

members that they will be treated on par with other federal employees in the event that they become disabled. A recent study, undertaken by the United States House of Representatives Committee on Government Reform, shows that the Disabled Veterans Tax affects approximately 57,300, or one in three, veterans in Florida. 2,738 veterans are affected by this tax in the third district of Florida. Statewide, Florida's veterans lose \$300 million in benefits annually to the Disabled Veterans Tax. In Florida's third district, veterans cumulatively lose \$13,923,588 in benefits a year—with an average loss of \$5,085 per veteran annually.

The Bush Administration argues that there is a cost barrier to fully funding concurrent receipt. This argument shows where the Administration's priorities are misplaced. If we can come up with an \$87.5 billion supplemental appropriation for the war in Iraq, then we can surely find the money to bring our Nation's military retirees on par with the rest of federal employees. We cannot say that we have enough money to fight wars, but not enough to compensate the servicemembers injured in them.

This year's budget process shows why we need mandatory funding for VA health care. The funding system for veterans' health care is seriously flawed. Instead of being based on need or costs like other federal health programs it is funded based on residual funding for discretionary programs. Veterans are paying for this defective funding system with curtailment in enrollment in the VA health care system, newly proposed copayments and enrollment fees, and increased waiting times. VA does well with the funding it receives, but with a stable and reliable funding stream, it could provide better access to high-quality care for our veterans.

It appears that the House will agree to the Senate's provision that will provide a \$1.3 billion increase above the Administration's budget request. However, it will still fall short of the 2004 funding level that was promised in the budget resolution. Veterans should not have to come begging at our doors for adequate funding of the VA health care system.

Today, and everyday, we should honor those who have worn this Nation's uniform. I thank them and will continue to work to fulfill Abraham Lincoln's pledge, "to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and orphans."

HONORING WOMEN AIRFORCE
SERVICE PILOTS

HON. STEVE ISRAEL

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, November 7, 2003

Mr. ISRAEL. Mr. Speaker, As Veterans' day approaches, I want to take the time to recognize the patriotism and sacrifice of a special group of women. I rise today to honor and recognize servicewomen who served as Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) during the Second World War.

The generation that defeated the Nazis has correctly been referred to as the "Greatest Generation." But for many years, the contributions of this select group of young women pilots were overlooked.

As the first women in history trained to fly American military aircraft, the WASP shattered traditional conceptions about women's roles and became pioneers, heroes, and role models for generations of women to come.

They compiled an admirable record, performing essential services that freed males for combat-related service overseas, but their accomplishments did not come without a cost. Thirty-eight members of the WASP made the ultimate sacrifice and lost their lives in the course of their service.

Although these women had answered the call to duty at America's time of greatest need, when the WASP were disbanded on December 20, 1944, they received no GI benefits or military honors.

America tried to forget them, leaving them with only their personal satisfaction that they had done their duty.

Congress finally corrected this wrong in 1977 when it formally recognized the service of members of the WASP as active military service, making them eligible for veterans benefits.

As we watch women serving bravely in the War Against Terror, it is safe to say that the future of women in the military seems assured. But it is important to remember that this was not always the case.

It is not an exaggeration that we owe a big part of the freedom we enjoy today to these women pilots. Their love of country and love of flying is something for which we will always be grateful.

At this time I would like to thank the thirty-eight who gave their lives. Let us remember Jane Champlin, Susan Clark, Margie L. Davis, Katherine Dussaq, Marjorie D. Edwards, Elizabeth Erickson, Cornelia Fort, Frances Grimes, Mary Hartson, Mary H. Howson, Edith Keene, Kathryn B. Lawrence, Hazel Ying Lee, Paula Loop, Alice Lovejoy, Lea Ola McDonald, Peggy Martin, Marie N. Michell, Virginia Moffatt, Beverly Moses, Dorothy Nichols, Jeanne L. Norbeck, Margaret Oldenburg, Mabel Rawlinson, Gleanna Roberts, Betty Scott, Margaret J. Seip, Helen J. Severson, Marie Sharon, Evelyn Sharp, Betty P. Stine, Marion Toevs, Gertrude Tompkins, Mary Trebing, Bonnie Jean Welz, Betty T. Wood, and Mary L. Webster.

In these dangerous times, their courage is an inspiration for all Americans. I encourage everyone to learn more about the history of the service of these courageous women.

CONFERENCE REPORT H.R. 2691,
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
AND RELATED AGENCIES APPRO-
PRIATIONS ACT, 2004

SPEECH OF

HON. GREG WALDEN

OF OREGON

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, October 30, 2003

Mr. WALDEN of Oregon. Mr. Speaker, I regrettably come to the floor in opposition to the Interior conference report that my friend from North Carolina and the Chairman of the Subcommittee, Mr. TAYLOR, worked so hard in putting together. There are many things in this conference report for which I'm very grateful. I'm grateful to the Chairman for working with me to give the Bureau of Indian Affairs the au-

thority to fund the first phase of the recommendations from the Chiloquin dam study, a critical effort in the Klamath Basin of southern Oregon to improve endangered sucker fish habitat and lighten the burden on agriculture. I also want to extend my sincere appreciation to the Chairman for funding PILT at \$227,500,000—one of its highest levels ever. While it is not the fully authorized level of \$360 million that I have been a staunch advocate for, it's much better than it has been in the past and the good Chairman and his top-notch staff are to thank for this. Finally, I want to commend the Chairman for his work in getting \$400 million included in the conference report to replenish the exhausted fire suppression accounts of the BLM and Forest Service, and I commend him for including almost \$2.5 billion to implement the National fire plan next year. These are significant accomplishments and I have enthusiastically supported them.

However, even with the inclusion of all these excellent provisions, I reluctantly must vote against the conference report because of the language included that undermines the efforts of my friend from California, the Chairman of the Resources Committee, to find a legislative solution to the complicated problem of tribal trust accounting. The language added to the conference report would interrupt the Department of the Interior's conduct of its historical accounting of individual Indian trust fund accounts, which is mandated by federal court order in Cobell v. Norton. The language would suspend any such accounting until either December 31, 2004 or until Congress revised the American Indian Trust Management Reform Act to limit this forensic accounting activity. The added language not only interferes with a court-required accounting for hundreds of thousands of Native Americans, but also seeks to force a potentially hasty decision on an exceptionally complex issue and overlooks an agreement reached between Chairman POMBO and Chairman TAYLOR during House floor consideration of this bill in July. That agreement stated that settlement of the Cobell matter would be left to Chairman POMBO's Resources Committee to resolve, the proper authorizing committee venue. Unfortunately, the conference report language does not comport with that agreement, and so I will reluctantly vote against this bill in its current form. I am hopeful that this provision can successfully be resolved in the correct legislative forum, and that the many other outstanding provisions of the Interior Appropriations bill developed under the fine leadership of Chairman TAYLOR remain intact.

TRIBUTE TO THE COLORADO
TRIAL LAWYERS ASSOCIATION

HON. DIANA DeGETTE

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, November 7, 2003

Ms. DeGETTE. Mr. Speaker, I would like to recognize the exceptional endeavors and notable undertakings of an extraordinary professional membership organization in the State of Colorado. It is both fitting and proper that we recognize this outstanding association for its leadership in government and the legal community and for its enduring service to the people of our state. It is to commend this distinguished organization that I rise to honor the