

with a real estate transaction to pay interest on such escrow account or to prohibit such institution from paying interest on such escrow account. No provision of this Act shall be construed as preempting the provisions of law of any State dealing with the payment of interest on escrow accounts maintained in connection with real estate transactions.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentlewoman from New York (Mrs. KELLY) and the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. FRANK) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from New York (Mrs. KELLY).

GENERAL LEAVE

Mrs. KELLY. 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. 1224, as amended.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from New York?

There was no objection.

Mrs. KELLY. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, for the fifth time in three Congresses, we are here to pass legislation to bring our banking system into the 21st century. Five times this House has passed this legislation to help our small businesses, only for it to fall in the other body. We come to the floor once again with a strong hope that the enactment of this bill will finally be enacted into law this Congress.

The Business Checking Freedom Act provides important benefits for our local small businesses and our financial system alike. First, it repeals an outdated law prohibiting banks from paying interest on business checking accounts. In our 21st century economy, no American should be losing the option of making money on their assets simply because they own a small business, yet our small business owners across the country are losing potential interest income on a daily basis until the Business Checking Freedom Act becomes law.

This legislation will allow banks to better meet the needs of their small business customers while providing a necessary phase-in period to protect existing business relationships from a sudden change, and it clarifies the treatment of escrow accounts maintained for the purpose of completing the settlement of real estate transactions, and that is not changed by this bill.

H.R. 1224 also gives the Federal Reserve the opportunity to pay interest on reserves that banks keep within the Federal Reserve system. Consumers and banks will be rewarded for saving and investment by this bill. The Federal Reserve strongly supports this change and a related change on reserve requirements to better enable banks to operate safely and soundly.

H.R. 1224 will once again ensure that banks can best meet the needs of their customers while increasing the safety

and soundness of our financial system. I urge all Members to join with me in passing this important bipartisan legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. FRANK of Massachusetts. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I concur with the explanation given by the gentlewoman from New York, the major author of the bill. This House has previously passed the bill, and it did not emerge from the Senate. We hope that it does this year.

There were, if you go back 20 years or more, a number of restrictions on what various financial institutions can do. They have been outdated by technology, and passing this bill is one more step towards making sure that our financial institutions can in fact take full advantage of that.

There is one issue that is of some interest to many Members that I want to note. We have in some parts of the country institutions known as "industrial loan corporations" that have many of the functions of banks, but, unlike more traditional banks, have many of their assets in nonbanking activities. Hence the name "industrial loan corporation."

They have become somewhat controversial. The Federal Reserve system is very much unhappy with them. There have been other concerns about other entities getting into the banking business when they are primarily not banks, but doing this in various ways.

□ 1715

When the Congress passed the bill reorganizing the financial systems and removing a lot of the constraints on various financial institutions known as the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act, it adopted a test that institutions had to be 85 percent financial in their total to get certain powers.

Working with the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. GILLMOR), I have put that formula into place, or the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. GILLMOR) and I together have, with the concurrence of most of the members of our committee, so that as we expand bank powers, whether it is for branching or, today, for interest on business checking or in other ways, we have maintained that principle that these new powers should only go to institutions that have an 85 percent financial entity.

This does not displace existing industrial loan corporations; indeed, it allows them to continue with whatever powers they get from the States where they are chartered, where they are State chartered, but it does say that as we expand banking powers, that expansion will be limited to institutions which would qualify under the 85-15 test.

That provision is in here, and with that provision and a couple of other minor changes, I think this is a piece of legislation that is very appropriate.

I would note that a question was raised about one aspect of it by people

interested in land title. My colleague, the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. WATT) negotiated, I think, a very reasonable response to their question, and we now have a bill that I hope will pass overwhelmingly.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mrs. KELLY. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I simply want to say that this bill is a bill that will encourage savings. It will also encourage the banks to keep more reserves at the Federal Reserve, which is a good thing for bank stability. We have passed this bill, as I said before, five times in the Congress. It is very important, I believe, to the small businesses of this Nation that this bill be passed today and that it get passed appropriately in the Senate.

