

billion dollars' worth of research here that is authorized, reauthorized. It is essential to this Nation if we are indeed going to be competitive throughout the world.

Mr. SOUDER. Mr. Speaker, I support H.R. 2534, the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reauthorization Act for 1997.

I have had the opportunity to meet with farmers, producers, and processors from northeast Indiana, as well as Dean Vic Lechtenberg of Purdue University's School of Agriculture. They have emphasized that the excellent research and extension education system of our land grant universities and the USDA has allowed U.S. agriculture to provide the lowest cost and highest quality food supply in the world.

As you know, agriculture is an extremely important industry, not only to my home State of Indiana, but many other parts of the country as well.

In the 1996 farm bill, we made great strides in bringing agriculture production into a new era of technological competitiveness. As American agriculture relies more on world markets, it is imperative that its technology and human resources continue to be strong.

Without superb technology and an outstanding education system, U.S. producers and processors will be unable to compete effectively with other nations where labor and other costs are less.

There is little doubt that our agricultural industry will need the necessary tools to compete in the global market with technology based research.

The passage of this legislation will provide State cooperative extension service systems and State university agricultural research programs the necessary tools to help direct this country in the future and allow it to continue to be a world leader in agriculture.

As we work toward making sure that our Nation's books are balanced, we must not do so at the expense of a safe, dependable, and abundant food supply.

We simply must maintain agricultural research and funding at adequate levels to ensure that American agriculture can remain competitive. For these reasons, I encourage my colleagues to support this very important bill.

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

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Oregon [Mr. SMITH] that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 2534, as amended.

The question was taken.

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

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 5 of rule I and the Chair's prior announcement, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

□ 1345

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. SMITH of Oregon. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks on the bill just considered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. PEASE). Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Oregon?

There was no objection.

SENSE OF HOUSE REGARDING TACTILE CURRENCY FOR BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED

Mr. BAKER. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the resolution (H. Res. 122) expressing the sense of the House of Representatives regarding tactile currency for the blind and visually impaired.

The Clerk read as follows:

H. RES. 122

Whereas currency is used by virtually everyone in everyday life, including blind and visually impaired persons;

Whereas the Federal reserve notes of the United States are inaccessible to individuals with visual disabilities;

Whereas the Americans with Disabilities Act enhances the economic independence and equal opportunity for full participation in society for individuals with disabilities;

Whereas most blind and visually impaired persons are therefore required to rely upon others to determine denominations of such currency;

Whereas this constitutes a serious impediment to independence in everyday living;

Whereas electronic means of bill identification will always be more fallible than purely tactile means;

Whereas tactile currency already exists in 23 countries worldwide; and

Whereas the currency of the United States is presently undergoing significant changes for security purposes: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the House of Representatives—

(1) endorses the efforts recently begun by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing to upgrade the currency for security reasons; and

(2) strongly encourages the Secretary of the Treasury and the Bureau of Engraving and Printing to incorporate cost-effective, tactile features into the design changes, thereby including the blind and visually impaired community in independent currency usage.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Louisiana [Mr. BAKER] and the gentleman from New York [Mr. FLAKE] each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Louisiana [Mr. BAKER].

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

Mr. Speaker, this legislation has a very noncontroversial purpose, which intends to update our currency to include tactile markings. This is a change which I believe will be certainly of value to all Americans.

It is important to recognize the efforts of the Secretary of the Treasury and the Bureau of Engraving and Printing in this general area of improvement. As our currency is constantly updated for security purposes, a new low-vision feature has been added in the form of a high-contrast, large numeral denoting the denomination of the bill. This change is already helping many Americans with vision difficulty.

House Resolution 122 takes these efforts one step further by initiating the

incorporation of tactile marking in our currency. This relatively minor change will have significant impact not only on individuals who have vision problems, but on all Americans that are visually impaired.

Mr. Speaker, I want to express my appreciation to Chairman LEACH and subcommittee chairman, the gentleman from Delaware [Mr. CASTLE] for their support and assistance with the resolution; also, the ranking member, the gentlemen from New York, Mr. LAFALCE and Mr. FLAKE for their support and courtesy in facilitating this.

I also want to express my appreciation to the American Academy of Ophthalmology and the National Federation of the Blind for their technical assistance in drafting this proposal.

I want to mention in connection with this resolution that I am particularly pleased to have worked with the Federation. They have been a leading force in our country in helping all of us acquire a more rational understanding of blindness. That has certainly been the case as we worked together on this particular matter. The Federation notes that although the visually impaired are currently able to use and handle their money, this additional step will facilitate safer and more secure transactions.

It is important, Mr. Speaker, that we examine and move forward in designing different forms of currency for use in the decades ahead. In that process, it will be important to consult with experts who have relevant knowledge, such as those in the Federation. This will ensure that the conversion of our currency occurs in a manner that is both cost-conscious and beneficial to everyone.

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

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of the resolution offered by the gentleman from Louisiana [Mr. BAKER]. To the extent that the Bureau of Engraving and Printing can accommodate the visually impaired during the future redesigns of currency, it should do so.

The availability of technology and materials exist today to do a great number of things with respect to the issue of anticounterfeiting. I would hope that the same technology may be used to make our visually impaired citizens more comfortable in their everyday business transactions.

Indeed, we have seen at newsstands and stores there have been technological advances which have allowed those who are salespersons and others to be able to function, even though they are, in many instances, visually impaired. It is only right that we give this opportunity to all of the citizens of this Nation. It is right, it is fair, it is appropriate.

I also recognize that we must not diminish the general market acceptance of our currency. Therefore, I would not

expect radical designs under the resolution which the gentleman from Louisiana [Mr. BAKER] has presented. Nevertheless, I support the idea and the effort of this well-intentioned resolution.

