

INTRODUCING THE VETERANS
PENSIONS PROTECTION ACT OF
2011

HON. ALCEE L. HASTINGS

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 3, 2011

Mr. HASTINGS of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce the Veterans Pensions Protection Act of 2011, which will protect veterans from losing their pension benefits because they received payments to cover expenses incurred after an accident, theft, loss or casualty loss.

When assessing a veteran's eligibility for a pension, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) considers a variety of sources of revenue to determine a veteran's annual income. If such income exceeds the income limit set by the VA, the veteran does not qualify for a pension or loses their benefits. Currently, the VA considers any reimbursement that compensates a veteran for his/or her expenses due to accidents, theft or loss as income. Only reimbursements of expenses related to casualty loss are currently exempted from determination of income.

Under current law, if a veteran is seriously injured in an accident or the victim of a theft and receives insurance compensation to cover his/or her medical expenses, the cost of replacement of the stolen items, or for pain and suffering, he/or she will likely lose their pension. This means that the law effectively punishes veterans when they suffer from such an accident or theft.

Such a tragedy happened to one of my constituents, a Navy veteran with muscular dystrophy who was hit by a truck when crossing the street in his wheelchair. His pension was abruptly cut off after he received an insurance settlement payment to cover medical expenses for himself and his service dog, and material expenses to replace his wheelchair. As a result, he fell below the poverty line, could not cover his daily expenses and mortgage payments, and almost lost his home!

There is clearly something wrong with a law that cancels veterans' pensions following the award of an insurance payment, which was only intended to cover exceptional medical expenses. I am distraught that the VA can cancel the pensions of unemployed and disabled veterans without further notice. The VA has a moral responsibility to care for our veterans and ensure that they live decent lives.

The Veterans Pensions Protection Act will amend the U.S. Code to exempt the reimbursement of expenses related to accidents, theft, loss or casualty loss from being included into the determination of a veteran's income. This will guarantee the continuity of our veterans' pensions and that no veteran will have their benefits unfairly and abruptly depreciated or cancelled.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation will fix a loophole under existing law to ensure that pensions are issued to veterans who legitimately meet the income criteria and rely on such benefits to survive. We must enact regulations that help veterans live better lives, not hurt them. At a time when our nation's servicemen and women are fighting two wars abroad, we have a duty to our past, present, and future veterans to provide them with the very best services and benefits. We owe our veterans

an enormous debt, and cannot thank them enough for their service. I urge my colleagues to support this important bipartisan legislation.

CONGRATULATING SILVER STAR
RECIPIENT JOSHUA R. LABBE

HON. JOE COURTNEY

OF CONNECTICUT

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 3, 2011

Mr. COURTNEY. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Army SGT Joshua R. Labbe for receiving the prestigious Silver Star—the third highest honor for valor in the Army. I also want to share with you a brief account of the remarkable story that earned him this award while serving in the Baghlan Province of Afghanistan.

Labbe, a former tight end on Stonington High School's football team, was raised in Pawcatuck, Connecticut. To the surprise of his family and friends but with their support, Joshua enlisted in the Army shortly after graduating, expressing his deep desire to make a difference. He did just that.

Joshua was awarded the Silver Star for leading his squadron through more than 6 hours of consecutive battles on October 6 of this year. He and his platoon began the day before dawn sweeping for mines in a mountainous region—one deemed critical in the fight to protect supply routes and crack down on drug trafficking in the province.

Not long after the operation had finished, Labbe and his squad came under heavy small arms fire from a group of Taliban fighters outnumbering them by roughly three to one. Following an order to retreat from their hillside position, Labbe returned—through enemy gunfire—to accompany several soldiers to safety including one who fell and had to be carried. Later, while towing a damaged truck in the midst of an ambush, Labbe provided cover fire—from close range and from an exposed position—for the recovery team. They all returned to base with no casualties.

Sergeant Labbe is one of just 195 soldiers to receive a Silver Star in Afghanistan since 2003. While this account provides only a glimpse of the heroic actions that earned him this honor, Joshua's contributions and deep devotion to protecting this country are clear. I ask my colleagues to join me in congratulating and honoring SGT Joshua R. Labbe for his service and sacrifice to this great nation.

HONORING THE GARFIELD BABE
RUTH LEAGUE ON ITS 50TH AN-
NIVERSARY

HON. STEVEN R. ROTHMAN

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 3, 2011

Mr. ROTHMAN of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate the Garfield Babe Ruth League on 50 years of service to the youth of Garfield, New Jersey. Since its founding in 1961, the League has provided countless young people with the opportunity to participate in a quintessential American pastime: youth baseball.

The Garfield Babe Ruth League is a proud member of the Middle Atlantic Region of Babe

Ruth Baseball. Comprised of two divisions, 13–15 year olds and 16–18 year olds, the League provides an important team experience and extracurricular outlet for as many as 200 young people each year. All of the coaches and league officials are volunteers, devoting their time to bring baseball into the lives of teenagers. These volunteers also maintain Columbus Field, home to all games played in the Garfield Babe Ruth League. Over the years, with the help of its invaluable volunteer coaches and officials, the League has been able to add a press box, score board, dugouts, club house, fencing, lighting, bleachers, and numerous other field enhancements. Garfield has hosted many District All-Star Tournaments and has been selected to host this year's New Jersey State Final Tournament for the 14-year-old division.

Throughout its half-century of service to the City of Garfield, the League has always provided the youth of the community with the opportunity to create cherished memories, have important character-building experiences, and celebrate proud accomplishments, both on and off the baseball field. The legacy of this organization only grows stronger as the League continues to touch the lives of all who become involved with it.

Mr. Speaker, today I would like to celebrate the Garfield Babe Ruth League's 50th anniversary and honor all of its volunteers and participants for their role in keeping this wonderful tradition going for so many years. I wish the League continued success as it continues to proudly serve the community of Garfield, New Jersey.

MARKEY AMENDMENT TO H.R. 1

HON. FRANK PALLONE, JR.

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 3, 2011

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of the amendment offered by the gentleman from Massachusetts, Mr. MARKEY. This amendment would strike a strange provision in law that allows for royalty-free production for certain offshore drilling leases.

I have introduced legislation, the No New Drilling Act of 2011, which would stop the Interior Department from pursuing any new exploration, development or production of oil, gas or any other mineral anywhere off America's coasts. The fact remains that opening up new drilling for fossil fuel development is unnecessary, poses a serious threat to our shores, and is the wrong approach.

If oil companies are going to drill in our waters, at the very least they should be required to pay royalties to the federal government on the profits they make at the expense of our environment. We have seen the environmental catastrophe that can occur, most notably with the BP oil spill last year.

I don't support issuing any new leases for offshore drilling in areas not currently leased. I support this amendment so that we can hold these companies financially accountable for the benefits they are reaping from our coastal environment. I urge all of my colleagues to vote aye.