Mr. FRANK of Massachusetts. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mrs. KELLY. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. DANIEL E. LUNGREN of California). The question is on the motion offered by the gentlewoman from New York (Mrs. KELLY) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 1224, as amended.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds of those present have voted in the affirmative.

Mrs. KELLY. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX and the Chair's prior announcement, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

SERVICEMEMBERS HEALTH INSURANCE PROTECTION ACT OF 2005

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 2046) to amend the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act to limit premium increases on reinstated health insurance on servicemembers who are released from active military service, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 2046

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Servicemembers' Health Insurance Protection Act of 2005".

SEC. 2. LIMITATION ON PREMIUM INCREASES FOR REINSTATED HEALTH INSURANCE OF SERVICEMEMBERS RELEASED FROM ACTIVE MILITARY SERVICE.

(a) PREMIUM PROTECTION.—Section 704 of the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (50 U.S.C. App. 594) is amended by adding at the end the following new subsection:

"(e) LIMITATION ON PREMIUM INCREASES.—

"(1) PREMIUM PROTECTION.—The amount of the premium for health insurance coverage that was terminated by a servicemember and required to be reinstated under subsection (a) may not be

increased, for the balance of the period for which coverage would have been continued had the coverage not been terminated, to an amount greater than the amount chargeable for such coverage before the termination.

“(2) INCREASES OF GENERAL APPLICABILITY NOT PRECLUDED.—Paragraph (1) does not prevent an increase in premium to the extent of any general increase in the premiums charged by the carrier of the health care insurance for the same health insurance coverage for persons similarly covered by such insurance during the period between the termination and the reinstatement.”.

(b) TECHNICAL AMENDMENT.—Subsection (b)(3) of such section is amended by striking “if the” and inserting “in a case in which the”.

SEC. 3. PRESERVATION OF EMPLOYER-SPONSORED HEALTH PLAN COVERAGE FOR CERTAIN RESERVE-COMPONENT MEMBERS WHO ACQUIRE TRICARE ELIGIBILITY.

(a) CONTINUATION OF COVERAGE.—Subsection (a)(1) of section 4317 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by inserting after “by reason of service in the uniformed services,” the following: “or such person becomes eligible for medical and dental care under chapter 55 of title 10 by reason of subsection (d) of section 1074 of that title.”.

(b) REINSTATEMENT OF COVERAGE.—Subsection (b) of such section is amended—

(1) in paragraph (1)—

(A) by inserting after “by reason of service in the uniformed services,” the following: “or by reason of the person’s having become eligible for medical and dental care under chapter 55 of title 10 by reason of subsection (d) of section 1074 of that title.”; and

(B) by inserting “or eligibility” before the period at the end of the first sentence; and

(2) by adding at the end the following new paragraph:

“(3) In the case of a person whose coverage under a health plan is terminated by reason of the person having become eligible for medical and dental care under chapter 55 of title 10 by reason of subsection (d) of section 1074 of that title but who subsequently does not commence a period of active duty under the order to active duty that established such eligibility because the order is canceled before such active duty commences, the provisions of paragraph (1) relating to any exclusion or waiting period in connection with the reinstatement of coverage under a health plan shall apply to such person’s continued employment, upon the termination of such eligibility for medical and dental care under chapter 55 of title 10 that is incident to the cancellation of such order, in the same manner as if the person had become reemployed upon such termination of eligibility.”.

SEC. 4. TECHNICAL CORRECTIONS TO VETERANS BENEFITS IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 2004.

(a) CORRECTIONS.—Section 2101 of title 38, United States Code, as amended by section 401 of the Veterans Benefits Improvement Act of 2004 (Public Law 108-454; 118 Stat. 3614), is amended—

(1) by redesignating subsection (c) as subsection (d);

(2) by inserting after subsection (b) a new subsection (c) consisting of the text of subsection (c) of such section 2101 as in effect immediately before the enactment of such Act, modified—

(A) in paragraph (1)—

(i) in the first sentence, by striking “paragraph (1), (2), or (3)” and inserting “subparagraph (A), (B), (C), or (D) of paragraph (2)”;

(ii) in the second sentence, by striking “the second sentence” and inserting “paragraph (3)”;

(B) in paragraph (2)—

(i) in the first sentence, by striking “paragraph (1)” and inserting “paragraph (2)”;

(ii) in the second sentence, by striking “paragraph (2)” and inserting “paragraph (3)”;

(3) in subsection (a)(3), by striking “sub-section (c)” in the matter preceding subparagraph (A) and inserting “subsection (d)”.

