who are unfamiliar with this organization, VWIN was established in 1995 and has dedicated itself to reaching out to veterans' widows to perform tasks for which they might qualify, to provide them with a point of contact for processing their claims, and to keep them abreast of changes. The Network has done an admirable job in this respect, but if you are like me you are probably wondering why the Department isn't providing these services. There are a whole host of challenges that the Department could argue that preclude them from improving adequate access to, and the timely processing of, such information, including the assertion that they are already doing a good enough job in this respect. But that just isn't good enough and that is why Congress should make it a priority to pass H.R. 801, as well as both H.R. 336 and H.R. 511 in their entirety.

The heart of both H.R. 336, The Surviving Spouses in Dependent Outcomes Outreach Enhancement and Veterans Casework Improvement Act, and H.R. 511, The Veterans Right to Know Act, is a belief grounded in the idea that one of our most basic responsibilities is to provide veterans and their family members with information about benefits to which they may be entitled. Indeed, the success of any initiative embarked upon sound levels of awareness and prudent oversight measures.

I want to sincerely thank Representative PASCRELL for being responsive to my concerns regarding the informational needs of surviving spouses and dependents when drafting the Veterans Right to Know Act. Their specific information needs were initially addressed by language which would require the Department to provide information to dependents concerning benefits and health care services whenever a dependent first applies for any benefit under laws administered by the Secretary. This trigger mechanism is definitely a step in the right direction and I am pleased that it has been included in Section 205 of H.R. 801.

But what about the informational needs of all the surviving spouses and dependents of deceased veterans who would not retroactively be affected by this effort? My bill, H.R. 336, addresses this dilemma in a very straight forward and reasonable way. Specifically, it would (1) establish as a national goal to fully inform surviving spouses and dependents regarding their eligibility for benefits and health care services under laws administered by the Secretary. This trigger mechanism is definitely a step in the right direction and I am pleased that it has been included in Section 205 of H.R. 801.

336 which speaks to the importance of encouraging all elements within the Department to work with private and public sector entities to enhance veterans service organizations and veterans widows organizations—to inform surviving spouses and dependents of deceased veterans regarding their eligibility. I would also have liked to see language speaking to the need to have staff at the local level available to assist these individuals with filing a claim, reconstructing incomplete records, and bridging language barriers included. These represent follow-up efforts designed to ensure that individuals fully understand and properly utilize the information they receive.

In closing, I believe there are shortcomings in current outreach efforts conducted by the Department, and thus I support the related improved language contained in H.R. 801. I am pleased that members of the Committee have paid attention to the need to bolster the Department's outreach efforts and hope that H.R. 801 will be expeditiously signed into law.

Mr. BUYER. Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank you and Ranking Member EVANS for agreeing to “Fast-Track” H.R. 801, the Veterans Opportunities Act.

I am especially pleased because I represent a district that is rural, with a large agricultural base. As such, I fully support the Veterans Opportunities Act, because it finally addresses the issue of “means testing” veterans' agricultural possessions.

In my district, many farmers are land rich, but lack liquid assets to readily pay for health care services at the Department of Veterans Affairs.

H.R. 801 will greatly assist in remedying this problem, and allow them the opportunity to access the VA Health Care system without being penalized.

In addition, I am pleased that this bill finally addresses the issue of allowing veterans to use their GI Bill education benefits for certain private technology entities.

This expansion of benefits will allow veterans to receive benefits for various certification type courses that have previously not been recognized.

As a result, veterans can now pursue non-traditional educational programs that usually require intense study and certification.

This will ultimately level the playing field for veterans by allowing them to compete in the high-tech environment.

Lastly, this bill will increase the burial benefits for both service-connected and non-service-connected veterans.

This is truly important! World War II veterans are dying at a rate of a thousand a day.

Many of these World War II veterans are living on fixed incomes, and the high costs of burying these veterans places a financial burden on their surviving spouses and families.

Mr. Speaker, this bill and its provisions are retroactive to October 1, 2000, for service members killed in the line of duty.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this important measure for our veterans.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. Bass). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 801, as amended.

The question was taken.

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 801, as amended.

Mr. Speaker, the House has the yeas and nays.

Mr. Speaker, this bill provides for other much-needed reforms. For instance, the bill expands the Service Members' Group Life Insurance (SGLI) program to include spouses and children. Upon termination of the SGLI, the policy could be converted to a private life insurance policy. Finally, the bill makes such changes retroactive to October 1, 2000, for service members killed in the line of duty.

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The measure contains other much-needed reforms. For instance, the bill expands the Service Members' Group Life Insurance (SGLI) program to include spouses and children. Upon termination of the SGLI, the policy could be converted to a private life insurance policy. Finally, the bill makes such changes retroactive to October 1, 2000, for service members killed in the line of duty.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the Chair's prior announcement, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 801, as amended.

Mr. Speaker, the Chair's prior announcement, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules.