QUALIFY FOR VA HOME LOANS

Congressman Faleomavaega announced today that by a vote of 372 to 0 the House passed S. 1235, the Veterans Housing Opportunity and Benefits Improvement Act of 2006 and included his provision for non-Samoan veterans married to Samoans to qualify for VA Home Loans. As we approach Memorial Day to remember and honor our military men and women who have died while serving our nation during a time of war, it is especially fitting that the House and Senate have passed the Veterans Housing Opportunity and Benefits Improvement Act of 2006 in tribute to those who are still with us, Faleomavaega said.

America is what she is today because of the sacrifices made by our military men and women and their families. This is why I am pleased that the US Congress is recognizing their service by passing S. 1235. After years of hard work, I am also pleased to announce that once the President signs this legislation into law, non-Samoan veterans married to Samoans will finally be able to qualify for VA home loans.

For too long, Native American veterans, including Samoans, were not able to participate in the VA Home Loan program because our land is communally rather than privately held. For the same reason, traditional lending institutions also would not make home loans to Native Americans because in case of default the bank would not be able to repossess the land or the home due to factors associated with communal ownership.

However, in 1992, with the support of the Chairman and Ranking Member of the Veterans Affairs Committee, were able to establish a pilot program making it possible for Native Americans, including Samoans, to qualify for VA home loans. Even though this was groundbreaking and very helpful to many of our veterans, the program was still problematic because it excluded the spouses of non-native Americans from qualifying for a VA home loan and for us this meant that non-Samoan military spouses married to native Samoans were also unable to qualify.

But thanks to the successful passage of today's legislation, our non-Samoan veterans married to Samoans will now be able to qualify for VA home loans and I could not be happier that their dreams of home ownership can now come true. At this time, I especially want to thank Chairman Steve Buyer and Ranking Member Lane Evans of the Committee on Veterans Affairs and also Chairman John Boozman and Ranking Member Stephanie Herseth of the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity and Mary Ellen McCarthy, Democratic Staff Director for Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs, for their support and tireless efforts in making this possible. I also thank Senator Larry Craig and Senator Daniel Akaka, Chairman and Ranking Member of the Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs, for their leadership.

Finally, I want to thank the VA for assisting the Veterans Affairs Committee and my office in drafting language that has been included in section 104 of S. 1235 which now makes home ownership a reality for non-Samoan veterans married to Samoans. As a result of this language, it is our understanding that a non-Samoan military member or veteran may now qualify for a VA loan if the non-Samoan military member has a meaningful interest in the housing a Samoan

spouse has been granted permission to build on communal land. It is also our understanding that meaningful interest means that the veteran has the right to reside in the home under tribal laws.

Again, I believe S. 1235 is a fitting tribute to our veterans and I am especially pleased that this legislation provides American Samoas veterans with the housing opportunities and other benefits they deserve. For this reason, I again thank my colleagues for including my provision in this important legislation and for supporting the Veterans Housing Opportunity and Benefits Act of 2006, the Congressman concluded.

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**ACKNOWLEDGING THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF MS. JENNETTE STARKS-FAULKNER, 2014 FENCING WORLD CHAMPION**

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**HON. GREGORY W. MEEKS**

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, November 20, 2014*

Mr. MEEKS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the accomplishments of Ms. Jennette Starks-Faulkner. As you know Mr. Speaker, great athletes are not born they are forged through the combined efforts of our entire community and the dedication and determination of individuals. Ms. Starks-Faulkner's discipline and her commitment to living a healthy and active lifestyle is evident in the success she has found participating in competitions hosted by the United States Fencing Association.

Ms. Starks-Faulkner's precise footwork, lightning thrusts, and deft ripostes have made her one of the most accomplished fencers in the entire world. This past October in Debrecen, Hungary she became the first U.S. woman ever to win the International Fencing Federation's Veteran Fencing World Championship gold medal in foil competition. Among her long list of achievements, which I ask be added into the RECORD, Ms. Starks-Faulkner won a gold medal at the 2014 USA Fencing National Championships in the Veteran Foil competition, a silver in the Veteran Saber competition and she has represented the United States as a member of the last seven Veteran World Championship teams.

Anyone who watches Ms. Starks-Faulkner compete will attest that her physical ability is only surpassed by her willingness to give everything she has to win. In a sport where there are very few African American participants, Ms. Starks-Faulkner has distinguished herself as the first among champions. While small in stature, her presence casts a great shadow on her competition. Ms. Starks-Faulkner's accomplishments are a testament to the power of the human spirit and the limitless potential each and every person possesses. Lastly, her dedication to fencing is an important reminder not only to her students, but to all Americans, that when you believe in your dreams, nothing can stop you.

As an ardent admirer of those who would push beyond their limitations, I salute Ms. Starks-Faulkner and her long list of accomplishments.

