

said that veterans found guilty of capital crimes could not be buried in our national veterans cemeteries. At the time, you may remember, the country was still reeling from the Oklahoma City bombing. And veterans everywhere were justifiably appalled that Timothy McVeigh, a military veteran, could be buried with full military honors.

Now, McVeigh did not receive that burial. But a major problem we discovered was that the law was not actively enforced for others until 2006.

Since then, the VA has relied on an "honor system," which requires family members to willingly report their relative's criminal record.

In 2013, Congress once again sought to protect our VA national cemeteries by passing a law to explicitly allow the VA to remove veterans from cemeteries if they had been convicted of a Federal or State capital crime. However, this law does not extend to veterans buried between 1997 and 2013, a time period that includes George Emery Siple.

That is why I have introduced Bertie's Respect for National Cemeteries Act. What this law will do is require Veterans Affairs to take every reasonable action to ensure that a veteran is eligible to be buried, including searching public criminal records. It will clarify Congress' original intent by providing Veterans Affairs the explicit authority to remove veterans convicted of capital crimes who were wrongly buried after 1997. And it will specifically provide for the removal of George Emery Siple from Indiantown Gap National Cemetery.

This bill really only reaffirms what Congress intended in the first place. And it enjoys the support of the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

There were precedents for the removal of convicted murderers from veterans cemeteries—from Arlington National Cemetery and VA cemeteries in Michigan and Oregon, to name just a few.

Additionally, nothing in the bill would withdraw previous military honors, such as Purple Hearts or medals for valor, otherwise earned by the deceased veterans.

The discussion of military veterans who have been convicted of murder often raises the issue of mental health treatment and posttraumatic stress disorder. There is no question that PTSD is a real condition affecting many servicemen and -women, and I have always stood for funding the evaluation and treatment of those who may be afflicted.

That said, those who have been convicted of capital murder by our judicial system have been declared guilty of the worst offense possible, and any mitigating factors would have been considered at trial and sentencing.

I don't think it is too much to say that murderers should not be buried next to true American heroes. And the memories of victims like Bertie Smith should not be disregarded.

I ask my colleagues for their support in saying that real, true honor really means something in our national military cemeteries.

HONORING OFFICER GREGG BENNER OF THE RIO RANCHO POLICE DEPARTMENT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New Mexico (Mr. BEN RAY LUJÁN) for 5 minutes.

Mr. BEN RAY LUJÁN of New Mexico. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor Officer Gregg Benner of the Rio Rancho Police Department, who was killed in the line of duty on May 25.

I offer my heartfelt condolences to the family and loved ones of Officer Benner as they mourn the loss of a husband, father, grandfather, and friend who was taken from them far too soon.

Officer Benner dedicated his life to protecting his community and his country. From his career in the United States Air Force to his last 4 years serving as a member of the Rio Rancho Police Department, Officer Benner put his health and safety on the line to make us safer.

The same was true last week. When most of us were settling down after a long Memorial Day weekend with family and friends, Officer Benner was doing his duty to protect the people of Rio Rancho. When he didn't return that evening, Officer Benner left behind a legacy of valor of service.

The loss of any police officer is a painful reminder of the dangers that they face each and every day. While we are shaken by Officer Benner's loss, we can take comfort in the memories that he left behind for all who knew him and the example that he set for all those in the community.

Rio Rancho is a tight-knit community, and while a tragedy such as this is unexpected and shocking, the response has brought out the best of its residents, who have displayed an outpouring of support and sympathy. My thoughts and prayers are with Officer Benner's family, friends, fellow officers, and the entire Rio Rancho community, and I hope that they find peace in this most difficult time.

Officer Benner, thank you for your service, and may you rest in peace.

STUDENT LOAN DEBT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. DUNCAN) for 5 minutes.

Mr. DUNCAN of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, costs simply explode on anything that the Federal Government subsidizes because there are simply not the same incentives or pressures to hold down costs as there are in the private sector.

Over the last several weeks, many thousands of young people have graduated from our colleges and universities burdened with sizable student loan debts.

It shocks the students of today when I tell them that tuition cost only \$90 a quarter my freshman year at the University of Tennessee in 1965-66—\$270 for a whole school year. I once heard House Minority Whip STENY HOYER say it cost only \$87 a semester when he started at the University of Maryland.

Students today think the Federal student loan program is one of the best things that ever happened to them. Actually, it may be one of the worst. Until that program started in the mid-1960s, college tuition and fees went up very slowly, roughly at the rate of inflation.

After the Federal Government decided to "help" students and start subsidizing these costs, tuition and fees started going up three or four times the rate of inflation almost every year.

Last year, columnist Kathleen Parker wrote in *The Washington Post* that since 1985, the cost of higher education has increased 538 percent, while the Consumer Price Index—inflation—over the same period has gone up 121 percent.

Colleges and universities were able to tamp down opposition to fee increases by telling students not to worry, they could just borrow the money.

When I was an undergraduate at UT and later in law school at George Washington, students could work part time, as I always did, and pay all their college expenses. No one got out of school with a debt because of tuition and fees. Now almost everyone does.

Now, 40 million Americans owe money on student loans. Outstanding student loan debts now total over \$1.3 trillion. Some analysts think it may be a bubble about to burst.

Floyd Norris, writing in the *International New York Times*, said: "Student loans are creating large problems that may persist for decades. They will impoverish some borrowers and serve as a drain on economic activity."

Hedge fund manager James Altucher wrote that "we're graduating a generation of indentured students."

Ohio University economist Richard Vedder several years ago wrote a book entitled, "Going Broke by Degree."

Richard Vedder, in an article last August, wrote that "a political storm is brewing in Washington over the consequences of rising college costs." He added that "the biggest single cause of this financial problem, and a contributor to many other weaknesses in our economy, is the dysfunctional, Byzantine system of Federal financial assistance for college students."

Mr. Vedder pointed out that before the late 1970s, Federal financial aid programs for colleges were modest in size, and tuition went up an average of only 1 percent above the inflation rate.

"Since 1978," he wrote, "in an era of rapidly growing Federal financial assistance programs, annual tuition increases have been 3 to 4 percent a year beyond the inflation rate."

In 1987, William Bennett, the Secretary of Education, said: "Increases in