

became Bureau of Land Management lands. They are available, in my view, and in most cases they are for multiple uses. We need to ensure that is happening.

However, since 1983, access to mineral reserves in the West has declined by about 65 percent. Less than 17 percent of the total mineral estate is leased as compared to 72 percent in 1983. I do not suggest we return to that, but we do have to take a look at accessibility. We have to take a look at good environmentally sound ways of exploring and extracting minerals. We can do that. The Bush-Cheney plan addresses this problem. Not only how to do it, but it talks about renewables. It talks about the environment and issues we need to talk about.

We have a great deal to do, but we have some great opportunities to do it. Here are a few of the things that are in the Bush-Cheney national energy policy. We help consumers in the short run. We increase LIHEAP funding to \$1.7 billion. LIHEAP is for low-income people whose home energy bills went up. We double the weatherization funding, work with Governors to encourage regional energy planning, and work with FEMA so the emergency agency can respond to energy emergencies.

There is a good deal of emphasis on conservation, increasing efficiency. Indeed, it is made a national priority in this book.

We need to expand DOE's appliance standards programs to make standards higher. We need to take a look at the mileage standards on vehicles, and this plan provides incentives for fuel-efficient technologies. These things are all in this plan, and I think are a very important part of it.

We need to increase the supply of conventional fuels. We can do that. I know there is great controversy about ANWR. Whether or not we end up in ANWR is not the issue; the issue is whether there is access to those lands that should be available for exploration and production. There are a great many of those lands. We have already extensive gas production. We need to increase the infrastructure there and have a natural gas pipeline; provide royalty relief for deep water and enhance that recovery, as well as low production wells. We can do that which would increase considerably production of energy here.

There are a lot of things to do. We need to extend renewables and alternative fuels. This is a good one. As I mentioned, it currently only produces less than 2 percent—a little over 1 percent—of the total, but it has the potential to do a great deal more. And it is very clean energy. That is what a lot of people would like to do.

It streamlines the hydroelectric licensing process. It expands tax credits, again, for the production of electricity from renewable sources.

We hear from environmentalists that all that is talked about is more production of oil. That is not true. This book contains all these areas, with a considerable amount of emphasis on conservation, and with a considerable amount of emphasis on renewables. So we can do that.

Obviously, one of the difficult things to do is strengthening and increasing the infrastructure so we can move energy. There is a good deal of talk in my State, again, about mine mouth generation. It is very efficient. But then you have to move it. You have to move it on a transmission line or a gas pipeline. We can do that. I think we have done some research to reduce the line loss that is in that kind of transportation. But that is probably our most available source of electric generation. It needs to be moved to where the market will be. We can do that.

There needs to be a considerable amount of work done on refining. One happy thought is that there is a surplus of gas that is beginning to build up. I think we see a leveling off of the price. I met with some refiners the other day, and they say there is likely to be a turnaround here, probably after this weekend. It will not be a great rush, but we will see it at least not move up as it has in the past.

Finally, I am a strong proponent of the environment. I grew up in a place right outside Yellowstone Park, where the environment is very close. In our plan, as we look forward to where we want this country to be in the next 20 years, in the next 50 years, we need a strong economy. And if we want a strong economy, we need jobs.

We also need energy so we can provide for this economy and do the things we need to do, which includes the military and military defense. At the same time, we want to have an environment with a certain amount of open space protecting this environment so that we end up preserving the mountains in Teton Park, so that we end up preserving the open spaces in Nevada, so that we end up preserving the trees and the mountains and the hills in Vermont because those are very close to all of us and very important.

So I think we have a great opportunity now. We have to move quickly because it is something that affects everyone. And it is starting to affect us now, of course.

There is always this question of needing to do something today. We need to put in price caps. We need to do this. It is very difficult. Obviously, price caps have not been an asset in terms of causing things to happen over the long term, to cause investments to take place so that we do solve the problems.

We took oil out of SPR, out of storage last time, and it had no overall impact. So we are going to have to sit down, probably look for conservation in the short term, and take a look at

what we can do with infrastructure, with sources to develop our fuels for the future.