I would hope that this body would see fit to pass it, because I think it is the right thing to do for those of our citizens who are visually impaired and can benefit greatly by our response to their needs today.

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

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

Mr. Speaker, I wish to express my appreciation to the gentleman from New York for his courtesies and support.

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

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Louisiana [Mr. BAKER] that the House suspend the rules and agree to the resolution, House Resolution 122.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the resolution was agreed to.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

VETERANS' CEMETERY PROTECTION ACT OF 1997

Mr. MCCOLLUM. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the Senate bill (S. 813) to amend chapter 91 of title 18, United States Code, to provide criminal penalties for theft and willful vandalism at national cemeteries.

The Clerk read as follows:

S. 813

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 "Veterans' Cemetery Protection Act of 1997".

SEC. 2. SENTENCING FOR OFFENSES AGAINST PROPERTY AT NATIONAL CEMETERIES.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Pursuant to its authority under section 994 of title 28, United States Code, the United States Sentencing Commission shall review and amend the Federal sentencing guidelines to provide a sentencing enhancement of not less than 2 levels for any offense against the property of a national cemetery.

(b) COMMISSION DUTIES.—In carrying out subsection (a), the Sentencing Commission shall ensure that the sentences, guidelines, and policy statements for offenders convicted of an offense described in that subsection are—

(1) appropriately severe; and
(2) reasonably consistent with other relevant directives and with other Federal sentencing guidelines.

(c) DEFINITION OF NATIONAL CEMETERY.—In this section, the term "national cemetery" means a cemetery—

(1) in the National Cemetery System established under section 2400 of title 38, United States Code; or

(2) under the jurisdiction of the Secretary of the Army, the Secretary of the Navy, the

Secretary of the Air Force, or the Secretary of the Interior.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Florida [Mr. MCCOLLUM] and the gentleman from New York [Mr. NADLER] each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Florida [Mr. MCCOLLUM].

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. McCollum. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks on the Senate bill under consideration.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Florida?

There was no objection.

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

Mr. Speaker, the House passed H.R. 1532, the Veterans Cemetery Protection Act, on June 23, 1997. The legislation instructed the Sentencing Commission to review and amend its guidelines to provide a sentencing enhancement for any offense against property of a national cemetery.

Under the House approach, the Sentencing Commission was directed to increase a sentence by at least four levels if property of the national cemetery was injured or defaced, and by at least six levels if such property was stolen or unlawfully sold.

The Senate recently passed S. 813, which is the bill before us today, its version of the Veterans Cemetery Protection Act, with an amendment. The Senate version differs slightly from the House-passed version. It directs the Sentencing Commission to increase the penalties for these crimes by at least two levels, not the four- and six-level enhancements which the House bill required.

Although I am somewhat disappointed that the Senate has chosen to lower the enhancement levels, I am heartened by the fact that the Senate version still retains a specific direction to the Sentencing Commission to increase penalties. Moreover, the Senate-passed bill also contains language which instructs the Commission to carefully review its entire sentencing structure regarding these crimes and ensure that penalties are appropriately severe.

By passing this legislation, the U.S. Congress sends a clear message to criminals who would desecrate or destroy property at a national cemetery that the United States will not tolerate such disrespect of its veterans. Such cowardly crimes can only be perpetrated by persons who choose to ignore the sacrifice of those men and women who have served proudly and bravely in the U.S. Armed Forces.

This issue strikes a national nerve, and I am grateful to the gentleman from California [Mr. CALVERT] for his dedication and concern for our veterans. As the prime sponsor of this bill, and I am going to recognize him in a minute, he deserves a lot of applause.

I also want to thank the gentleman from Hawaii [Mr. ABERCROMBIE] for his continued efforts to ensure the passage of this legislation. The House version, H.R. 1532 was introduced on May 6, 1997, just over 6 months ago, and today the bill has 250 cosponsors.

Many of our veterans gave their lives to protect our cherished traditions and freedoms, and when their gravesites are desecrated by foul words and pictures, it offends the dignity and sense of honor shared by all Americans. I can think of no better gift to give our Nation's heroes for this Veterans Day than to pass the Veterans Cemetery Protection Act, and underscore our intolerance of vandalism and theft at our national cemeteries.

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

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

Mr. Speaker, this bill will impose stiffer penalties for thefts and acts of vandalism that involve a national cemetery. When someone desecrates a gravesite or steals a headstone, that is an especially vile crime, especially vile when it is a national cemetery where heroes of the United States are buried. It deserves appropriate punishment. So I commend the authors of this bill. I hope it will become law soon. I urge unanimous adoption.

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

Mr. MCCOLLUM. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from California [Mr. CALVERT], the author of this bill on the House side.

Mr. CALVERT. I thank the gentleman for yielding me the time, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the time has finally come. For over a year I have worked hard to introduce a certain piece of legislation which I think overcomes all our differences, goes beyond party affiliation, and shows the American people that when all is said and done, that this Congress is one, that it can be united.

Today especially as we go into Veterans Day weekend, and Tuesday, November 11, as Members know, is Veterans Day, I cannot think of any legislation which comes at a more appropriate time than that of the Veterans Cemetery Protection Act, introduced with my colleague, the gentleman from Hawaii [Mr. ABERCROMBIE].

Mr. Speaker, whenever a young man or woman enters the military, which some do voluntarily, they do so in order to protect our country and guard us against the uncertainties of the world. Sometimes they make the ultimate sacrifice. Over 1 million Americans have died fighting this country's wars. That is why it sickens me when I hear of ingrates and degenerates desecrating our national cemeteries.

In June of 1996, Riverside National Cemetery in California, the second largest in the Nation next to Arlington Cemetery in Virginia, fell prey to a