

homelessness among veterans and encourages all governmental and private agencies to work together to achieve this goal.

It is the responsibility of the federal government to see to the needs of homeless veterans and the responsibility of federal agencies in meeting those needs. This bill does this by authorizing 10 new Domiciliary for Homeless Veterans programs; \$285 million over four years for the Homeless Grant and Per Diem program; \$250 million over five years for the Labor Department's Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program to expedite the reintegration of homeless veterans into the labor force; and it earmarks \$10 million over three years for medical care for homeless veterans with special needs, including older veterans, women, substance abusers and those with post-traumatic-stress disorder.

I believe so strongly in this issue that I donated personal property to the cause. The Hoosier Veterans Assistance Foundation has worked hard to make my dream a reality. The house assists homeless veterans by supplying transitional housing as well as needed supportive services. We must work together. I have been touched by the number of people who are asking to help since they saw the story on the news.

I am pleased that this measure is being considered this session and urge its passage.

Ms. SCHAKOWSKY. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of the Senate amendments to the House passed Homeless Veterans Assistance Act and Veterans Benefits Act. These amendments will provide greater care for our nation's veterans and will help America keep its promise to protect the men and women that have done so much to protect America.

I supported the Homeless Veterans Assistance Act when it passed the House of Representatives, and now, I support the Senate-passed version because it does much more. This bill will provide new programs, and will modify existing programs, to furnish a multitude of services for homeless veterans. These services include outreach, rehabilitation, vocational counseling and training, and transitional housing assistance to homeless veterans. In other words, this bill seeks to fight the causes of veterans' homelessness at their root.

Mr. Speaker, as many as 80,000 of our country's 3 million homeless are in the city of Chicago. Many of these are veterans. There are few things as tragic as the sight of the homeless set against the background of a society with so much wealth and prosperity. We have the responsibility to do more. This bill is a modest step in the right direction. Providing veterans with the best possible benefits and rewarding them for their tremendous service to our country is important to me. I believe we must ensure that veterans' programs are sufficiently funded. Providing the means for disenfranchised veterans to renew their lives is the very least we can do.

I also supported the Veterans Benefits Act when it passed the House because it provides a cost of living adjustment for the rates of veterans' disability compensation, additional compensation for dependents, the clothing allowance for certain disabled adult children, and dependency and indemnity compensation for surviving spouses and children. This legislation seeks to ensure that our veterans and their families are not left behind in the struggle to move forward in these pressuring economic times.

I believe that veterans who served our country deserve the fairest treatment available and that our national priorities must recognize the contributions of all military personnel. This Congress should remain committed to our veterans and work to ensure that they are provided the best possible service. I urge my colleagues to vote in favor of the Senate amendments to the Homeless Veterans Assistance Act and the Veterans Benefits Act.

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 2716, the Homeless Veterans Comprehensive Assistance Act of 2001. This homeless bill retains the best components of two individuals bills, introduced by Ranking Member EVANS and Chairman SMITH. I was an original co-sponsor of H.R. 936, the Heather French Henry Homeless Veterans Assistance Act introduced by Ranking Member EVANS and later in the Senate as S. 736 by Senator PAUL WELLSTONE, because I believed it would enhance effective programs serving homeless veterans, such as community based "grant and per diem" care, the homeless veterans reintegration program, and the comprehensive homeless veterans centers. In particular, the bill emphasizes the VA's mental health and substance abuse programs—programs that help veterans achieve the stability they need in order to move toward rebuilding productive lives.

I also believe H.R. 936 would address gaps in VA's care continuum that have been identified by homeless veterans their advocates, such as dental care and outreach to prevent veterans at risk for homelessness. It allows innovative new grant programs to address the needs of veterans whose needs may not be addressed by mainstream programs—programs for terminally ill veterans, veterans with "dual diagnosis", that is mental illness and substance abuse disorders, frail elderly veterans, and women.

In Committee hearings, Members from both sides of the aisle identified both the medical necessity and the social importance of a dental benefit in helping veterans regain their footing in society. I believe dental care is an important, but underemphasized part of the VA health care system. This is a small, but critical step we can take toward making this service available to additional veterans.

