

knights in shining armor, from Greek warriors to great patriots like George Washington, Sam Houston, and Davy Crockett we strive to reach their level of courage, bravery, determination and faith. We admire them for protecting their families, their lands, and their communities.

This summer, the firefighters of East Texas have given us new stories to tell our children. Their sacrifices saved countless lives, buildings, and acres of natural resources.

We owed them a great debt. I hope that our children will listen closely to the stories we tell. When they grow up, we can only hope that they will follow the example set by these heroes. Our firefighters represent the highest standards of public service.

Mr. GALLEGLY. Madam Speaker, I would first like to thank Chairman BURTON, Subcommittee Chairman SCARBOROUGH, Mr. CAMP and Ms. CAPPS for their help in bringing this bill to the floor. I would also like to thank my constituent, retired Captain Mike Hair of the federal firefighting unit at Point Mugu Naval Air Station, for first bringing this important issue to my attention.

Madam Speaker, H.R. 460 is a bill I first introduced in 1995 to stop the forced early retirement of our federal firefighters. The bill raises the mandatory retirement age for federal firefighters from 55 to 57, allowing federal firefighters the option of continuing their careers for an additional two years. The bill has gained over 92 bipartisan cosponsors, and the endorsement of the International Association of Fire Chiefs.

Several years ago, Congress passed legislation which raised the mandatory retirement age for "federal law enforcement officers" from 55 to 57. However, Congress neglected to raise the retirement age for federal firefighters. The net result has been that capable firefighters are being denied the opportunity to work simply because they turn 55. I introduced H.R. 460 to correct this omission in the law.

Madam Speaker, when this year's fire season reached its height, communities around the nation endured a dangerous shortage of experienced firefighters. I represent most of Ventura County, California, which has faced two major brush fires since the beginning of the fire season in mid-May. These fires have consumed thousands of acres. The latest of the fires struck dry grass in Piru, injuring five firefighters and scorching hundreds of acres near an underground oil pipeline.

Firefighters from the U.S. Forest Service and California Department of Forestry joined hundreds of firefighters from Ventura and Los Angeles counties to battle the flames.

Despite an increase in the overall fire budget nationally, federal fire management officers in California and the rest of the West faced a shortage of experienced personnel. With a declining firefighting population nationwide, Governors in some cases had to call upon Army National Guard units and volunteers with much less experience and training to fight the fires. In addition, CBS News reported that even retired fire managers were being called up to oversee and manage these fires. In the aftermath, firefighting officials are now looking for ways to help prevent a repeat of this year's devastation, which claimed more than 6 million acres.

According to the Washington Post, 57 percent of the U.S. Forest Service firefighters are

45 or older. According to the Brookings Institute, most new hires are 35 and older and training for senior management positions can take 12 to 17 years. As a result, we are losing our best and most experienced firefighters to forced early retirement.

If enacted, this bill will bolster our firefighting capabilities by maintaining more experienced firefighters in the field and in senior management positions by allowing these brave men and women the option of continuing their careers for an additional two years. As an added bonus, Madam Speaker, the CBO estimates that the bill will actually save the government \$4 million over the next 5 years.

We must act now to ensure we have the experienced personnel needed to fight our nation's fires during next year's fire season.

Mrs. CAPPS. Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 460, a bill to raise the mandatory retirement age for federal firefighters from 55 to 57. As the lead cosponsor, I am proud that the House has passed this timely legislation.

As the recent wildfires which ravaged much of the West have shown, firefighters, are in great demand. Many of our Nation's firefighters are quickly approaching retirement age, highlighting the growing shortage of well-trained, quality firefighters. In my District, federal firefighters have been part of the team of courageous men and women battling the Harris fire and the smoldering peat bog on Vandenberg Air Force Base during the past several weeks. These heroes deserve our strongest support, and I'm proud to have played a role in securing this victory. This important legislation will allow more firefighters to remain on the front lines in the battle against devastating fires in my District and across the country.

Several years ago, Congress raised the mandatory retirement age for federal law enforcement officers from 55 to 57. H.R. 460 would correct this oversight and adjust the federal firefighters' retirement age so that it is equal to that of federal law enforcement officers. This legislation has bipartisan support and the endorsement of the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC).

Currently, over 2,500 federal firefighters are based in California—the largest percentage of federal firefighters in the country. A recent report issued by the General Accounting Office (GAO) stated that because of an aging work force there will be a shortage of qualified firefighters in the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management, and that the situation could have a direct impact on firefighters' safety. In fact, as reported recently in the Washington Post, 57 percent of Forest Service firefighters are 45 years of older (8/11/00). Because it takes 17–22 years of experience to become eligible for firefighters leadership positions, an extra two years of service would be of critical importance to a qualified and effective fire fighting operation.

Madam Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to bring this important legislation to the Floor for a vote and I commend the dauntless efforts of the firefighters in my District and across the nation.

Mr. CUMMINGS. Madam Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

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

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mrs. BIGGERT). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. OSE) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 460.

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

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

#### MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

A message from the Senate by Mr. Lundregan, one of its clerks, announced that the Senate has passed with an amendment in which the concurrence of the House is requested, a bill of the House of the following title:

H.R. 4635. An act making appropriations for the Departments of Veterans Affairs and Housing and Urban Development, and for sundry independent agencies, boards, commissions, corporations, and offices for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2001, and for other purposes.

The message also announced that the Senate insists upon its amendment to the bill (H.R. 4635) "An Act making appropriations for the Department of Veterans Affairs and Housing and Urban Development, and for sundry independent agencies, boards, commissions, corporations, and offices for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2001, and for other purposes," requests a conference with the House on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses thereon, and appoints Mr. BOND, Mr. BURNS, Mr. SHELBY, Mr. CRAIG, Mrs. HUTCHISON, Mr. KYL, Mr. DOMENICI, Mr. STEVENS, Ms. MIKULSKI, Mr. LEAHY, Mr. LAUTENBERG, Mr. HARKIN, Mr. REID, Mr. BYRD, and Mr. INOUE, to be the conferees on the part of the Senate.

#### NATIONAL CHILDREN'S MEMORIAL DAY

Mr. OSE. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the concurrent resolution (H. Con. Res. 415) expressing the sense of the Congress that there should be established a National Children's Memorial Day.

The Clerk read as follows:

H. CON. RES. 415

Whereas approximately 80,000 infants, children, teenagers, and young adults of families living throughout the United States die each year from myriad causes;

Whereas the death of an infant child, teenager, or young adult of a family is considered to be one of the greatest tragedies that a parent or family will ever endure during a lifetime; and

Whereas a supportive environment and empathy and understanding are considered critical factors in the healing process of a family that is coping with and recovering from the loss of a loved one: Now, therefore, be it