I think we have a great opportunity to do that. We have guidelines for doing it in President Bush's and Vice President CHENEY's national energy policy.

VETERANS OPPORTUNITIES ACT OF 2001

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Veterans' Affairs Committee be discharged from further consideration of H.R. 801 and that the Senate then proceed to its immediate consideration.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CHAFEE). Without objection, it is so ordered. The clerk will report the bill by title.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 801) to amend title 38, United States Code, to improve programs of educational assistance, to expand programs of transition assistance and outreach to departing servicemembers, veterans, and dependents, to increase burial benefits, to provide for family coverage under Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance, and for other purposes.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

AMENDMENT NO. 790

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, Senators SPECTER and ROCKEFELLER have an amendment at the desk, and I ask for its consideration.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Wyoming (Mr. THOMAS), for Mr. SPECTER, for himself and Mr. ROCKEFELLER, proposes an amendment numbered 790.

(The text of the amendment is printed in the RECORD under "Amendments Submitted and proposed.")

Mr. SPECTER. Mr. President, I have sought recognition to comment on the "Veterans' Survivor Benefits Improvement Act of 2001," a measure which I ask be approved by the Senate as a substitute amendment to H.R. 801. H.R. 801 is a bill which was passed by the House of Representatives on March 27, 2001, and subsequently referred to the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs. In my capacity as Chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, I am pleased to offer this amendment with my colleague, the Ranking Member of the Committee, Senator ROCKEFELLER.

In keeping with the spirit of the upcoming Memorial Day holiday—a day intended to memorialize the service of those who lost their lives while in service to the Nation—the Veterans' Survivor Benefits Improvements Act of 2001 would retroactively increase insurance benefits provided to, and guarantee additional health coverage for,

the survivors of service members killed in the line of duty. The Act would also expand health care coverage to the spouses of veterans who have permanent and total disabilities due to military service, as well as the spouses of veterans who have died as a result of wounds incurred in service. Further, the Act extend life insurance benefits to service members' spouses and children, and would authorize, and direct, the Department of Veterans Affairs to conduct outreach efforts to contact these survivors, and other eligible dependents, to apprise them of the benefits to which they are entitled. Finally, the Act would make technical improvements to Montgomery GI Bill education benefits, and make other purely technical amendments to title 38, United States Code.

As part of the "Floyd D. Spense National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2001" (Public Law 106-398), Medicare-eligible military retirees and their spouses became eligible for lifetime health care coverage under the Department of Defense (DOD) TRICARE program. Under the new law, TRICARE acts as a "Medigap" policy, paying for those health care services, such as prescription drugs, not covered under Medicare. Prior to enactment of Public Law 106-398, military retirees lost TRICARE eligibility upon becoming eligible for Medicare.

Mr. President, we can do no less for the survivors of service members who have died wearing our Nation's uniform than we have already done for spouses of military retirees. Therefore, Section 3 of the Act—building on legislation introduced by Senator ROCKEFELLER (S. 564) and consistent with the principles set out in the "TRICARE-for-life" program expansion for military retirees—would extend lifetime health coverage under the Civilian Health and Medical Program of the VA (CHAMPVA) program. That program—similar to TRICARE—provides medical services to the surviving spouses of service members who died while on active duty, to the surviving spouses of veterans who died after service from injuries sustained while on active duty, and to the spouses of veterans who have survived service but who had service-related injuries which are permanent and total in nature.

Under the Act—similar to provisions applicable under the TRICARE expansion enacted in Public Law 106-398—CHAMPVA benefits will be extended to spouses even after they gain Medicare eligibility, and CHAMPVA will pay for what Medicare does not. Full CHAMPVA benefits will be extended to eligible survivors who were eligible for Medicare on the date of enactment, and for those survivors who became Medicare-eligible after enactment, full CHAMPVA benefits will be extended upon enrollment in Medicare Part B.