I also appreciate elements of Chairman SMITH's bill, the Homeless Veterans' Assistance Act. I particularly appreciated his bill's emphasis on finding permanent supported housing options for homeless veterans.

Together, the composite legislation will allow VA to consolidate and coordinate programs for homeless veterans both within the Department, within other federal agencies, and in the non-profit sector that furnish services to our homeless veterans. I believe this comprehensive homeless legislation will make a real difference in the lives of America's homeless veterans.

The final bill retains the stated goal of H.R. 936: to end chronic homelessness among veterans within a decade. I believe the comprehensive bill before us puts the Department of Veterans Affairs on the right path for making this happen. I urge my colleagues to support this measure.

Mr. UDALL of New Mexico. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of H.R. 2716. I am proud to be a cosponsor of this measure and I would like to thank all members and staff who worked to help bring this excellent piece

of legislation before the House for passage. I strongly believe that H.R. 2716 will truly benefit our nation's homeless veterans.

I would also like to express my regret and disappointment over some of the partisan politics that have surrounded this legislation. For far too long, too many of the men and women who have served in our nation's military have been homeless. It is a sad fact that an estimated 225,000 veterans throughout the United States live on the streets. Delaying action on this bill over partisan politics only hurt the veteran's living on the streets.

Nevertheless, I am pleased that the bill is finally ready for passage and I strongly support H.R. 2716, which is a critical step in addressing the shameful situation of homeless veterans in our country.

Among several other provisions included in this bill, H.R. 2716 authorizes 2,000 additional HUD Section 8 low-income housing vouchers over four years for homeless veterans, establishes a grant program for homeless veterans with special needs, and establishes a limited dental provision for veterans using VA homeless programs.

In addition, H.R. 2716 establishes evaluation centers for programs that serve homeless populations and requires annual program assessments to be submitted to Congress.

These are just a few of the many critical provisions in H.R. 2716 that will help eliminate the problem of chronic homelessness among veterans. I ask my colleagues to join me in support of this important legislation for the men and women who have sacrificed so much in defense of liberty and democracy.

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

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH) that the House suspend the rules and concur in the Senate amendment to the bill, H.R. 2716.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the Senate amendment was concurred in.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

#### VETERANS BENEFITS ACT OF 2001

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and concur in the Senate amendments to the bill (H.R. 2540) to amend title 38, United States Code, to make various improvements to veterans benefits programs under laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read as follows:

Senate amendments:  
Strike out all after the enacting clause and insert:

#### **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE; REFERENCES TO TITLE 38, UNITED STATES CODE.**

(a) *SHORT TITLE.*—This Act may be cited as the "Veterans' Compensation Rate Amendments of 2001".

(b) *REFERENCES TO TITLE 38, UNITED STATES CODE.*—Except as otherwise expressly provided, whenever in this Act an amendment or repeal is expressed in terms of an amendment to, or repeal of, a section or other provision, the reference shall be considered to be made to a section or other provision of title 38, United States Code.

**SEC. 2. DISABILITY COMPENSATION.**

(a) INCREASE IN RATES.—Section 1114 is amended—

- (1) by striking “\$98” in subsection (a) and inserting “\$103”;
- (2) by striking “\$188” in subsection (b) and inserting “\$199”;
- (3) by striking “\$288” in subsection (c) and inserting “\$306”;
- (4) by striking “\$413” in subsection (d) and inserting “\$439”;
- (5) by striking “\$589” in subsection (e) and inserting “\$625”;
- (6) by striking “\$743” in subsection (f) and inserting “\$790”;
- (7) by striking “\$937” in subsection (g) and inserting “\$995”;
- (8) by striking “\$1,087” in subsection (h) and inserting “\$1,155”;
- (9) by striking “\$1,224” in subsection (i) and inserting “\$1,299”;
- (10) by striking “\$2,036” in subsection (j) and inserting “\$2,163”;
- (11) in subsection (k)—
  - (A) by striking “\$76” both places it appears and inserting “\$80”; and
  - (B) by striking “\$2,533” and “\$3,553” and inserting “\$2,691” and “\$3,775”, respectively;
- (12) by striking “\$2,533” in subsection (l) and inserting “\$2,691”;
- (13) by striking “\$2,794” in subsection (m) and inserting “\$2,969”;
- (14) by striking “\$3,179” in subsection (n) and inserting “\$3,378”;
- (15) by striking “\$3,553” each place it appears in subsections (o) and (p) and inserting “\$3,775”;
- (16) by striking “\$1,525” and “\$2,271” in subsection (r) and inserting “\$1,621” and “\$2,413”, respectively; and
- (17) by striking “\$2,280” in subsection (s) and inserting “\$2,422”.