THE BLACK LUNG BENEFITS IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 2014

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**HON. MATT CARTWRIGHT**

OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, November 20, 2014*

Mr. CARTWRIGHT. Mr. Speaker, I am introducing the Black Lung Benefits Improvement Act of 2014 today to help disabled coal miners get benefits that they are entitled to but often unable to access.

Coal workers' pneumoconiosis, commonly referred to as "black lung," is a debilitating and deadly disease caused by the long-term inhalation of coal dust in underground and surface coal mines. According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, black lung has caused or contributed to more than 76,000 deaths since 1968, with thousands of miners still sick and dying from the disease.

The Federal Coal Mine Health and Safety Act of 1969, which included the Black Lung Benefits Act, contained a program designed to provide compensation and medical care to miners who are totally disabled due to black lung. To secure benefits, disabled coal miners must engage in lengthy and complex litigation against local operators that has been proven to unfairly burden claimants and prevent them from receiving the benefits to which they are entitled.

In 2009, the Government Accountability Office found that "coal miners face a number of challenges pursuing federal black lung claims, including finding legal representation and developing sound medical evidence to support their claims." More recent award-winning investigations by the Center for Public Integrity and ABC News uncovered numerous cases in which coal operators and their attorneys defeated claims by hiring doctors who systematically failed to diagnose black lung disease, or by withholding medical evidence from miners, surviving spouses, and judges that would have proven the miners' eligibility for benefits. These and other unethical practices were examined as part of a July 22, 2014, hearing before the Senate Subcommittee on Employment and Workplace Safety. In addition, bureaucratic delays impede timely decisions about miners' benefits, with miners waiting an average of 42 months to receive a decision on their claim from an administrative law judge in the Department of Labor.

In the past year, the Department of Labor has taken several steps to address these issues; however, administrative actions alone will not be able to solve the systematic problems facing victims of black lung disease. That is why Congress has an obligation to reform this program so that it better serves and honors those who have helped supply the energy that our country relies on to light our homes and power our factories.

I want to thank Congressman GEORGE MILLER, the senior Democrat on the Committee on Education and the Workforce, for his leadership on this issue, and for Representatives JOE COURTNEY, NICK RAHALL and ROBERT C. "BOBBY" SCOTT for joining me in sponsoring this important legislation.

BLACK LUNG BENEFITS IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 2014

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**HON. GEORGE MILLER**

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, November 20, 2014*

Mr. GEORGE MILLER of California. Mr. Speaker, today I am joining Representatives CARTWRIGHT, SCOTT, COURTNEY, and RAHALL in introducing the Black Lung Benefits Improvement Act of 2014.

The Black Lung Benefits Act was enacted in 1969 to provide health care and modest benefits to coal miners who develop black lung disease, also known as coal workers' pneumoconiosis, which is a crippling respiratory disease that has left generations of miners tethered to oxygen tanks. Today, the black lung benefits program is failing far too many miners and their survivors because there is an unfair disparity in medical and legal resources between miners and coal operators when it comes to establishing eligibility for benefits.

This legislation seeks to level the playing field by ensuring that miners have equal access to medical evidence, better access to legal resources, a remedy for those whose claims were denied due to recent discoveries of discredited medical evidence. In addition, it includes a requirement that the Department of Labor improve the timeliness of benefit decisions and an adjustment of benefit payments so that miners and their survivors receive the cost of living increases that Congress intended.

Black lung disease has killed more than 76,000 miners since 1968. Rates of black lung disease dropped steadily after the Federal Coal Mine Safety and Health Act of 1969 set enforceable limits on exposure to coal mine dust. However, rates are now on the rise again, according to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, or NIOSH. The number of people with the most severe form of black lung disease has spiked ten-fold over the past 15 years. In a heartbreaking example of the disease's prevalence, autopsies of the 24 miners who died in the Upper Big Branch mine explosion in 2010 revealed that 17 of these miners had black lung. And the Department of Labor expects 7,300 black lung benefit cases to be filed in fiscal years 2014 and 2015, an increase of 35 percent since fiscal year 2012.

The Black Lung Benefits Improvement Act of 2014 seeks to level the playing field for miners and strengthen our black lung benefits program in nine key ways.

First, it addresses the lack of legal assistance available to miners. The determination of a claimant's eligibility for black lung benefits often requires complex, adversarial litigation, but resource disparities between coal companies and claimants make it difficult for many miners and survivors with meritorious claims to prevail. The Government Accountability Office found that many claimants under the Black Lung Benefits Act are not equipped with the medical and legal resources necessary to develop sufficient evidence that can meet the requirements for benefits. Miners often lack complete and reliable medical evidence, which increases the risk that the individuals who review claims for benefits will be presented with insufficient medical evidence. Similarly, without better options for legal representation, significant numbers of such claimants proceed