

BULLETPROOF VEST  
PARTNERSHIP GRANT ACT OF 2000

SPEECH OF

**HON. PETER J. VISCLOSKY**

OF INDIANA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Wednesday, October 25, 2000*

Mr. VISCLOSKY. Mr. Speaker, I support S. 2413, the Bulletproof Vest Partnership Grant Act of 2000. I would like to recognize over 260 of my colleagues who joined me as a cosponsor of H.R. 4033, an identical House version of this bipartisan legislation designed to save the lives of police officers, which my colleague from New Jersey, FRANK LOBIONDO, and I sponsored and which was approved overwhelmingly by the House earlier this year. Mr. LOBIONDO has once again proven that he is an indispensable leader on this vital issue. His commitment to police officers in his district and nationwide is absolutely unquestionable. Furthermore, he has repeatedly championed the cause of corrections officers, who are often the forgotten arm of the law enforcement community. In this age of expanding and increasingly violent prison populations, Mr. LOBIONDO has taken the lead in pushing for the development and use of stabproof vests to protect those who keep violent criminals behind bars. I am pleased to say that, largely due to his efforts, S. 2413 includes provisions which will make stabproof vests available under the Bulletproof Vest Partnership Grant program. Mr. LOBIONDO's staff, especially his Legislative Assistant, Bryan Cunningham, have been incredibly helpful in this process. Their work has been a worthy reflection of Mr. LOBIONDO's long-standing commitment to the protection of our nation's law enforcement officers. I would also like to extend my thanks to Senator CAMPBELL and Senator LEAHY, the Senate sponsors of this legislation. It has been my pleasure to work with them to see this bill passed before the conclusion of the 106th Congress.

I would like to express my deep appreciation to Crime Subcommittee Chairman BILL MCCOLLUM, whose dedication to this program has proven invaluable in securing a speedy floor vote on this reauthorization. I also owe a debt of gratitude to Carl Thorsen, a member of the Judiciary Committee staff. Formerly an assistant to Mr. LOBIONDO, Carl worked with us on the original authorization of this program and has been a valuable ally in our efforts to pass bulletproof vest legislation in the 106th Congress. The Crime Subcommittee's Ranking Democrat, BOBBY SCOTT, has also lent his powerful voice to this important cause. I commend his efforts in pushing this legislation forward, and thank him on behalf of the police and corrections officers who will benefit from its enactment. Bobby Vassar, on Mr. SCOTT's staff, also deserves praise for his dedication and support, which helped make an often long and difficult process fast and painless. All of these gentlemen recognize the importance of this legislation to law enforcement officers, who put their lives on the line every day for our safety.

As an appropriator, I would be remiss if I did not mention the considerable assistance we have received from the Chairman and Ranking Member of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, State, and the Judiciary. Chairman HAROLD ROGERS and Ranking

Democrat JOSE SERRANO have been instrumental in ensuring that this program is consistently funded at its authorized level.

Finally, I would like to thank the members of the law enforcement community who have worked with me and my staff to ensure that we crafted the best possible legislation to meet their needs. I am proud that the Fraternal Order of Police, National Sheriffs' Association, International Union of Police Associations, AFL-CIO, National Troopers' Coalition, Police Executive Research Forum, and the Law Enforcement Alliance of America have placed their collective memberships of over 500,000 law enforcement professionals and community leaders squarely behind this legislation. In particular, I would like to express my gratitude to Tim Richardson of the Fraternal Order of Police and Dean Kueter of the National Sheriffs' Association, who's input was vital in shaping the important changes found in the legislation before us today.

The seed for the Bulletproof Vest Partnership Grant program was planted over six years ago, when I was told by local police officers that many gang members and drug dealers in Northwest Indiana had the protection of bulletproof vests, while many of the police officers who patrol the streets in my district did not. I was absolutely stunned by this. I believe that when police officers are issued guns and badges, they should be issued a bulletproof vest as well. If we are going to ask these men and women to risk their lives to keep our streets safe, we have a responsibility to ensure they have the equipment needed to do their job. Unfortunately, we often fall short of this obligation.

Each year, hundreds of police officers in this nation are killed in the line of duty. Studies show that, between 1980 and 1996, there were 1,182 felonious deaths of police officers due to firearms. Of those deaths, 924 of the officers were not wearing bulletproof vests. Wounds to the torso area killed 42 percent of those officers; wounds that could have been prevented had those officers been equipped with bulletproof vests. The Federal Bureau of Investigation has estimated that risk of fatality from a firearm for officers not wearing body armor is 14 times higher than for officers wearing body armor. In fact, modern bulletproof material has saved the lives of more than 2,500 police officers from gunfire since its introduction in the mid-1970's. However, bulletproof vests are not limited to stopping bullets. Police officers will attest to vests' roles in saving their lives from impact during car accidents, adding an extra layer of protection while subduing a violent suspect, and giving them the confidence they need to carry out dangerous assignments.