As part of the "Veterans Benefits and Health Care Improvement Act of 2000"

(Public Law 106-419), signed into law on November 1, 2000, Congress authorized an increase, from \$200,000 to \$250,000, in the maximum amount of Servicemembers Group Life Insurance (SGLI) coverage available to participating service members. However, Congress did not make the increased maximum death benefit effective until April 1, 2001. Sadly, the Nation's Armed Forces have suffered a series of tragic losses over the past several months. From the terrorist attack on the U.S.S. *Cole* on October 12, 2000, to the accidental bombing of our own service members in Kuwait on March 12, 2001, many brave Americans have lost their lives in defense of freedom during the period between enactment and the effective date of these increased benefits. As a symbol of gratitude to the survivors of those killed in the performance of duty, section 5 of the Act would allow retroactive application of the increased SGLI amount for those service members who died in the performance of duty between October 1, 2000, and March 31, 2001, and who had the maximum amount of available SGLI coverage in effect at the time of death. This would amount to a \$50,000 payment for eligible beneficiaries, a small token of thanks for a sacrifice so large. I thank my colleague from Virginia, Senator WARNER, who authorized the legislation (S. 546) from which this provision was derived.

Another provision in the Act would enhance SGLI benefits for the spouses and dependent children of active duty service members. The provision would permit service members to purchase a maximum of \$100,000 in SGLI coverage for their spouses and would extend \$10,000 of life insurance coverage automatically to their children. These added enhancements to the SGLI program are common features provided by many commercial policies; they should be made available to our fighting men and women. A similar provision was approved by the Senate during the 106th Congress, but was not acted upon by the House.

In order to ensure that veterans' family members are made aware of the various VA benefits to which they are entitled, section 6 of the Act authorizes and instructs VA to conduct enhanced outreach efforts to veterans' spouses, surviving spouses, children, and dependent parents. The Act also specifies that such efforts are to be undertaken with the use of the internet, media, and veterans' publications to reach as wide a beneficiary audience as possible. Awareness of available benefits is critical if VA is to meet its statutory responsibilities.

Lastly, the Act makes several technical improvements to the Montgomery GI Bill (MGIB) education program. The first improvement would clarify eligibility requirements for MGIB benefits. Current law, as amend-

ed under the "Veterans Benefits and Health Care Improvement Act of 2000" (Public Law 106-419), could be interpreted as requiring more active duty service than is actually necessary to qualify for MGIB benefits. The clarifying language removes any ambiguity as to the service obligation required for eligibility.

A second improvement would change the method by which a veteran's MGIB entitlement is charged in cases where an active duty service member uses a portion of his or her MGIB benefit entitlement during service to supplement costs not covered under Tuition Assistance Reimbursement programs run by the armed service branches. The new method would be simpler for VA to administer, easier for veterans to understand, and more beneficial for a veteran wishing to maximize his or her utilization of the MGIB benefit.

A third improvement would simplify administration of the new MGIB "buy-up" opportunity created by the "Veterans Benefits and Health Care Improvement Act of 2000" (Public Law 106-419). Under that law, a service member who contributes up to \$600 while in service may receive an additional \$150 per month in additional monthly MGIB benefits for a total of 36 months. The improvement would set minimum monthly in-service contribution amounts of \$20 and would limit the frequency of contributions to once per month. DOD requested these modifications to ensure the smooth and efficient operation of the "buy-up" program.

A fourth improvement would clarify and extend current provisions of law providing for the reimbursement of contributions made to secure eligibility for MGIB benefits in cases where the service member has died before he or she could utilize those benefits. Current law neglects to specify explicitly that the reimbursement provision applies in certain circumstances. This provision remedies that oversight.

Finally, a fifth improvement would clarify that service members who wish to convert from Veterans Educational Assistance Program (VEAP) benefits to MGIB eligibility—an option made possible by a provision of the "Veterans Benefits and Health Care Improvement Act of 2000" (Public Law 106-419)—need only contribute \$2,700 to exercise that option. Due to a drafting error, current law could be read as requiring that a servicemember interested in converting pay \$3,900, an additional contribution amount that was not intended.