(b) SPECIAL RULE.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs may authorize administratively, consistent with the increases authorized by this section, the rates of disability compensation payable to persons within the purview of section 10 of Public Law 85–857 who are not in receipt of compensation payable pursuant to chapter 11 of title 38, United States Code.

**SEC. 3. ADDITIONAL COMPENSATION FOR DEPENDENTS.**

Section 1115(1) is amended—

- (1) by striking “\$117” in clause (A) and inserting “\$124”;
- (2) by striking “\$201” and “\$61” in clause (B) and inserting “\$213” and “\$64”, respectively;
- (3) by striking “\$80” and “\$61” in clause (C) and inserting “\$84” and “\$64”, respectively;
- (4) by striking “\$95” in clause (D) and inserting “\$100”;
- (5) by striking “\$222” in clause (E) and inserting “\$234”; and
- (6) by striking “\$186” in clause (F) and inserting “\$196”.

**SEC. 4. CLOTHING ALLOWANCE FOR CERTAIN DISABLED VETERANS.**

Section 1162 is amended by striking “\$546” and inserting “\$580”.

**SEC. 5. DEPENDENCY AND INDEMNITY COMPENSATION FOR SURVIVING SPOUSES.**

(a) NEW LAW RATES.—Section 1311(a) is amended—

- (1) by striking “\$881” in paragraph (1) and inserting “\$935”;
- (2) by striking “\$191” in paragraph (2) and inserting “\$202”.

(b) OLD LAW RATES.—The table in section 1311(a)(3) is amended to read as follows:

Pay grade and monthly rate	
E-1 .....	\$935
E-2 .....	935
E-3 .....	935
E-4 .....	935
E-5 .....	935
E-6 .....	935

E-7 .....	967
E-8 .....	1,021
E-9 .....	1,066 <sup>1</sup>
W-1 .....	988
W-2 .....	1,028
W-3 .....	1,058
W-4 .....	\$1,119
O-1 .....	988
O-2 .....	1,021
O-3 .....	1,092
O-4 .....	1,155
O-5 .....	1,272
O-6 .....	1,433
O-7 .....	1,549
O-8 .....	1,699
O-9 .....	1,818
O-10 .....	1,994 <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>If the veteran served as Sergeant Major of the Army, Senior Enlisted Advisor of the Navy, Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force, Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps, or Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard, at the applicable time designated by section 1302 of this title, the surviving spouse's rate shall be \$1,149.

<sup>2</sup>If the veteran served as Chairman or Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Chief of Staff of the Army, Chief of Naval Operations, Chief of Staff of the Air Force, Commandant of the Marine Corps, or Commandant of the Coast Guard, at the applicable time designated by section 1302 of this title, the surviving spouse's rate shall be \$2,139.”

(c) ADDITIONAL DIC FOR CHILDREN.—Section 1311(b) is amended by striking “\$222” and inserting “\$234”.

(d) AID AND ATTENDANCE ALLOWANCE.—Section 1311(c) is amended by striking “\$222” and inserting “\$234”.

(e) HOUSEBOUND RATE.—Section 1311(d) is amended by striking “\$107” and inserting “\$112”.