Despite these statistics, tens of thousands of law enforcement officers do not even have access to a vest. This problem is accentuated by our nation's commitment to beefing up our police forces. In May 1999, the Department of Justice announced that we had reached our goal of putting an additional 100,000 officers on the streets almost a year ahead of schedule. But what good is hiring new officers if we cannot give them the tools they need to do their jobs?

I was even more troubled to learn that many law enforcement agencies, especially in small towns or rural communities, simply found the costs of vests prohibitively expensive. During a visit to a local chapter of the Fraternal Order

of Police in Dyer, Indiana, officers explained that a good vest can cost over \$500, while heavier body armor can cost almost \$1,000. As a result, many agencies are simply unable to budget for vests, a fact which sometimes forces officers to purchase vests at their own expense. Despite the risk, many officers are unable to balance the cost of the vest with the cost of feeding their families, making car payments, or sending their children to school.

Statistics show that officers in small police departments are much less likely to have vests than their counterparts in larger departments with greater resources. Yet just because they do not have access to vests, it does not mean they are immune from the violent crime that plagues many of our communities. In this age of cross-country drug and illegal firearms trafficking, rural methamphetamine labs, and rapidly expanding suburban areas, even rural and small town police officers increasingly find themselves faced with dangerous, well-armed criminals. Without vests, these officers are at the mercy of these criminals.

Even in larger departments, officers may have vests purchase years earlier which are now either worn out or obsolete. The National Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology Center at the National Institutes of Justice has recommended that bulletproof vests be tested every 5 years for bullet resistance degradation. Even as we begin to provide vests for the estimated 25 percent of law enforcement and corrections officers without access to bulletproof and stabproof body armor, other officers are wearing vests that are losing their protective qualities due to constant wear and tear.

In order to alleviate this problem, in 1997, I, along with Mr. LoBiondo, introduced H.R. 2829, the Bulletproof Vest Partnership Grant Act. With over 300 co-sponsors, the measure passed by an overwhelming margin. Ultimately, a similar measure introduced by Senators Ben Nighthorse Campbell and Patrick Leahy was enacted on June 16, 1998. The 1998 law created a program which authorized \$25 million per year to pay up to 50 percent of the costs of bulletproof vests for local and state law enforcement agencies. In order to ensure that smaller jurisdictions received a fair share of the funds, the money was to be distributed evenly, with half going to jurisdictions with under 100,000 residents and half going to larger jurisdictions.

In each of the first two years of this program, the Bulletproof Vest Partnership Grant program has provided over 3,000 law enforcement agencies with funding to purchase over 90,000 bulletproof vests and body armor. The program is operated through the Office of Justice Programs' first Internet-based funding application process. The web site was developed within six months of the appropriation, and offers a one-stop application process. The site allows law enforcement agencies to log in, purchase vests from a choice of dozens of manufacturers and hundreds of styles, and automatically apply for the grant upon purchase. This effort garnered the prestigious 1999 Intergovernmental Open Systems Solutions Gold Award from the Federation of Government Information Processing Councils for the program.

Unfortunately, in the most recent year of the program, funding was insufficient to provide any law enforcement agency with the full matching grant requested under the program.

In fact, the average grant award represented only 30 percent of the cost of the vests, a 20 percent shortfall on the federal side. These agencies came to us in good faith and committed to providing vests to their officers if the federal government matched their funds. For many smaller agencies, this shortfall is devastating, and could end up taking away funding from other important departmental programs. Therefore, we must, in turn, honor our commitment to provide these agencies with the full 50 percent of the costs of these vests. In order to do so, S. 2413 doubles the yearly authorization of the program to \$50 million from Fiscal Year (FY) 2002 through FY 2004. This figure, based on demand from the first two years of the program, should be sufficient to fully fund all grant requests at the 50 percent matching level we promised in 1998.

The original authorization of this program also included a provision to allow the purchase of stabproof vests for corrections officers and sheriff's deputies who regularly face violent criminals in close quarters in our nation's jails. The primary threat to these officers comes from homemade knives. The ingenuity displayed in smuggling in and creating sharp weapons in prison is phenomenal. This combination of violent felons and deadly weapons often leads to explosive conflicts into which deputies and corrections officers must insert themselves to restore order. In order to do this, they must be confident that they have the best protection possible from the criminals they must subdue.

Unfortunately, the Department of Justice decided that requests for funding for stabproof vests under the Bulletproof Vest Partnership Grant program were not valid until a national standard for such vests is developed by the National Institutes of Justice (NIJ). After over two years of development, NIJ continues to delay the implementation of such a standard. In order to address this issue, we supported amendments to the measures, offered by Chairman McCOLLUM during subcommittee consideration of H.R. 4033 in the House and by Senator LEAHY during floor consideration of S. 2413 in the Senate, which will allow states to develop their own stabproof vest standards, independent of NIJ or the Department of Justice. These standards will then be used as a basis for agencies within each state to purchase stabproof vests through the Bulletproof Vest Partnership Grant program and until NIJ makes good on their promise to complete a national standard.