Mr. President, I urge my colleagues to support the adoption of the "Veterans' Survivor Benefits Improvement Act of 2001." In doing so, we honor the memories of our fallen heroes by providing for those loved ones left behind. I yield the floor.

Mr. ROCKEFELLER. Mr. President, I am very pleased that the Senate is considering the Veterans' Survivor Benefits Improvements Act of 2001.

It is fitting that we will enact this bill in time to commemorate Memorial Day, the day we, as a nation, remember and pay tribute to the brave members of the American military who died to ensure our freedom. That is why the theme of the bill is especially appropriate. Although not broad in scope, H.R. 801 attempts to improve the ways in which we relate to the survivors of servicemembers and veterans, the families of those who have sacrificed so much for their country.

I am enormously pleased that the bill before us contains my legislation to extend health care protections to CHAMPVA beneficiaries over the age of 65.

Last year, Congress finally enacted legislation to restore the promise of providing lifetime health care to military retirees, by allowing military retirees to retain coverage through TRICARE, rather than having to shift to Medicare at age 65. TRICARE for Life, as it is known, was a great benefit for retirees, but CHAMPVA beneficiaries were not included in this new benefit.

The Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs, CHAMPVA, provides health care coverage to several categories of individuals: Dependents of veterans who have been rated by VA as having a total and permanent disability; survivors of veterans who died from VA-rated service-connected conditions; and survivors of servicemembers who died in the line of duty. As such, CHAMPVA provides a measure of security to a group of persons who have undeniably already sacrificed a great deal for our country. Under current law, CHAMPVA beneficiaries lose their eligibility for coverage when they turn 65 and have to shift to Medicare.

The TRICARE for Life law passed last year specifically allows military retirees and their dependents to remain in the TRICARE program after they turn age 65, as long as they are enrolled with Part B of Medicare. TRICARE will cover those expenses not covered under Medicare. It also provides for retail and mail-order pharmaceutical coverage for Medicare-eligible military retirees.

Title 38, United States Code, reflects the view that TRICARE and CHAMPVA should operate in similar ways. However, with the enactment of TRICARE for Life, that linkage was broken and a modification in law is needed to make CHAMPVA consistent with TRICARE.

The provisions in this bill simply clarify that the CHAMPVA and TRICARE programs should continue to operate in a similar manner, with similar eligibility. This would mean that

Medicare-eligible CHAMPVA beneficiaries who enroll in Part B of Medicare would retain secondary CHAMPVA coverage and receive the same pharmacy benefit as CHAMPVA beneficiaries who are under age 65.

The failure of Congress to enact prescription drug coverage under Medicare only magnifies the need to enact this CHAMPVA reform. Incredible advances in drug therapy, combined with staggering inflation in prescription drug costs, have made the need for affordable prescription drug coverage absolutely critical. CHAMPVA beneficiaries who have sacrificed so much already should not be forced to forego other necessities of life to purchase needed prescription drugs.

I recently heard from a couple from Alderson, WV, who represent a classic example of why this legislation is so necessary. The husband is a veteran of the Korean war. They wrote to me when they learned that the wife lost all of her CHAMPVA benefits when she turned 65. As a result, she was forced to pay more than \$300 per month for her diabetes and heart medications, in addition to all the other new costs for care not covered by Medicare. With Social Security and disability compensation as their only income, this couple is struggling to absorb this enormous new expense in their modest budget. My bill would relieve them of that burden.

I thank the Gold Star Wives Association and the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities for their dedication in bringing this issue to my attention. We must never forget that the costs of military service are borne not by the servicemember alone, but by their families as well.

Section 4 of H.R. 801 addresses a shortcoming in the current insurance coverage provided to servicemembers, the Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance, SGLI. Currently, dependents, spouses and children, are not eligible for insurance coverage under the servicemember's policy and must secure outside commercial coverage. This bill would extend coverage to dependents, giving great peace of mind to servicemembers with many other worries as they train and prepare for deployment, and especially when they are sent into harm's way.

Servicemembers can elect to participate in a VA-administered group life insurance program, SGLI. Government insurance for servicemembers was created in 1917 to provide insurance to soldiers going off to war, because they were unable to purchase commercial life insurance that would cover death resulting from an act of war. That need still exists today.

