

She writes: "My husband, who served in the Army for 20 years, died in July, 1995. I was then 61 years old. I was doing okay, paying my monthly bills and having enough left for groceries, but when I turned 62, I was notified my SBP was reduced from \$476 to \$302. What a shock! This was my grocery money they took from me. I hope that nobody else has to go through what I have. I cry every day and night. Not only have I lost my husband, I lost my money, my pride, my dignity." These words from the widow of one of our nation's veterans should be seared into the mind of every member of Congress.

Tomorrow, along with a number of my colleagues, I will be signing a discharge petition for H.R. 303, a bill to provide what is known as concurrent receipt to our disabled military retirees. If this law is passed, these retirees would be able to receive both their military retired pay, which they earned, and their VA disability compensation, which they deserve! As you know, both the House and the Senate passed concurrent receipt during the last session of Congress—and only in the Conference, was it diluted to almost nothing. We are again fighting to correct this grave injustice.

I am here today to state that there is another equally deserving group that we must include in this fight—the widows of our military retirees! Not only are many of our military retirees being denied their rightful benefits while they are alive, their spouses are being denied their rightful benefits upon their death.

The law to reduce the benefits received by military retired widows when they turn 65 is misleading and unfair. It is time to change this law! Most of these military widows are living on small incomes, but even people with substantial incomes would have a tough time coping with a reduction from 55 percent of their retirement benefits to 35 percent.

My bill, H.R. 1592, the Military Survivors Equity Act, would immediately eliminate this callous and absurd reduction in benefits that now burdens our military widows. My colleague from Florida, Mr. MILLER, has introduced H.R. 548, a bill that would increase the post-62 SBP annuity so that it reaches 55 percent of the military retired pay by 2007. Both bills fulfill the 2001 "sense of Congress" resolution to reduce and eventually eliminate this SBP reduction. The passage of this legislation is a top priority for the Military Officers Association of America, and the Veterans of Foreign Wars has also voiced their support for these bills. The Democratic Salute to Veterans and the Armed Forces legislative package, recently released, also calls for an end to this unfair reduction of benefits.

I encourage members from both sides of the aisle to work with Congressman MILLER and me to stop the pain and anguish we are causing our military widows and to show respect for the tremendous sacrifices made by our veterans and their families. We must pass this legislation to make this the compassionate and effective Survivors Benefits Plan it should be.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks on the subject of my Special Order.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. FEENEY). Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Florida?

There was no objection.

SUPPORTING HEAD START

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 7, 2003, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WATERS) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Ms. WATERS. Mr. Speaker, I rise this evening to talk about a most important successful program that young children have been able to participate in from very needy communities for a long time now. But first I would like to thank the chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus for organizing this Special Order this evening.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of the Head Start programs, and I would urge all of my colleagues to oppose the radical changes that are being proposed by the Bush administration.

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I have taken time out this evening to be here with whatever colleagues will join me to talk about this program because it is a program that I love. I love the Head Start program. I love this program because I got involved with the Head Start program early on. I got involved at the inception of the Head Start program under the war on poverty. The country was very excited about the fact that under the war on poverty there was going to be this program, an early childhood education program, for people in poor communities and working communities that had not been able to send their young children to preschool programs.

At one time in this country, preschool programs were only available to people with money, to the wealthy, to people who were earning good incomes, but Head Start was envisioned under the war on poverty as a program that could help children in poor communities and working communities get a jump, get a head start so that they would be prepared for kindergarten. They would be prepared for school and education.

The researchers and the educators that came up with this idea understood that for young people to be successful or more successful in school, if they had this preschool experience, it would not only prepare them for reading and learning, but it would also build other kinds of qualities. Building self-esteem was an important idea of the Head Start program.

I went to work for Head Start as an assistant teacher. I went into the Head Start program, and little did I know that Head Start was not simply to be a place of employment for me, it changed my life. In Head Start, not only did I learn how to work with young people, to build self-esteem, I later became the supervisor of parent involvement and volunteer services where I worked with

families, with mothers and fathers and grandparents, bringing them into the Head Start program and helping them to understand that they certainly could be in control of their children's destiny.

Head Start was a program that not only dealt with early childhood education, a preschool experience for young people, but it was a program that helped to deal with parenting and helping parents to understand how they could, in fact, get more involved and give more support to their children.

Also, this program spread out into the community, and it helped parents to understand how not only they could be involved with their children's early childhood education, but they could be involved in the community and helping the community to understand how to be supportive of education, interacting with the school boards and with other educators, talking about their children's experiences and what was going on in the homes and helping educators to be more in tune with how they could better give young people a head start.

Head Start is very special because it takes into consideration the whole child. This program understood early on that if we are to be successful with our young people in education, we must give them every advantage and every opportunity to learn. Before Head Start, children were going to school. They could not hear well, could not see well, had learning disabilities, had never had a physical examination, had never had an examination to determine some of the problems that were so obvious when one interacted with these young people.

When we opened Head Start, we brought in the families and the children, and they had full physical examinations. They had an opportunity to talk with counselors. If psychiatrists were needed, they had that, also. So we discovered that there certainly were learning disabilities; dyslexia, and other kinds of problems were discovered and they were worked on.

Health care opportunities and preventive care was available to these parents for the first time. So we were able to attend to these health needs so that the children could certainly be prepared for learning, and that is what happened in the Head Start program.

The Head Start program not only dealt with the health care needs and preventive health care for families, it helped families to understand how they could build self-esteem. We learned a lot about self-esteem and how parents and families could be involved in building that self-esteem. We talked to parents how to place the work of their children on their walls at home, the paintings and the drawings and all of those things that children felt proud about, but oftentimes parents and families did not know how important it was. We taught them how to display the work of their children, but we also taught them how to take materials in