(b) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendments made by subsection (a) shall take effect as of December 10, 2004, as if enacted immediately after the enactment of the Veterans Benefits Improvement Act of 2004 on that date.

SEC. 5. NOTIFICATION TO MEMBER’S SPOUSE OR NEXT OF KIN OF CERTAIN ELECTIONS UNDER SERVICEMEMBERS’ GROUP LIFE INSURANCE PROGRAM.

(a) REPEAL.—Subsections (f) and (g) of section 1012 of division A of the Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act for Defense, the Global War on Terror, and Tsunami Relief Act, 2005 (Public Law 109-13), and the amendments made by those subsections, are repealed, and sections 1967 and 1970 of title 38, United States Code, shall be applied as if those subsections had not been enacted.

(b) NOTIFICATION REQUIRED.—Section 1967 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new subsection:

“(f)(1)(A) Whenever a member who is eligible for insurance under this subchapter executes a life insurance option specified in subparagraph (B), the Secretary concerned shall notify the member’s spouse or, if the member is unmarried, the member’s next of kin, in writing, of the execution of that option.

“(B) A life insurance option referred to in subparagraph (A) is any of the following:

“(i) An election under subsection (a)(2)(A) not to be insured under this subchapter.

“(ii) An election under subsection (a)(3)(B) for insurance of the member in an amount that is less than the maximum amount provided under subsection (a)(3)(A)(i).

“(iii) An application under subsection (c) for insurance coverage under this subchapter or for a change in the amount of such insurance coverage.

“(iv) In the case of a married member, a designation under section 1970(a) of this title of any person other than the spouse or a child of the member as the beneficiary of the member for any amount of insurance under this subchapter.

“(2) Whenever an unmarried member who is eligible for insurance under this subchapter marries, the Secretary concerned shall notify the member’s spouse in writing as to whether the member is insured under this subchapter. In the case of a member who is so insured, the Secretary shall include with such notification—

“(A) if the member has made an election described in paragraph (1)(B)(ii), notice that the amount of such insurance is less than the maximum amount provided under subsection (a)(3)(A)(i); and

“(B) if the member has designated a beneficiary other than the spouse or a child of the member for any amount of such insurance, notice that such a designation has been made.

“(3)(A) Notification of a spouse under paragraph (1) or (2), or of any other person under paragraph (1), for purposes of this subsection shall consist of a good faith effort to provide information to the spouse or other person at the last address of the spouse or other person known to the Secretary concerned.

“(B) Failure to provide such notification, or to provide such notification in a timely manner, does not affect the validity of any life insurance option referred to in paragraph (1)(B).”.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. BOOZMAN) and the gentlewoman from South Dakota (Ms. HERSETH) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. BOOZMAN).

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 2046, as amended, the Servicemembers’ Health Insurance

Protection Act of 2005, provides several improvements to the Servicemembers’ Civil Relief Act and the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act.

Mr. Speaker, this is a bipartisan bill and was passed by unanimous consent in both the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity and the full Committee on Veterans Affairs. I am delighted to bring this important piece of legislation before the House.

The bill has several components. Section 2 of the bill would amend section 704 of the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act, otherwise known as the SCRA, to limit premium increases on reinstated health insurance coverage of servicemembers who are released from active duty. Section 704 provides that a servicemember who is ordered to active duty is entitled, upon release, to reinstatement of any health insurance in effect on the day before actually beginning active duty.

This amendment would prohibit any increase in individual health insurance premiums from the period of time for which coverage would have been continued, had the coverage not been terminated due to military service. However, a health care insurance carrier would be allowed to increase the servicemember’s premium if the general premium increase was implemented for all persons similarly covered during the period between the termination and the reinstatement.

