

have left a legacy that will last for years to come. On behalf of the Congress, I extend sympathies to Lynn's family, and gratitude for all she did to make our community a better place.

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS HEALTH CARE PERSONNEL ENHANCEMENT ACT OF 2004

SPEECH OF

**HON. ALCEE L. HASTINGS**

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Wednesday, November 17, 2004*

Mr. HASTINGS of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to support the Department of Veterans Affairs Health Care Personnel Enhancement Act of 2004, the Veterans' Benefits Improvements Act of 2004, and the Veterans Health Programs Improvement Act of 2004. These three pieces of legislation are critically needed. Our men and women in uniform exemplify the spirit, sacrifice, and commitment of the American people to securing freedom and democracy throughout the world. We owe it to our Armed Forces and veterans to ensure that their benefits are protected.

The Personnel Enhancement Act of 2004 sets forth new pay provisions for physicians and dentists employed by the Veterans Health Administration that will increase their income. This bill requires, among other provisions, that base pay be uniform nationwide and that performance pay be linked to individual achievements. This bill further provides for pay that is tailored to several variables, such as geographic region, area specialty, the nature of the assignment, and individual experience.

The Veterans Benefit Improvement Act of 2004 increases the maximum housing loan guarantee amount for which veterans are eligible and also increases the voluntary contribution amount that active duty members of the Armed Forces may make in order to receive increased monthly educational assistance under the Montgomery GI Bill.

The Veterans Health Programs Improvement Act of 2004 allows the principal office of the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims to be in the Washington, D.C., and metropolitan area instead of restricting it to the District of Columbia. The bill also expresses the sense of Congress that a courthouse and justice center should be provided for the Court, if feasible, by the Pentagon.

Mr. Speaker, these three bills will improve the services available to our country's armed services personnel and veterans. Those who put their life on the line to fight for the continued freedom this country enjoys should be entitled to a support system that meets their needs. These three pieces of legislation do just that. I urge my colleagues to support all three bills.

HONORING PATRICK RYAN ON HIS RETIREMENT FROM THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

**HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH**

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Friday, November 19, 2004*

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, as Patrick Ryan, Chief Counsel and Staff Director for the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, retires from government service, I rise today to pay tribute to his extraordinary career and accomplishments. After more than two decades working for the Committee, and a decade before that working for the Veterans Administration, Patrick is ending his public service career to pursue new personal and professional challenges.

Mr. Speaker, one of the first actions I took when I was elected chairman 4 years ago was to name Pat the chief counsel and staff director for the committee. Having been a member of the committee for 20 years, I was already familiar with the expertise, knowledge, judgment, compassion, and devotion that Patrick had displayed throughout his career.

A graduate of the University of Maryland, Pat went to work for the Veterans Administration in 1974 as a benefits counselor at the D.C. regional office. In this job, Pat learned firsthand about the challenges facing our Nation's veterans, especially those returning from the conflict in Vietnam. He also learned in detail about the programs and services that VA provided to help improve their lives. Among those Pat worked with at that time was a DAV benefits representative named Jesse Brown, who later became Secretary of Veterans Affairs in the 1990s.

Shortly after Pat went to work for VA, he also enrolled in the evening program at Georgetown University Law School. Over the next 4 years, he continued to work at VA, moving up to the position of budget analyst, while attending law school at night, earning his law degree in 1978. He then moved to a new position in VA's Office of General Counsel, where he worked for the next 5 years.

In 1983, Pat Ryan began working for the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, serving as counsel for the Subcommittee on Hospitals and Health Care. He later served as counsel for the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, as well as for the full committee. Over the years, Pat was promoted to serve as both deputy chief counsel and finally, as chief counsel and staff director.

For the past 22 years, Pat Ryan has made tremendous contributions to many of the most important new veterans laws approved by Congress. He worked on numerous bills to expand services for aging veterans and those in need of long-term care. He was instrumental in helping to establish domiciliaries for homeless veterans and was the principal drafter of legislation to authorize VA's transitional housing guarantee program to benefit homeless veterans. Pat played a central role in helping to establish the Department of Veterans Affairs and in creating the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims.

Pat has been deeply involved in numerous successful committee initiatives that have expanded and strengthened the Dependency and Indemnity Compensation, DIC, program,

survivor health care services, and educational assistance benefits available to surviving spouses and children of servicemembers killed in action or who later die of a service-related cause. And over the past 20 years, Pat has played a role in increasing the Montgomery GI bill benefit for qualified veterans from \$300 when he joined the committee to over \$1,000 today.

Using his budget expertise, Pat has been invaluable in helping Congress ensure that VA's budget has been both appropriate and sufficient. His extensive knowledge of the law and the inner workings of VA has also greatly aided the committee in its work to provide exemplary oversight of veterans programs.

From managing the committee's professional staff, to drafting legislation, to overseeing VA's programs and services, Patrick Ryan is the consummate professional. During the four years I have served as chairman, he has helped draft and guide to enactment more than a dozen new laws to benefit veterans, including legislation to modernize the GI bill, expand veterans' health care programs, strengthen benefits for disabled veterans, and aid homeless veterans. I consider him to have been a partner in all that this committee has accomplished during our time together and it has been an honor to work side-by-side with him.

Throughout his tenure in the House, Patrick has earned and retained both the respect and the trust of Members and staff on both sides of the aisle. Pat was hired by Chairman Sonny Montgomery when the Democrats controlled the committee, and he went on to serve both the late Chairman Bob Stump and me while Republicans have controlled Congress. Pat is equally respected inside the Department of Veterans Affairs and by outside leaders of veterans service organizations.

Mr. Speaker, all of us who know Pat Ryan understand that he is driven to succeed, not for his own benefit, but to benefit his fellow man. What has made Patrick Ryan such a valuable public servant are his personal qualities of faith, hope, and charity. A leader in both his community and his church, Pat is well-known for his singing in the choir and for his love of music, especially his eclectic musical tastes.

On a personal level, Pat Ryan has lived his life in a way that has truly made a difference. He has walked to the beat of our Lord's drummer when He said "whatsoever you do to the least of my brethren, you do likewise to me." For Pat, that means always looking out for the little guy. I have such respect and admiration for that character trait, and it is very strong in Patrick Ryan. What motivates Patrick first and foremost is devotion and love for his wife Kathie and their three children—Kerry, Dan, and Julia. For Pat Ryan, family comes first.

Pat is ever proud of his father who has passed, William Everest Ryan, a proud Marine who saw combat action during World War II in the South Pacific, where he was wounded and won the Purple Heart award. He later joined the Justice Department while continuing in the Marine reserves as an Officer in the JAG Corps, retiring with the rank of Colonel in 1964. After a distinguished career of government service, Pat's father retired from government service in 1977. In 1999, William Ryan died in the VA nursing home in Baltimore, 3 years after his wife, Pat's mother, Rosemary Ann Kelly Ryan, had passed away.