**SEC. 6. DEPENDENCY AND INDEMNITY COMPENSATION FOR CHILDREN.**

(a) DIC FOR ORPHAN CHILDREN.—Section 1313(a) is amended—

- (1) by striking “\$373” in paragraph (1) and inserting “\$397”;
- (2) by striking “\$538” in paragraph (2) and inserting “\$571”;
- (3) by striking “\$699” in paragraph (3) and inserting “\$742”; and
- (4) by striking “\$699” and “\$136” in paragraph (4) and inserting “\$742” and “\$143”, respectively.

(b) SUPPLEMENTAL DIC FOR DISABLED ADULT CHILDREN.—Section 1314 is amended—

- (1) by striking “\$222” in subsection (a) and inserting “\$234”;
- (2) by striking “\$373” in subsection (b) and inserting “\$397”; and
- (3) by striking “\$188” in subsection (c) and inserting “\$199”.

**SEC. 7. EFFECTIVE DATE.**

The amendments made by this Act shall take effect on December 1, 2001.

Amend the title so as to read: “An Act to amend title 38, United States Code, to provide a cost-of-living adjustment in the rates of disability compensation for veterans with service-connected disabilities and the rates of dependency and indemnity compensation for survivors of such veterans.”

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH) and the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH).

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 2540, the Veterans Compensation Rate Amendments of 2001, is a clean bill providing a cost-of-living adjustment to disabled veterans and surviving spouses. Most of the changes to other benefit authorities that were part of the bill when it

passed the House will be taken up as part of the compromise agreement to H.R. 1291.

Upon enactment of this vital legislation, all veterans or qualified survivors of veterans who receive disability compensation payment will receive a 2.6 percent cost-of-living adjustment beginning on December 1 of this year. This increase, which matches the Social Security COLA, will raise payments to disabled veterans by more than \$400 million in the first year. In all, compensation payments will be increased by more than \$2.5 billion over the next 5 years. For more than 170,000 veterans who are permanently and totally disabled, the average annual increase is \$738.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank every Member who contributed to this bill. I especially want to thank the gentleman from Idaho (Mr. SIMPSON), who is the chairman of our Subcommittee on Benefits, and the gentleman from Texas (Mr. REYES), who is the ranking member, for their excellent work on H.R. 2540.

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

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 2540, as amended. I again want to thank the gentleman from New Jersey for his leadership on this important legislation and for his continuing efforts on behalf of our Nation's veterans. I also want to thank the leaders of our Subcommittee on Benefits, the gentleman from Idaho and the gentleman from Texas, as well as the other members of this subcommittee, for their support of this important legislation. This measure deserves the support of every Member of this House.

The importance of this bill cannot be overstated. It protects the purchasing power of disability benefits which our Nation's service-connected veterans have earned by virtue of their military service and provides similar protection for the recipients of DIC payment for compensation.

Under H.R. 2540, effective December 1 of this year, a cost-of-living adjustment will be provided for service-connected disability compensation and DIC benefits. The adjustment, 2.6 percent, will be the same as that provided to Social Security recipients. I call on every Member of this body to join the chairman of this committee in supporting this legislation.

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

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. EVANS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 4 minutes to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. REYES).

Mr. REYES. Mr. Speaker, as an original cosponsor and strong supporter of H.R. 2540, the Veterans Compensation Rate Amendments of 2001, I am pleased

that we are moving forward to assure a cost-of-living increase for our Nation's disabled veterans and their families. Our Nation's veterans, their surviving spouses and dependents expect that their benefits will be increased to reflect changes in the cost of living. The effective date of this legislation, Mr. Speaker, is December 1, 2001, with receipt of the increase in benefits in 2002.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to acknowledge the cooperation of the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH) and the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS), as well as our Subcommittee on Benefits chairman, the gentleman from Idaho (Mr. SIMPSON), for bringing this important legislation before the House today.

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H.R. 2540 is a good bill. I urge all Members to support it and to support our Nation's veterans and their families by providing them the necessary increases to their deserved benefits. These men and women place their lives on the line in the defense of our country and the national ideals of freedom and democracy. They deserve adequate benefits for their service. They deserve the kind of compensation that we can all be proud of.