Section 704 of the SCRA currently contains no express provision regarding premium increases. This amendment to the SCRA would ensure that servicemembers are treated fairly upon reinstatement of their health insurance and are not discouraged by premium increases from exercising their reinstatement entitlement rights.

Section 3 of the bill would amend section 4317 of the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act, better known as USERRA, to preserve employer-sponsored health plan reinstatement rights for certain Reservists who, prior to entering active duty, acquire TRICARE coverage under Title X. This TRICARE option only became available by an amendment to the TRICARE authority enacted in the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2004 on November 24, 2003.

Under existing law, an employer is only required to provide employees returning from active duty with the same employer-sponsored health benefits they had when they reported for active duty. Unless the employer voluntarily chooses to allow immediate reinstatement of coverage, an employee would be required to wait for the next open enrollment opportunity provided by the employer.

Section 3 would confirm the health insurance reinstatement rights under USERRA to the change in TRICARE. This amendment to section 4317 of USERRA would protect both employees who did not actually report because

of cancellation of active duty orders and employees who served a period of active duty.

Section 4 of the bill would make a technical correction to the Public Law 108-454 regarding the VA's adaptive housing grant program.

Finally, section 5 of the bill would make a correction to the servicemembers' group life insurance provisions of H.R. 1268 regarding spousal notification for servicemembers' elections of coverage and designation of beneficiaries.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. HERSETH. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of H.R. 2046, as amended, the Servicemembers' Health Insurance Protection Act of 2005.

I would like to thank the gentleman from Indiana (Chairman BUYER) and the gentleman from Illinois (Ranking Member EVANS) for their leadership on the full committee and for their good work in shepherding this bill to the floor today. I would also like to personally thank the gentleman from Arkansas (Chairman BOOZMAN) of the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity for his steady bipartisan leadership on the subcommittee.

Mr. Speaker, I support this legislation and am an original cosponsor of the bill. This legislation is aimed at improving the quality of life of our servicemembers, veterans, and military families. It is very important for the increasingly activated National Guard and Reserve components, our citizen-soldiers who leave behind their families, employment, and comforts of home to defend this Nation.

The State of South Dakota has had and continues to have National Guard units activated and serving in the Middle East. This legislation will protect them and their families as they return home to civilian life and seek to reinstate their private or employer-sponsored health insurance coverage.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation also includes two corrective provisions, as the gentleman from Arkansas (Chairman BOOZMAN) described, which amend and improve the administration of the disabled veteran adaptive housing grant program and the servicemembers' group life insurance program respectively. I am pleased we were able to include these important corrective measures.

Mr. Speaker, the servicemembers, military families and veterans of this Nation have earned and deserve our best efforts here in Congress. Indeed, they deserve so much more. I am proud to support this legislation, and I am confident it will benefit the veterans of my home State of South Dakota, as well as the other veterans across the country.

I fully support H.R. 2046, as amended, and urge my colleagues to do the same.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. GINNY BROWN-WAITE).

Ms. GINNY BROWN-WAITE of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to thank our Committee on Veterans' Affairs Chairman, the gentleman from Indiana (Chairman BUYER), as well as the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER), the Ranking Member, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS), and the subcommittee chairman, the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. BOOZMAN) for giving Congress the opportunity to vote on the Servicemembers' Health Insurance Protection Act.

Today, when a man or a woman makes a decision to serve their country through the Armed Forces, most have to give up their employer-sponsored health care. Although TRICARE insures these enlistees, in the eyes of their health care providers, they are technically without coverage until they return, and then they are subject to unfair premium increases as a "new employee." America asks these young men and women to fight for our country, then we allow their insurance costs to increase when they return. How, many would ask, is this at all fair?

The bill that we have before us, H.R. 2046, specifies that when a person enlists in the military, they will return to the same low-cost, employer-sponsored health insurance that they had before their absence. This common-sense legislation enjoyed unanimous support from Committee on Veterans' Affairs members, is supported by the Department of Defense, Department of Labor, and veterans' groups around the country.

I look forward to voting in favor of H.R. 2046 and I encourage my colleagues to do the same. Certainly those members of the military, whether it is active or the Reserve, when we have so many people serving today in the war on terrorism, they deserve to have this kind of legislation passed so that they can come back home and again provide the kind of health care insurance that their family needs.