Coverage is available in \$10,000 increments up to a maximum of \$250,000 unless the servicemember declines coverage or elects coverage at a reduced amount. Veterans can opt to continue

VA insurance, VGLI, after leaving the service, although generally the rates are not as competitive as commercial policies. As of last September, the SGLI premium was \$.08 per month per \$1,000 of coverage, and there was 2,307,000 SGLI policies in force. However, there is no VA or DoD sponsored insurance for the families of these servicemembers, who are often overseas, which makes securing U.S. commercial insurance difficult.

Last year, the Senate passed S. 1810, which would have provided an opportunity to provide similar coverage to spouses and children to SGLI-insured servicemembers. The House did not accept this provision in conference, and it was dropped from the final omnibus veterans bill.

This year, the House passed a provision that essentially mirrors last year's Senate provision to allow coverage for dependents. Dependents' coverage would be automatic unless it is declined. The amount of coverage for a spouse would be equal to the coverage of the insured servicemember, up to a maximum of \$100,000. The lives of a covered servicemember's dependent children would be insured for \$10,000. Premiums are to be set by VA to cover the costs of providing the insurance coverage.

Section 5 of H.R. 801 also addresses an apparently small discrepancy that may make a great difference in the lives of some servicemembers' survivors. In Public Law 106-419, Congress increased the maximum coverage for servicemembers' group life insurance from \$200,000 to \$250,000, but delayed the effective date to the "first day of the first month that begins more than 120 days after the date of the enactment of [this] Act." The bill was signed by the President on November 1, 2000.

However, between passage of the law in Congress and the prospective implementation of the increase, the nation has been shocked by several high profile incidents resulting in loss of servicemembers' lives, such as the tragic bombing of the U.S.S. *Cole*.

This provision would make the increase retroactive back to October 1, 2000, to cover those servicemembers who died in the line of duty in the last several months. There are no costs associated with this provision, nor will there be any increase in premiums to the insured. It is simply the right thing to do for our men and women in uniform.

Finally, section 6 of H.R. 801 would require VA to expand outreach efforts to veterans' dependents and survivors, by requiring the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to ensure that the availability of services and assistance for eligible dependents is made known through a variety of means, including the Internet, announcements in veterans' publications, and announcements to the media.

The most recent survey conducted by VA indicated that less than half of the veterans contacted were aware of certain benefits they were entitled to receive. For survivors of veterans, there is even a lower level of awareness. Currently, VA is mandated to perform outreach to servicemembers and veterans, but not to eligible dependents, a spouse, surviving spouse, child, or dependent parent of a person who served on active duty.

It is critical that we reach out to these survivors and dependents. They should know that VA has many services to assist them in the difficult time following a servicemember's death and in transitioning through that period with insurance, compensation, education, and health care.

In closing, I urge all my colleagues to support H.R. 801 as a tribute to our deceased servicemembers, not just on the day we have selected to honor them, but on every day throughout the year.

Mr. THOMAS. I ask unanimous consent the amendment be agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection it is so ordered.

The amendment (No. 790) was agreed to.

Mr. THOMAS. I ask unanimous consent the bill be read a third time and passed, as amended, the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table, and that any statements relating to the bill be printed in the RECORD.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection it is so ordered.

The bill (H.R. 801), as amended, was read the third time and passed.

Mr. THOMAS. Thank you, Mr. President.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. ALLARD). Without objection, it is so ordered.

CHANGING SENATE LEADERSHIP

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, this is a historic day in the Senate. The announcement this morning by Senator JIM JEFFORDS of Vermont that he is going to become an Independent and organize the Senate with the Democratic caucus means a change in leadership in this important institution of government. It is not the first time that a Member of the Senate has changed political parties. I reflected as I came to the floor that there were four Members on the Republican side who were formerly Democrats at some point in their career. Senator THURMOND was a Democrat from South Carolina and made a decision to become a Republican, I believe, in the

1970s. Senator PHIL GRAMM was a Democratic Congressman from Texas who changed his party allegiance and ran for reelection before he was elected to the Senate as a Republican. Senator BEN NIGHTHORSE CAMPBELL switched parties from Democrat to Republican and now sits on the Republican side. In addition, Senator RICHARD SHELBY of Alabama made the same transition from Democrat to Republican.