Mr. EVANS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. RODRIGUEZ).

Mr. RODRIGUEZ. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that H.R. 2540 is before us, the Veterans Benefit Act, and that the President will soon have the opportunity to sign it into law.

I would like to thank the chairman of the committee, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH) for his efforts on this particular piece of legislation, and also my distinguished colleague, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS), the ranking member, for this bill.

The legislation before us would provide a cost of living adjustment to those receiving disability compensation benefits for the year 2002. As a member of the committee, I am proud to join this bipartisan effort to improve the quality and delivery of veterans benefits programs. The veterans should not be left wondering if the Federal Government is going to fulfill their promises. I have heard too many stories from veterans in my district who do not receive sufficient benefits to meet their living expenses.

H.R. 2540 would provide a cost of living increase for those who have received service-connected disability benefits, as well as their survivors. Veterans work around the clock for us. They deserve no less in return. For many of our veterans, the physical and psychological wounds of war do not go away.

Today, men and women have answered the new call to action, carrying the banner of freedom into Afghanistan in search of those responsible for the horrifying attacks of September 11. When they return home, these brave

sons and daughters need to know that we will be there for them should they suffer from debilitating conditions as a result of their military service.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this bill and vote for H.R. 2540.

Mr. BUYER. Mr. Speaker, today we will consider several bills that were favorably reported by the Committee on Veterans Affairs, with my support, which will provide veterans with much needed assistance.

The first bill, H.R. 2540, would provide veterans with a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for veterans with a service-connected disability and for survivors of certain service-connected disabled veterans. This year's COLA is 2.6 percent and is effective December 1, 2001. I can't think of any group that is more deserving of this increase in their benefits than those who have answered the call to defend our country's freedoms.

I want to thank our Chairman CHRIS SMITH, for his bold leadership in bringing the Homeless Veterans Comprehensive Assistance Act to this point. H.R. 2716, addresses many of the issues that homeless veterans are forced to confront on a daily basis such as how to obtain health care, housing, employment training and other benefits. This bill goes a long way to ensuring that our nation's homeless veterans will receive the assistance they need to turn their lives around by providing the necessary resources. It is shameful that one-third of our nation's homeless are Vietnam-era veterans. Veterans should not be forced to sleep on our streets or be warehoused in our nation's jails. That is why I am pleased to support passage of this important initiative.

One of the most important benefits that we offer people who choose to serve their country is that in return we will provide them with education benefits. H.R. 1291, the Veterans Education and Benefits Expansion Act of 2001, makes several important improvements to our current programs. Passage of this legislation will increase the \$650 monthly benefit to \$800 per month effective January of 2002. In October 1 of 2002 that amount will increase to \$900 per month, and effective October 1 of 2003, the monthly benefit will be \$985. This should help those individuals who could not keep pace with the escalating cost of higher education. Again, I want to applaud our Chairman, Mr. SMITH, for his outstanding work in making this one of the Committee's top priorities.

H.R. 1291 also contains several other provisions including an expansion of the definition of illnesses for Gulf War veterans; offering additional assistance to disabled veterans by increasing specially adapted housing allowance for severely disabled veterans from \$43,000 to \$48,000 per year; increasing burial and funeral expenses for a service-connected veteran from \$1,500 to \$2,000; increasing the allowance for burial plots for eligible veterans to \$300; and prohibits payments of veterans' benefits to fugitive felons.

I urge my colleagues to support our veterans and vote for these three bills.

Mr. GILMAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of H.R. 2540, the Veterans Benefits Act of 2001. I urge my colleagues to join in supporting this important legislation.

Mr. Speaker, the House typically passes a general veterans benefits bill each year. H.R. 2450 represents this year's benefits legislation, providing several important improvements to existing programs.

First, this bill provides for the annual cost-of-living adjustment to the rates of disability compensation for those veterans with service connected disabilities. This new rate, reflecting an increase of 2.6 percent, will go into effect on December 1, 2001.

Congress has approved an annual cost-of-living adjustment to our veterans and survivors since 1976.