Ms. HERSETH. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS), the ranking member of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

Mr. EVANS. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 2046, as amended. I would like to thank the gentleman from Indiana (Chairman BUYER) and the chairman and ranking member of the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunities, the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. BOOZMAN) and the gentlewoman from South Dakota (Ms. HERSETH) for their hard work in bringing this legislation to the floor today.

Mr. Speaker, this has been a bipartisan effort. Let us keep it that way and get the job done for the veterans who deserve our help through the difficult times that they are facing. They face danger every day, and I am proud to represent them here in the United States House of Representatives. It is our responsibility to provide them the necessary benefits and protections as they serve this Nation.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this legislation.

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. HERSETH. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER).

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman for yielding me this time, and I thank the gentleman from Arkansas (Chairman BOOZMAN) for his great work on this very necessary item.

I too rise today in support of the Servicemembers' Health Insurance Protection Act of 2005, a bill that we have heard will assure the men and women in active service that their private health insurance premiums will not be increased, nor will reinstatement be delayed when they return from Iraq or Afghanistan. The last thing these servicemembers need while they are at war is to worry about the details of their life after service, and health insurance, of course, being one of the most important.

H.R. 2046 will ensure a smooth transition from health care under the military to health care in civilian life.

□ 1730

This bill has support from the veterans service organizations around the country, as well as our Department of Defense.

I think, as we have heard, in addition to the primary purpose of the bill, a technical change is included which will help many disabled veterans to use what is called their adaptive housing grant prior to their discharge from the military. This will expedite their release from hospitalization because they will not have to wait for changes to be made to their homes to accommodate their disability. This provision was inadvertently omitted when changes were made in 2004 in the Veterans Benefit Act, and I am glad that we are fixing this problem today.

Congress must do everything it can to recognize and reward our brave men and women fighting today. Many are serving longer than they expected. Many are in danger each and every day.

They serve with pride and with dignity. Let us honor their service by passing this legislation to treat them with the respect that they deserve.

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. HERSETH. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time. I would just like to reiterate my appreciation for the leadership of the full committee, the gentleman from Arkansas (Chairman BOOZMAN), and his leadership on the subcommittee, of course the efforts of committee staff and all of their hard work in advancing this important legislation, as well as those that were in hearings with the chairman and me and other members of the subcommittee, those from the Department

of Labor, the Department of Defense, the Department of Veterans Affairs, as well as many veterans organizations serving as advocates for veterans and their families across the country and servicemembers as they return.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the gentleman from Indiana (Chairman BUYER); the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS), our full committee ranking member; and the gentlewoman from South Dakota (Ms. HERSETH), the Economic Opportunities Subcommittee ranking member, for their leadership and hard work on this bill. And, again, as was noted, I especially want to thank the staff.

Once again, this is a bipartisan bill, and I urge all Members to support the Servicemembers Health Insurance Protection Act of 2005.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to support H.R. 2046, the Servicemembers Health Insurance Protection Act of 2005. This legislation offered by the Chairman of the Veterans Affairs Committee Mr. BUYER, would limit premium increases on health insurance for reservists who return to their civilian jobs after serving on active duty and ensure that reservists whose activation is cancelled before they report for duty can reinstate their health care coverage. It also would allow disabled service members to qualify for a housing grant provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs before being discharged from active duty. I support these provisions of the legislation because they protect the rights the men and women of our Armed Forces when they are on duty.

While I do support the provisions of this legislation, I do have concerns about the possible adverse impact on private insurance carriers. I strongly believe it is the responsibility of the Federal government to provide for the healthcare needs of our veterans. Private insurance should not carry the entire national burden of health care for military personnel. I hope that as the agenda of the Veterans Affairs Committee continues to unfold, further legislation will be introduced to provide healthcare for our veterans through the Federal government. We made a promise to our men and women in the Armed Forces that we would take care of them when they were no longer on active duty and we as a Government would be negligent if we did not keep our promise.

Mr. BISHOP of New York. Mr. Speaker, I proudly rise today as a cosponsor and in support of H.R. 2046, the Servicemembers' Health Insurance Protection Act of 2005.