Finally, the Bulletproof Vest Partnership Grant Act of 2000 would take extra precautions to ensure that those small agencies, which are often in most need of additional funding for bulletproof vests, would receive the entire grant for which they apply. As I noted earlier, many smaller agencies find themselves unable to purchase vests for their officers due to limited funding. The program, to date, has not fulfilled their expectations, because it has fallen short of giving many of these agencies a full grant. Therefore, S. 2413 includes a provision which ensures that smaller jurisdictions, with under 100,000 residents, will receive all of the funding they request before money is allotted to larger jurisdictions. This is more of a safeguard than a limitation. Under statistics from the first two years of the program, less than \$15 million would be needed to fully fund these small jurisdictions. Under a \$50 million authorization, this would leave

well over half of the funding to larger jurisdictions. However, with an expected increase in demand due to the new treatment of stabproof vests, it is vital that we ensure smaller communities that their police officers will be cared for. We must protect the Crown Point, Indiana, officer who unknowingly pulls over an armed drug dealer on U.S. Highway 231 as much as the New York City officer involved in an orchestrated drug raid.

Our legislation is intended to reauthorize a highly successful program which provides a partnership between the federal government and state and local law enforcement agencies in order to make sure that every police and corrections officer who needs a bulletproof vest gets one. It is clear to us that every officer on the street should have a vest, and that the need to supply officers with vests is important enough to warrant direct federal assistance. Furthermore, the overwhelming positive response we have received from law enforcement agencies and officers to this program highlights the continued need for the program.

Mr. Speaker, at the heart of this effort is our desire to save the lives of police officers. When we make this commitment, we offer protection not just to the officers, but to every community in America. We prevent the suffering of families of fallen officers. We prevent the loss of leaders in our communities. Perhaps most importantly, we give those who protect us the ability to do their job better, more confidently, and with a knowledge that their entire nation is behind them every day, in even the most dangerous situations.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to stand up in support of our police and corrections officers, and vote for S. 2413.

RETIREMENT OF HON. TILLIE  
FOWLER

SPEECH OF

HON. E. CLAY SHAW, JR.

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, October 24, 2000*

Mr. SHAW. Mr. Speaker, for the past eight years, I have had the privilege of serving in the U.S. House of Representatives with the distinguished gentlelady from Jacksonville, Florida, Tillie Fowler. It has been my and my wife, Emilie's great pleasure to get to know Tillie and her husband Buck. They have become close friends of ours as we worked together to serve our constituents in Florida.

The residents of Florida's 4th Congressional District have been fortunate to be represented by a hard-working, dedicated Member of Congress. Tillie has served as the Vice-Chairman of the Republican Conference, making her the highest-ranking woman in the Congress and the only Floridian who is part of the leadership. While she has been involved in the leadership, she has not neglected the needs of her constituents.

Her service on the Armed Services and Transportation Committees has been exemplary. She worked very hard to ensure that Florida received its fair share of highway funding.

Tillie Fowler is a class-act and we need more individuals like her here. We will truly miss her. But we know that she will not stop serving the residents of Florida no matter what she does next.

RETIREMENT OF HON. TILLIE  
FOWLER

SPEECH OF

HON. TILLIE K. FOWLER

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, October 24, 2000*

Mrs. FOWLER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to make my last address as an honored Member of this distinguished body. There is no doubt in my mind what I will miss the most about this job. It will not be the late nights—and it will not be the ever-changing schedule. I will miss my friends—and I have made so many.

This institution is filled with so many extraordinary people, who, in my time here, have done some extraordinary things.

I make it a point in every speech I give back home to talk about the people I serve with here in this great body. I want people to know that the portrayal they see of politicians in the press and on TV is far from accurate. While scandals and controversy may sell newspapers, they are certainly not the norm around here.

I never give a speech without talking about the dedication, the devotion and the selflessness with which nearly every Member of Congress serves this institution and his or her country.

I may not always agree with someone's politics or ideology, but I would never question the sincerity or the purpose with which they pursue their agendas. People serve here for the right reasons—I truly believe that.

Serving with all of you has been such an honor. And as I look back over the last eight years, I look with pride at what we were able to do in such a short time.

Together, we reformed Congress. We have made this institution more open, more accountable and more responsive to the people. When I first set foot on this House floor in 1993, Congress' approval rating was a dismal 17 percent. That number is much higher today.

Together, with the hard work of the American people, we turned around an economy saddled by high interest rates and high unemployment.

Together, we balanced the federal budget for the first time since I was a staffer on Capitol Hill back in the 1960's.

Together we ended welfare as we knew it, and created a new system that rewards work and responsibility.

If I have one wish as I leave this institution, it is that some progress can be made toward reducing the partisanship that has plagued us.

I have tried very hard over my eight years to focus on the task at hand and leave the partisanship on the Capitol steps. When you look back at some of our best accomplishments, you find that they were mostly gained with support from both sides of the aisle. That should be a lesson to future Congresses.

I was proud to serve on the planning committee for the two bi-partisan retreats, and I hope that those retreats will continue and their mission expand.

I was also proud to serve on Speaker Hastert's leadership team these past two years. When he was unexpectedly tapped for the speakership, I said then he was the right man for the right time. Working with him the last two years, I witnessed first hand how true that statement was.