Second, this legislation adds type II diabetes to the list of diseases presumed to be service-connected in Vietnam veterans exposed to herbicide agents. It also greatly extends the definition of undiagnosed illnesses for Persian Gulf war veterans, and authorizes the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to protect the grant of service connection of Gulf war veterans who participate in VA sponsored medical research projects. It further extends the presumptive period for providing compensation to Persian Gulf veterans with undiagnosed illnesses to December 31, 2003.

Mr. Speaker, many of our veterans from the Vietnam and Gulf wars, went years suffering from undiagnosed ailments while receiving neither recognition nor treatment from the veterans health care system.

During the past ten years, the Congress made significant strides in recognizing the special circumstances surrounding the post service experiences of these veterans. This bill is an extension of this process, and for that reason, I urge its adoption by the House.

Mrs. MCCARTHY of New York. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of the Veterans health bill. Before coming to Congress, I spent 30 years as a nurse on Long Island, New York. And even now, I know that there isn't a better career in the world than nursing or better training for being a Member of Congress. The only difference is now I have a lot more patients.

That's why I am particularly saddened when we talk about the nursing shortage—especially in our VA hospitals. Our veterans give their lives for our country and therefore deserve the best health care in the world. Unfortunately, like the rest of health care in this country, VA hospitals are experiencing a nursing shortage.

As a nurse, I know the key to solving our nation's nursing shortage is recruiting and retaining nurses. And the best way to attract new students and keep good nurses is through education. Helping nursing students pay for their education or helping them to finish an advanced degree goes a long way in attracting those who want to help people to the nursing profession. That's why I am proud of this bill, it does just that. Through the Employee Incentive Scholarships and Education Debt Reduction Programs nursing students and nurses can choose to work for a VA hospital and receive financial assistance for their education.

In addition, this bill requires the VA to develop a nationwide policy on staffing standards to ensure that veterans are provided with safe and high quality care, taking into consideration the numbers and skill mix required of staff in specific health care settings. We promised our Vets we would take care of them—let's keep that promise by improving their health care.

We need to end the nursing shortage crisis across this country, but tonight I am honored to fight for our VA nurses as the first step.

I urge all my colleagues to vote in favor of the Veteran's health bill.

Mr. UDALL of New Mexico. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of H.R. 2540, the

Veterans' Compensation Rate Amendments of 2001.

I would first like to thank my colleagues on both sides of the aisle, and their staffs, who worked to bring this bill before the House for final passage.

This legislation provides an important annual cost-of-living adjustment for disabled veterans, as well as surviving spouses of veterans who receive dependency and indemnity compensation. Under H.R. 2540, the compensation rate is raised by 2.6 percent, the same percentage as the increase provided to Social Security recipients.

As the cost living continues to rise, it is important that the well-deserved benefits received by veterans and their families are not diminished as a result of inflationary costs.

I urge my colleagues to join me in support of this legislation and ensure that the benefits for the men and women who served our nation keep up with the ever-increasing cost of living.

Mrs. JOHNSON of Connecticut. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of the Veterans Benefits Act of 2001, specifically a provision in the legislation that ensures all veterans will be eligible for a government-furnished grave marker.

I would like to thank the Chairman for his hard work and commitment to our Nation's veterans and I appreciate the willingness of the Chairman and the committee to include my veterans marker provision in the conference report. I would also like to thank the Chairman for accommodating my request in the Joint Explanatory Statement to encourage the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to consider pre-existing requests for markers.

This legislation is essential to our veterans' futures, ensuring that their acts of heroism will be recognized beyond their lifetimes. This legislation remedies a glaring discrepancy in the law, ensuring that every veteran, regardless of whether their grave is privately marked, will be eligible for a government grave marker upon their death.

Every single veteran deserves to be permanently recognized for their contribution to our nation. Every veterans family deserves solace in knowing their loved one will continue to receive the recognition they deserve.

Mr. Speaker, I extend the heartfelt thanks from the veterans in my district.

