

INTRODUCTION OF THE MILITARY
RETIREE HEALTH FAIRNESS ACT
1998

HON. HENRY BONILLA

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 25, 1998

Mr. BONILLA. Mr. Speaker, today I am introducing along with my colleague from Washington State, Mr. DICKS the "Military Retiree Health Fairness Act of 1998". This bipartisan bill is an important step in keeping our promises to military retirees. Specifically, this legislation will make sure that all military retirees have the opportunity to participate in Tricare Senior Prime, by waiving penalties for late enrollment in Medicare Part B. Without such relief those most dependant on the military medical system may well see their access reduced.

Medicare Subvention will allow military retirees to receive the health care they were promised by having Medicare reimburse DOD for care provided to Medicare eligible beneficiaries at DOD facilities. Retirees will be able to continue using the same physicians they have always relied and depended upon. Current law mandates that retirees who had counted on using the military health care system and did not enroll in Medicare Part B will be denied the opportunity to participate. Without change, these individuals would have reduced access to DOD health services due to Tricare Senior Prime participants increased use of the system.

The "Military Retiree Health Fairness Act of 1998" makes sure all military retirees have the opportunity to participate in Tricare Senior Prime. The "Military Retiree Health Fairness Act of 1998" waives the penalties for those who do not have Medicare Part B, but would like to participate in Tricare Senior Prime. We can not allow our military retirees to be neglected. I urge my colleagues to join me and cosponsor this worthy legislation.

INTRODUCTION OF H.R. 4149 "THE
FOREST SERVICE COST REDUC-
TION AND FISCAL ACCOUNTABIL-
ITY ACT OF 1998"

HON. ROBERT SMITH

OF OREGON

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 25, 1998

Mr. SMITH of Oregon. Mr. Speaker, a year-and-a-half ago the Committee on Agriculture convened a hearing in Sunriver, Oregon to discuss deteriorating conditions in the Eastside forests of Oregon. That meeting marked the beginning of what has since become an intensive national inquiry into the way the Forest Service is managing our National Forest System.

Since the meeting in Sunriver, the Committee on Agriculture has held ten hearings to examine the performance of the Forest Service. From the first six of these the Committee learned that forest health and productivity throughout the country is deteriorating due to a decline in active forest management—management that is necessary to provide high quality recreation experiences, maintain a well-functioning rural transportation system,

sustain the integrity of watersheds, improve fish and wildlife habitat, protect timber stands from the devastating effects of unnatural fire, insect and disease activity, and provide an adequate supply of forest products to the American public. Recreationists, wildlife advocacy groups, environmentalists and forest products companies from every quarter have testified that the agency is achieving fewer outputs per dollar spend now than in any other time in its history.

This information has prompted the Committee to take a more detailed look at how the Forest Service manages its annual appropriations, trust funds and off-budget accounts to determine the correlation between fiscal management and resource management. This inquiry has revealed some rather troubling findings, including the following:

In 1995, the USDA Inspector General gave the Forest Service a failing grade on its annual financial report saying that it could not certify that the data contained in the report was accurate. The Forest Service has failed to produce an acceptable financial statement since then.

A total of at least 10 separate General Accounting Office reports have been published in recent years documenting the mismanagement of taxpayer dollars by the Forest Service.

The Forest Service claims to have a \$10.5 billion road reconstruction backlog. Yet, thirty-two percent of the agency's road construction and reconstruction program costs are overhead. The FY99 budget request asked for \$26.5 million for road reconstruction while requesting \$31 million for overhead.

The Forest Service presently charges over 27% overhead to the off-budget accounts it uses for reforestation, brush disposal, and other site restoration associated with federal timber sales. Overhead charged to these funds has increased by 80% over the last five years.

Presently 31% of the total costs of the federal timber sale program is overhead. These costs are in addition to the cost of project planning and implementation, environmental documentation, litigation, and other costs. By way of comparison, in 1996 the Forest Service reports that it spent \$5 million on timber sales litigation, \$54 million on environmental documentation, \$123 million on timber sales preparation and over \$200 million on overhead.

The Forest Service does not currently have a system in place to adequately track the costs associated with the programs it administers. Consequently, inefficiency and escalating overhead is the rule within the agency rather than the exception.

Inevitably, each dollar spent on overhead or lost to inefficiency is a dollar not spent on active forest management. In short, rather than spending more money to deliver quality goods and services to the American taxpayer, the Forest Service is spending more money to support wasteful management and line the pockets of bureaucrats.

Some in Congress argue incorrectly that the solution to the problems I have outlined is to simply eliminate those programs the agency does not efficiently administer. This is the position, for example, of those who advocate eliminating the federal timber program.

This approach, however, ignores rather than solves the problem and is ultimately unfair to national forest constituents. If Congress were

to eliminate every Forest Service program plagued by waste and inefficiency then, in the end, we would be forced to eliminate all of them. The big losers under this way of thinking are the millions of tax paying Americans who use our forests for a variety of purposes every day.

When government misbehaves, Congress' objective should be to discipline the government, not punish the people it is supposed to serve. That is why I have introduced the Forest Service Cost Reduction and Fiscal Accountability Act of 1998.

This legislation will require the agency to reduce costs, limit overhead, and be more accountable to Congress and the taxpayer. Specifically, the bill will do five things:

1. Require the Forest Service to account annually for the costs associated with all of the programs it administers by moving to an "all resources" financial reporting system.

2. Impose limitations on the overhead the agency may charge to off-budget funds.

3. Require the Forest Service to fully disclose in each year's budget request the amount of overhead implicit in each budget line item.

4. Require the Forest Service, in cooperation with the General Accounting Office and USDA Office of Inspector General, to develop a five-year strategic plan for identifying and reducing overhead and unnecessary costs.

5. Require periodic GAO audits of the implementation of the strategic plan and corresponding reports to Congress.

I invite my colleagues in the House of Representatives to join me in quickly moving this bill toward final passage on the House floor.

The Forest Service Cost Reduction and Fiscal Accountability Act of 1998 will produce less waste, greater efficiency, and make more dollars available for active on-the-ground management. It is a good government solution for what ails the Forest Service without unfairly penalizing forest constituents. In sum, it is a win for the good forest management, a win for the Forest Service and, most importantly, a win for the millions of Americans who live, work and recreate in our national forests every day.

INTRODUCTION OF THE MINORITY
COMMUNITY TOBACCO REDUC-
TION ACT

HON. BENNIE G. THOMPSON

OF MISSISSIPPI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 25, 1998

Mr. THOMPSON. Mr. Speaker, today more than fifty Members of the Congressional Asian Pacific Caucus, Congressional Black Caucus, Congressional Hispanic Caucus, and the Congressional Native American Caucus joined with a number of other Members of Congress in introducing legislation to address the disproportionate levels of tobacco use and tobacco related disease in the minority community.

The "Minority Community Tobacco Reduction Act" was developed to address the absence of minority initiatives in national tobacco legislation and to reverse the disturbing effects of the tobacco industry's targeting of minorities. The three main priorities of the bill are: 1. Funding for tobacco-related prevention activities in the minority community; 2. Research on