Of course, it is different in this circumstance in a 50/50 Senate. Any change of party has historic consequences. The decision of Senator JEFFORDS to organize with the Democratic caucus means there will be a rather substantial change in terms of the leadership of the Senate.

For the last several months, since the election of President Bush, many have given speeches and made statements about the need for bipartisanship. Now we will be put to the test if we have a Democrat-organized Senate, a Republican House, and, of course, a Republican in the White House. Literally, the agenda for the country and the fate of our country will be in the hands of bipartisanship. I think we can rise to that challenge. I hope we will.

I have the greatest confidence in the man who will be the Democrat majority leader, TOM DASCHLE of South Dakota. I have worked with him for almost 20 years in public life, in both the House and the Senate. He is not only very talented; he is an honest person, as hard working as any Member of this Chamber, and his word is good. President Bush, as well as Speaker HASTERT, I am sure, will find him to be an excellent person with whom to work.

I also hope we can develop a common agenda, a bipartisan agenda for the Senate. We have dealt with important budget and tax matters. There are other issues that need to be resolved, not just the 13 spending bills that fund our Federal Government but important issues which, frankly, have not received the attention they deserve. One of those is the Patients' Bill of Rights, to make certain the families across America can have peace of mind that they can go to the best doctors and the best hospitals and rely on medical decisions being made by medical professionals rather than by insurance company clerks. Too often, good medical decisions are being overridden by those who work for insurance companies who have a profit motive in mind rather than the best interests in a person's health. I think a Patients' Bill of Rights should be high on our agenda.

Second, of course, we will move into the area of education. This is an area we were debating before the tax bill arrived, and that most Americans agree is absolutely critical to the future of our country. We have to make a commitment in our agenda to public education and the education of all children across America. The schools of today

face extraordinary challenges which my generation could not have even imagined. Children are coming to school now with greater problems than they have had in the past, and we are expecting more out of the school in terms of training and education than we ever did in the past. We have to make the investment in quality teachers and accountability, in safe classrooms, in modern classrooms, and technology so our kids have a fighting chance to lead America into the 21st century. That should be high on our list of priorities.

In addition to that, the President has asked us to look at questions related to energy. That is an important issue in my home State of Illinois where people have gone from recordbreaking heating bills because of the cost of natural gas to the recordbreaking cost for gasoline at the pump. It is important to not only find new sources of energy that are environmentally sound and make certain they are delivered to the people who need them but to also talk about conservation, a responsibility that is not only one we have as individuals but as the Government. We have to do our part as consumers to buy more fuel-efficient vehicles. Government has to do its part to encourage Detroit to catch up with Japan which already has these duel-use, duel-energy vehicles on the street that are in great demand. Unfortunately, Detroit has not come up with an alternative to compete. They should.

In addition, we have to look at the marketplace for energy in America. Some people think it is simply a supply-and-demand market. It is hard to imagine there is real competition of supply and demand when you drive around Chicago or Springfield, IL, and see all of the prices at the gasoline stations going up in lockstep and coming down, trickling down, in lockstep to believe there is real competition. It is hard to find anybody who is selling at a low price in order to entice consumers.

Sadly, despite the high energy prices and the fact some say it is a market situation, these energy companies are having the highest profits in many years. It is one of the industries that can guess wrong for consumer demand and make higher profits. That is something that has occurred.

We also need to address the question of the minimum wage for workers across America. There was a tax bill passed yesterday that leaves behind over 70 million Americans who do not get a reduction in their tax rate, those at the 15-percent rate, the lowest rate, and those are the same people in many cases who are working for a minimum wage. We have not touched the minimum wage in years in this country.

We have in my State over 400,000 people who go to work every single day at the minimum wage. If we are serious