

July 22, 1999

land and agree to administer, operate, and maintain the cemetery.

To date, half of the states—to include my home state of Florida, as well as the large veterans population states of Texas and New York—still do not have a state veterans cemetery.

On May 20th, the Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, of which I am the Ranking Democrat, conducted a hearing on veterans cemeteries. Veterans organization representatives and State Directors of Veterans Affairs testified that many states do not seek VA grants to establish a veterans cemetery because of their concern for the high perpetual costs of operating them. Witnesses noted that the amount of the plot allowance received by state cemeteries—\$150—has remained unchanged since the benefit was authorized in 1973 and does not come close to covering the state's cost of an interment. Furthermore, states are not able to receive plot allowance payments for veterans unless those veterans had wartime service. Witnesses estimated that 20 percent of the veterans buried in state veterans cemeteries were peacetime veterans who would have been eligible to be buried in a national cemetery.

To encourage states to apply for a VA state cemetery grant, my legislation would increase the plot allowance to \$300. This amount represents a conservative estimate of the current actual cost to states for the interment of veterans—the original intent of the plot allowance benefit.

My bill also would expand the eligibility criteria for states and their political subdivisions to receive plot allowance payments. A provision that would allow plot allowance payments for all veterans who are eligible for burial in a national cemetery would correct a long-standing inequity for peacetime veterans as well as support the state cemetery grants program. Veterans with peacetime service are not distinguished from veterans with wartime service regarding their burial benefits in a national cemetery. Veterans who elect to be buried in a state cemetery, likewise, should not be subject to differing categories of eligibility for the plot allowance benefit.

A third burial option for veterans—the one that offers a location closest to their residence—is a veterans cemetery owned by an agency or political subdivision of a state. Local cemeteries owned by a county or city are authorized to receive the veteran's plot allowance if the veteran is buried without charge for the cost of a plot or interment in a section that is used solely for the interment of persons eligible for burial in a national cemetery. Like state veterans cemeteries, these local, government-owned cemeteries are limited to plot allowances for veterans with wartime service.

Witnesses at my Subcommittee's recent hearing testified that they believed that if the amount of the plot allowance benefit were increased to a sum more closely approximating the actual cost of interment, and if the eligibility criteria for receipt of the plot allowance by cemeteries owned by a political subdivision of a state were expanded to include peacetime veterans who were eligible for burial in a national cemetery, that those community cemeteries would be encouraged to establish or expand special sections for veterans.

EXTENSIONS OF REMARKS

Mr. Speaker, it is important that Congress reaffirm this Nation's commitment to provide an appropriate resting-place of honor for its veterans. My legislation would provide states and their political subdivisions with the incentive to expand the necessary supplement to our national cemetery system so that America might properly memorialize the sacrifices her veterans have made to keep this Nation free. I urge my colleagues to support their veterans through the support of my solution to this bipartisan issue.

CONDEMNING INTERNATIONAL PARENTAL CHILD ABDUCTION

HON. GEORGE W. GEKAS

OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 22, 1999

Mr. GEKAS. Mr. Speaker, today I rise to condemn the continuing crisis of international parental child abduction. Six years ago, in the 103rd Congress, in response to an instance of international child abduction in my home State of Pennsylvania, I formulated legislation which created punitive measures to respond to these crimes. I had hoped that when we passed that measure, now Public Law 103-173, the International Parental Kidnapping Crime Act of 1993, that tragic instances of child abduction would be halted. Unfortunately, I was wrong.

Imagine that your former spouse—who does not have custodial rights of your children—comes to your home and picks up your kids for a weekly visit. Then imagine that you discover your spouse has taken your children to a foreign country, and you have little recourse in getting your children back. Sadly, this happens more than 1,000 times each year.

Prior to passage of this legislation, there was no Federal law that addressed this heinous crime. Now, this law provides both deterrence and prevention. For anyone convicted of unlawfully kidnapping their child and taking him or her overseas, a one- to three-year jail term and stiff fines can be expected. In addition, this legislation established educational programs for judges and others involved in custody proceedings that continue to serve as preventive measures. By passing that law, Congress for the first time put the weight of Federal law behind our desire that children never be taken away from a loving parent.

Yesterday the House of Representatives debated and passed the Gibbons amendment to H.R. 2415, the American Embassy Security Act. Representative GIBBONS, like myself six years ago, has diligently worked with the State Department in order to find a resolution to this same problem that plagues families across the country. His amendment helps prevent international child abduction by ensuring that in order for a child to be issued a passport, certain requirements must be met by her/his legal guardians.

I applaud the efforts of Representative GIBBONS and I wholly support his amendment. As Members of Congress, we should do all we can to end the nightmare of international parental child abductions.

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TRIBUTE TO MR. JOSEPH E. BEASLEY ON HIS RETIREMENT FROM THE INTERNATIONAL UNION OF OPERATING ENGINEERS LOCAL #66

HON. RON KLINK

OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 22, 1999

Mr. KLINK. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in order to honor my longtime friend, Mr. Joseph E. Beasley. On June 30th, Mr. Beasley retired from the International Union of Operating Engineers, bringing to a close a career that spanned five decades.

After serving his country in the military, Mr. Beasley joined the work force in Pittsburgh. Soon after, he joined the Union and began what would become a 49 year association with the Operating Engineers. Mr. Beasley served in a wide variety of capacities during this tenure, distinguishing himself through dedication and hard work.

Mr. Beasley's career began with his election to the position of Financial Secretary for the Local Union in 1972. He held this position until his 1981 election to Business Manager, a seat he held until his retirement. In addition, Mr. Beasley served as Vice-President of the Pittsburgh Building Trades Counsel and Chairman of the Local 66 Pension and Annuity and Welfare Funds.

In addition to his work on the local level, Mr. Beasley also served as an International Trustee and the eleventh General Vice President of the International Union of Operating Engineers. Most recently, he served as the Vice-President of the Pennsylvania AFL-CIO and as Secretary Treasurer of the Northeastern States Conference of Operating engineers.

Mr. Beasley's accomplishments throughout his career have gained him the respect and admiration of his colleagues. He has proven himself a great asset to not only the state of Pennsylvania but also hard working men and women across this country.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank Mr. Beasley for all his efforts throughout his nearly fifty year career. I wish him the best in his much deserved retirement.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. HERBERT H. BATEMAN

OF VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 22, 1999

Mr. BATEMAN. Mr. Speaker, I was regrettably absent and missed rollcall vote No. 327 on July 21, 1999. The vote was on the Bilbray amendment to H.R. 2415, the American Embassy Security Act. I include in the RECORD that I would have voted "aye" had I been present.