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

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. OTTER). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH) that the House suspend the rules and concur in the Senate amendments to the bill, H.R. 2540.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the Senate amendments were concurred in.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

PROVIDING FOR APPOINTMENT OF PATRICIA Q. STONESIFER AS CITIZEN REGENT OF BOARD OF REGENTS OF SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

Mr. EHLERS. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass to the Sen-

ate joint resolution (S.J. Res. 26) providing for the appointment of Patricia Q. Stonesifer as a citizen regent of the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institution.

The Clerk read as follows:

S.J. RES. 26

*Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,* That, in accordance with section 5581 of the Revised Statutes of the United States (20 U.S.C. 43), the vacancy on the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institution, in the class other than Members of Congress, occurring by reason of the expiration of the term of Dr. Homer Neal of Michigan on December 7, 2001, is filled by the appointment of Patricia Q. Stonesifer of Washington. The appointment is for a term of 6 years and shall take effect on December 8, 2001.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. EHLERS) and the gentleman from Florida (Mr. DAVIS) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. EHLERS).

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

Mr. Speaker, Senate Joint Resolution 26 provides for the appointment of Patricia Stonesifer to serve on the Smithsonian Institution's Board of Regents. This board governs the Smithsonian Institution and includes the Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court and the Vice President of the United States. It also is comprised of three Members each from the U.S. House and Senate and nine citizens who are nominated by the Board and approved jointly in a resolution of Congress.

Patricia Stonesifer currently serves as cochair and President of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. She works to achieve that foundation's mission of improving access to advances in global health and education for all people as we move into the 21st century. Her other philanthropic work includes serving on the Board of the Vaccine Fund, which was started in 1999 to address the need for vaccines among the world's poorest countries.

Prior to her being appointed President and Cochair of the Gates Foundation, she held a Senior Vice President position at Microsoft and ran her own management and consulting firm.

I believe her diverse background and strong management experience make her an excellent candidate for appointment to the Smithsonian Institution's Board of Regents, and I urge my colleagues to support Senate Joint Resolution 26.

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

Mr. DAVIS of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

At the risk of repeating some of the comments that the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. EHLERS) has stated, let me also join him to say I am delighted at this appointment.

Ms. Patricia Stonesifer has distinguished herself in a variety of fields.

She brings a combination of skills to the Smithsonian Institute. As has been previously alluded to her, in her capacity as Cochair and President of the Gates Foundation, she focused on improving global health throughout the world. She has also served on the Board of the Vaccine Fund, established in 1999, to address the dire need to combat preventable disease in the world's poorest countries.

As the gentleman mentioned, she brings considerable expertise in the private sector, which, combined with her philanthropic work, will make her a very welcome addition to this board.

Mr. HOYER. Mr. Speaker, Ms. Patricia Stonesifer will make a wonderful addition to the Smithsonian Institution's Board of Regents. Ms. Stonesifer has distinguished herself in numerous philanthropic, business, and public activities during her career, and I urge every Member to support her appointment.

Ms. Stonesifer now serves as the co-chair and president of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. At the Gates Foundation, she focuses on global health and education issues, reflecting her personal commitment to improving living conditions for peoples everywhere.

Ms. Stonesifer also serves on the boards of the Vaccine Fund, established 2 years ago to combat preventable disease in the world's poorest countries, and that of the African Comprehensive HIV/AIDS Partnership, an organization working to fight the spread of AIDS in Botswana. She has served as a member of the American Delegation to the United Nations General Assembly's special session on AIDS.

In her business career, Ms. Stonesifer has both served as a senior vice president at Microsoft, and operated her own consulting firm, so she knows business large and small. She serves on the boards of two publicly held corporations, the King County (Wash.) YWCA, and the Seattle Foundation.

Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt that Patricia Stonesifer will bring the right mix of philanthropic and business experience to the Smithsonian Institution. I urge the House to support her appointment.

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

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

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. EHLERS) that the House suspend the rules and pass the Senate joint resolution, S.J. Res. 26.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the Senate joint resolution was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

#### GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. EHLERS. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on Senate Joint Resolution 26.

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