LIVING AMERICAN HERO APPRECIATION ACT

SPEECH OF

HON. LANE EVANS

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, December 19, 2001

Mr. EVANS. Madam Speaker, the remarks that I made in support of H.R. 2561 were made in the context of the measure as it was originally introduced by my colleague, the gentleman from Pennsylvania, CURT WELDON. The measure passed by the House under suspension of the rules, however, was an amended version of H.R. 2561. As amended, H.R. 2561 did not embody certain provisions that had been included in the original bill.

With regard to H.R. 2561 as amended, I want to express my strong support for this legislation that demonstrates our continued commitment to recipients of the Medal of Honor. In the name of the Congress, the President presents the Medal of Honor. It is the highest honor that can be bestowed upon any American citizen. Only 3,455 Americans have been awarded Medals of Honor, and today only 149 of them are living.

As the Ranking Democrat on the Veterans' Affairs Committee, as a senior member of the Armed Services Committee, and as a United States Marine, I feel strongly that these heroes deserve special recognition and consideration. Their valiant contributions must be honored and supported by all Americans.

Accordingly, I am pleased that H.R. 2561 would increase from $600 to $1,000 the monthly amount paid to recipients of the Medal of Honor and provide for retroactive, lump-sum payments to such recipients to reflect this increase. In addition, the bill would provide an additional medal for use in display or exhibits to those recipients who desire one, and increase the criminal penalties associated with the unauthorized purchase or possession of a Medal, or with the false representation of its awarding.

Madam Speaker, I am proud to be an original cosponsor of H.R. 2561 and I strongly urge my colleagues to join me in supporting our Medal of Honor recipients.

NURSE REINVESTMENT ACT

SPEECH OF

HON. MARK FOLEY

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, December 19, 2001

Mr. FOLEY. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank all the members of this chamber for passing H.R. 3487, the Nurse Reinvestment Act. This bill will provide immediate relief to a sector of the healthcare industry in desperate need of our support. The nursing shortage is approaching critical levels and it is clearly affecting patients throughout our Nation.

These men and women who work on the front lines of our healthcare system everyday face tremendous hurdles. I have met with nurses and their representatives who have thoroughly explained the problems with mandatory overtime, the need for staffing standards, and protection for those employees who report unsafe conditions or practices in the facilities in which they work.

H.R. 3487 is a step in the right direction. It will provide for funding public service announcements to recruit nurses, loan repayment programs, and scholarship programs. It also requires the GAO to report to Congress on several key issues in the nursing arena—including nursing faculty shortages and disparities among hiring practices of nurses between not for profit and for profit entities.

Again, I thank my colleagues for their support of this very important piece of legislation.

CONFERENCE REPORT ON H.R. 3061, DEPARTMENTS OF LABOR, HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES, AND EDUCATION AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2002

SPEECH OF

HON. SHEILA JACKSON-LEE

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, December 19, 2001

Ms. JACKSON-LEE. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased with the bipartisan bill passed out of the House Labor–HHS–Education subcommittee and brought to the floor by unanimous consent. The bill generally makes sure that we continue our commitment to education and health care, preserves our most important worker protection programs, and includes the largest increase in new educational investment in a decade. This is good news for the American people.

However, I am extremely disappointed that this $123.8 billion appropriation does not include a greatly needed provision to expand insurance coverage for mental illness. This provision, known as ''mental health parity'' would have required group health plans offering mental health coverage to make that coverage available at the same level as insurance coverage for physical illness.

This was a crucial social issues issue that was included in the Senate version of the spending bill (H.R. 3061) that should have been adopted by the conferees. The adoption by the conferees of an amendment offered by Representative RANDY ''DUKE'' CUNNINGHAM that would keep the Wellstone-Domenici Mental Health Parity Act of 1996 (P.L. 104–204) in effect for another year is notable, but should not replace the responsibility of the conferees to address this important issue to protect all Americans from disparities in insurance coverage.

According to the Wall Street Journal, the cost to American businesses of untreated mental illnesses is $70 billion per year, and the National Institute of Mental Health estimates that the cost to society is $300 billion per year. These costs are reflective of the 23% unemployment rate among American adults who suffer from depression, and the fact that four of the ten leading causes of disability in America are mental disorders.

The mental health parity provision would have addressed these issues while increasing the levels of productivity in the American workforce. It is a seriously missed opportunity that this provision was not included in this appropriation.

Having said that, I am pleased that this appropriation includes $48.9 billion for the Department of Education, roughly $4.4 billion more than President Bush originally requested. However, as Chair of the Congressional Children's Caucus, I am disappointed that funding for elementary and secondary education programs fell short of the levels in the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA; H.R. 1) which would authorize $26.5 billion for elementary and secondary education programs, and which awaits the President's signature.

I am also disappointed that the conferees failed to keep in the bill $925 for elementary and secondary school renovation, particularly in light of the current state of disrepair that we find our schools in.

I am pleased with the large increase to $7.5 billion in special education funding, raising spending roughly 19 percent higher than the $6.8 billion in fiscal 2001. I am also pleased with the increases in spending for Pell Grants to $10.3 billion from roughly $8.8 billion in fiscal 2001, raising grants from $3,750 to $4,000.

Americans will also be well-served by the other increases such as: the 18% increase to $1 billion for after school centers, the $1.6 billion (18%) increase to $10.35 billion for Title 1 grants, the 45% increase to $665 million for Bilingual Education, the 31% increase to $2.85 billion for Teacher Quality grants, and the 15% increase to $1.1 billion for Impact Aid.

This appropriation also increases funding to the Department of Labor by 3%, or about $12 billion, rather than cut by 3% as proposed by the President. This is a $310 million increase over fiscal 2001 spending and provides growth in the major employment, training and worker protection programs. It also targets $54.2 billion to the Department of Health and Human Services, increasing $5 billion over fiscal 2001 and $2.5 billion over the President's initial request.

However, much more should have been done to help displaced workers, particularly in light of those recently displaced by the September 11 attacks on America , including more than 100,000 airline employees have lost their jobs. These attacks radically altered the prospects of workers and business in every community in America.

Unfortunately, by all indicators, the recession is upon us and it seems clear that we have not yet hit bottom. So while hard working Americans continue to loose their jobs through no fault of their own, we must do all that we can to provide them with the benefits and safety net that they need and deserve.

That's why I was proud to join Representative HASTINGS and over 150 other members of the House in co-sponsoring H.R. 2946, the Displaced Workers Relief Act of 2001. This bill served as the companion bill to S. 1454, which was introduced in the Senate by Senator JEAN CARNAHAN of Missouri. It would have provided those who lost their jobs in the wake of the attacks of September 11 with the ability to pay rent, put food on their table, buy school books for their children, while trying to get by in these difficult times.

Specifically, the bill extended unemployment benefits from 26 to 78 weeks, provided 26 weeks of unemployment insurance benefits for workers who would not otherwise qualify, extended Job Training Benefits from 52 to 78 weeks, provided up to 78 weeks of federally subsidized COBRA premiums, and provided temporary Medicaid coverage for up to eighteen months to those workers without COBRA