As our brave men and women continue to put their lives on the line for our Nation, we owe each of them the health care coverage they were promised and make it easier for their families to manage the transition to active duty and back to civilian life.

Reservists, who fulfill a critical mission in supplementing our fighting forces, should be treated equally and feel as safe as their active duty counterparts in that their employer provided insurance will still be available upon termination of federal benefits. But for too many reservists, this is not the case.

The Servicemembers' Civil Relief Act was passed, in part, to guarantee reinstatement of employer-provided health care following separation from active duty. However, an unintended consequence of that law allowed insurance companies to unfairly single out reservists by inflating their premiums once they returned to civilian life.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that we are working to correct this problem by offering this bill as a remedy by protecting our brave reservists from inflated insurance premiums and giving them a helping hand as they return to civilian life.

Mr. REYES. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 2046, the Servicemembers Health Insurance Protection (SHIP) Act of 2005, and to voice my strong commitment and appreciation to our nation's servicemembers and veterans as we head into the Memorial Day weekend.

On May 11, 2005, my colleagues and I on the House Veterans Affairs Committee considered H.R. 2046. This important legislation would assist in providing a seamless transition for our Reservists and Guardsmen by curbing health insurance premium increases and preserving employer-sponsored health care coverage. I voted for this legislation because our servicemembers deserve better protections and improved quality of life.

I would also like to take this time to thank our past and current members of the U.S. Armed Forces for their selfless service to our country. We owe each of them a great deal of respect and appreciation, especially those who have made the ultimate sacrifice for our nation. While many of us will be fortunate enough to be surrounded by loved ones this Memorial Day weekend, I encourage all Americans to take this special time to reflect on the sacrifice of those who died while serving their country and to pray for our troops currently in harm's way.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues in Congress to continue caring for our servicemembers by ensuring passage of H.R. 2046.

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. Speaker, as our soldiers face a time of war and strife across the globe, we must be mindful not only of the risks that they face in combat, but also the barriers that they face in planning a secure future here at home after the battle is done.

There are currently about 180,000 Americans serving in Iraq, and another 18,000 in and around Afghanistan. It is estimated that there are 1,652 Maryland national guard and reservists serving in combat today.

This bill is important, because it shows our commitment to the future of our troops, to the future of their families. Today soldiers do not pay taxes on their combat pay, as our way of saying that they are paying more than their fair share in the gift of service they bestow on their country. This is only right, and we owe our soldiers our gratitude. But we also owe them the gift of a future, and this bill allows soldiers to plan for that future even as they are protecting ours.

This bill gives soldiers the opportunity to save for their retirement by including combat zone pay as earned income in calculating the tax deduction for contributions to retirement savings plans.

I think we should go further. In my bill, the Pension Preservation and Savings Expansion Act, I included a provision that allows National

Guard members and military reservists called up on active duty to continue contributing to their workplace retirement plans where their employers pay them their salary differential during their active duty service. This important provision should also be brought to the floor for a vote.

We have an obligation to ensure that our soldiers have a secure present and a secure future, and this bill takes one important step in that direction. I urge a "yes" vote on the Heroes Earned Retirement Opportunities Act.

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. BOOZMAN) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 2046, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. BOOZMAN. 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. 2046, as amended.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. DANIEL E. LUNGREN of California). Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Arkansas?

There was no objection.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a), rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until approximately 6:30 p.m. today.

Accordingly (at 5 o'clock and 32 minutes p.m.) the House stood in recess until approximately 6:30 p.m.

□ 1831

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. DUNCAN) at 6 o'clock and 31 minutes p.m.

REPORT ON RESOLUTION PROVIDING FOR CONSIDERATION OF H.R. 2419, ENERGY AND WATER DEVELOPMENT APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2006

Mr. LINCOLN DIAZ-BALART of Florida, from the Committee on Rules, submitted a privileged report (Rept. No. 109-94) on the resolution (H. Res. 291) providing for consideration of the bill (H.R. 2419) making appropriations for energy and water development for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2006, and for other purposes, which was referred to the House Calendar and ordered to be printed.