

This means that our servicemen and servicewomen who served in Grenada, Panama, and the Gulf War cannot get veterans home mortgages from their own state government while veterans who served before that time are fully eligible. Are those who began serving their country after 1976 any less deserving than their predecessors?

This arbitrary cutoff was created to raise revenue for the 1984 tax bill by limiting the use of tax-exempt bonds to finance state veterans mortgage programs. In 1984, there were very few veterans who entered service after 1976. Because of their small numbers, the affected veterans were unable to stop this unfair change in the law. But, fifteen years later, there are hundreds of thousands of veterans who have served our country honorably in that period and they are calling for a change in the law. The state veterans affairs departments believe that if this bill becomes law, they can help a great number of the post-1976 veterans purchase their own home.

Our bill will simply eliminate the arbitrary cutoff that exists under current law. Under our proposal, former servicemen and servicewomen who served our country beginning in 1977 or any other year after that will be eligible to apply for a home mortgage loan provided by their state. This legislation does not increase federal discretionary spending one cent—it simply allows the states to help their veterans own a home regardless of when they served.

Mr. Speaker, arbitrary rules in the tax code should not stop our states from helping all veterans who served our nation honorably. I urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to join with us in supporting this measure to assist those who have spent so much of their lives defending our freedom.

#### EXPANDING HOMEOWNERSHIP

### HON. JOHN J. LaFALCE

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, March 8, 2001*

Mr. LaFALCE. Mr. Speaker, this week, I introduced two bills designed to strengthen the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) single family mortgage loan program. The two bills, H.R. 859, the "FHA First-time Homebuyer Act" and H.R. 858, the "FHA Down Payment Simplification Act," would expand homeownership, reduced defaults on FHA loans, and simplify the process of securing an FHA loan.

The first bill, the "FHA First-time Homebuyer Act" would pass along to first-time homebuyers the saving from HUD's recent cut in the FHA up-front loan fee into a dollar for dollar reduction in the required down payment. In addition, by conditioning this down payment reduction on a requirement of homeownership counseling, the legislation would reinstate the financial incentive for first-time homebuyers to undergo pre-purchase homeownership counseling, thus reducing default rates for these borrowers.

Late last year, HUD reduced the up-front premium customarily charged on single family FHA loans from 2.25% to 1.50% of the loan amount. However, because of a quirk in the statutory formula which sets maximum loan limits, not a single dollar of this premium reduction accrues to the borrower with respect

to lowering the down payment. Thus, a major portion of the benefit of the fee reduction benefit is deferred until the loan is paid off or prepaid—which could be years or even decades later.

My legislation would allow 100% of the recently announced FHA fee reduction to be passed along to a first-time homebuyer in the form of a reduced down payment. This will have the effect of reducing a borrower's down payment by as much as \$1,755, depending on the loan size. Reduced down payments will make it easier for young families to buy a home.

Moreover, this down payment reduction will not pose a risk to the FHA single family mortgage fund, since maximum loan-to-value levels, even with this change, will not be any higher than they were prior to last year's fee reduction. In practice, the legislation would have the effect of reducing defaults, because the lower down payment option is conditioned on the borrower competing a course in homeownership counseling.

The second bill, the "FHA First-time Homebuyer Act" would make permanent the temporary FHA down payment simplification formula, which is scheduled to expire in December of next year. The FHA down payment simplification formula is widely considered to be a tremendous improvement over the confusing, two-part down payment formula that preceded it.

Unfortunately, our recent practice of providing only a periodic extension of this improved down payment formula has resulted in unneeded uncertainty. Last year, as its interim status was about to expire, the FHA Commissioner was forced to issue a clarification that loans closed before October 1, but insured after October 1 were eligible for the simplified treatment. Subsequently, Congress was forced to step in to pass a stop-gap 30-day extension, and then a further 26 month extension of the simplified formula, through December, 2002. A permanent extension, supported by the major real estate organizations, would avoid these periodic crises.

FHA is an effective program which helps middle class and low-income families buy a home, and makes a \$2.4 billion annual profit for the government. These two bills will make it even better.

#### SOUTH BAY WOMEN'S SUMMIT

### HON. JANE HARMAN

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, March 8, 2001*

Ms. HARMAN. Mr. Speaker, in honor of International Women's Day, I would like to highlight an event occurring in California's 36th District in April. To recognize women throughout my district, the Women's Coalition South Bay is sponsoring the South Bay Women's Summit.

This Summit will give us the opportunity to discuss issues important to women around the world, such as workplace and pay equity and improved childcare.

Mr. Speaker, another critical issue that will be discussed is reproductive choice. I respect every woman's personal decision on choice, and feel strongly that Congress should not dictate to women how that choice should be ex-

ercised. This right is coming under attack around the world, and here in the United States. The South Bay Women's Summit will give women the chance to talk about ways we can protect this right, including ensuring access to Mifepristone and allowing U.S. funding of overseas family planning clinics.

The women of the South Bay provide networking opportunities, a shoulder to lean on, and the chance to relax with good friends. I am proud to be participating in the South Bay Women's Summit, which will illuminate issues that deserve our attention, and provide a framework for future action.

#### OUR SERVICEMEN DESERVE MORE

### HON. JO ANN DAVIS

OF VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, March 8, 2001*

Mrs. JO ANN DAVIS of Virginia. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to address the needs of our servicemen. Often, we will hear that our servicemen require a pay raise. That is absolutely true, however, not for the reasons usually cited. They simply deserve it.

Mr. Speaker, over the past several months I have had the opportunity to visit the military bases in my district and to speak with many of the junior soldiers, sailors, and Marines about their service. Without hesitation, they have all told me that they love serving the country, but are frustrated by the constant deployments, poor housing, and a constant lack of spare parts.

I realize that we have addressed some of these problems, but we have much more to do. If we do not more fully address them, we will shortchanging not only ourselves, but actively endangering our grandchildren. However, the issue remains, our servicemen deserve more.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to say that our President has forwarded a budget that will allow us to substantively increase our servicemen's pay and benefits. This is good for the present, however, more needs to be done in the long term.

The realities are ugly. Our servicemen are underpaid. Furthermore, over the past several years, we have set military pay .5% below the Employment Cost Index. This was wrong. It shouldn't have happened. But worst of all, it treats our servicemen as second-class citizens. While civil service has never paid as much as the civilian sector, we should at least ensure that those who provide the most important civil service, defense of our nation, the same level of compensation as other government employees.

This is an issue of justice, and an issue of fundamental fairness. It is not acceptable to ignore this issue any longer.

Mr. Speaker, now I realize that this is something that cannot be solved overnight. However, it is an issue that we must address for the future. For, if we continue to treat our soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines in such a manner, they will eventually realize that our servicemen will vote with their feet.

While they won't rank it first among their problems, our servicemen do cite this injustice. But, let me take a minute to cite why this is even more urgent. Our services, with our