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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
UPON SIGNING H.R. 14298
THE VETERANS AND SURVIVORS PENSION
ADJUSTMENT ACT OF 1976
AND
H.R. 14299, VETERANS DISABILITY COMPENSATION
AND SURVIVOR BENEFITS ACT OF 1976

THE EAST ROOM

12:21 P.M. EDT

Distinguished Members of the Congress,
representatives of the various veterans organizations,
ladies and gentlemen:

I really enjoy the opportunity to have you down here for this very auspicious occasion. When I finish my remarks, I will sign the two bills that are before me, and I am very pleased to have the opportunity to sign both bills, which will protect pensions and increase disability payments for some five million veterans and their survivors.

The bills will insure that the benefits which these veterans have earned for themselves and their families will keep pace with the cost of living. These bills represent another step in our continuing effort to fulfill the words spoken more than a century ago, and I quote: "To care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and for his orphan."

In December 1975 I signed a bill providing a temporary cost of living increase in veterans' pensions for the first nine months of this year. One of the bills I am signing today will make this increase permanent. It will protect more than two and a quarter million veterans and their families from having their pension payments reduced next week. In addition, it will provide a 7 percent cost of living increase in pension benefits for the first of next year.

The second bill that will be signed will raise by 8 percent disability payments for more than two million service disabled veterans. It will also increase some other special benefit payments.

MORE

As Commander-in-Chief and as a citizen, I salute our veterans organizations, which played such an important role in developing this legislation. They are doing a first-rate job of representing the legitimate interests of veterans and their families.

Our Veterans Administration is also playing its part in making life better for our veterans in this country.

Under the leadership of my good friend Dick Roudebush, it has made tremendous strides forward. We are going to make sure that this progress continues. For medical needs in particular, my budgets for fiscal years 1976 and 1977 have provided more funding, more personnel and better facilities to give eligible veterans the highest quality, fastest service possible.

I have requested funds to construct two new VA hospitals and the funds to design six more, which will be built as readily as possible.

The Administration is committed to doing right by the American veteran. They served their country well in time of war. It is only right we serve them well in times of peace.

The Administration is also committed to continuing the fight against inflation. The threat it poses to Americans living on fixed pensions and benefits, such as veterans and the elderly, cannot be tolerated.

While adjusting Social Security and veterans benefits for the cost of living, we will continue to do everything we can to remove the underlying causes of inflation. In the long run, that is the only way to insure the economic security of all Americans.

Now it is my pleasure to sign H.R. 14298 and to commend the Members of Congress, particularly the two veterans committees, and all Members, for enacting this legislation which, as I said, is a way of our expressing to all of them, the veterans of America, the great respect and admiration that we have for all of them.

Thank you very much.

END (AT 12:26 P.M. EDT)