

Joseph A. Scerra of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States. [Standing ovation.]

STATEMENT OF JOSEPH A. SCERRA, COMMANDER IN CHIEF, VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE UNITED STATES, ACCOMPANIED BY COOPER HOLT, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, WASHINGTON OFFICE, AND FRANCIS W. STOVER, NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR

Mr. SCERRA. Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, I would first like to express my deep appreciation for the kind remarks in the introduction extended by Congressman Jim Burke. Of course, I would have loved to have had my Congressman Phil Philbin here for whom I have the highest regard and I fully appreciate New England weather keeping him grounded. We have had snow in our part of Massachusetts up until June in years gone by. I hope that at a later date I may be able to extend to Congressman Philbin my deep appreciation for his many kindnesses to me. He has served in the Congress for 25 years and has won the high esteem of all. He is a truly great American.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, again permit me to express my deep appreciation, as well as that of my fellow officers and all the members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States for this opportunity to appear before your committee.

I shall, of course, direct the major portion of my comments to our views on veterans' benefits and our legislative program. But due to the grave significance of the international circumstances in which we find ourselves, it is my hope, Mr. Chairman, that you and your distinguished committee will permit me to digress for a moment, in my initial remarks.

As you know, this is the occasion of our annual conference of national and department officers. I am happy to report a most successful year. Our programs are going forward with dispatch. For the 14th consecutive year we have increased our membership. Our numbers will far exceed 1.4 million when we close our books this summer. My comrades who have filled this room to overflowing and their counterparts throughout the world are, of course, responsible. No commander in chief has ever had a more dedicated staff.

With me also this morning are 54 patriotic young Americans of whom we are very, very proud. They are the current winners of our annual "Voice of Democracy" contest representing each of the 50 States, the District of Columbia, Korea, Okinawa, and the Canal Zone. Each of these young people has an opportunity to win one of five scholarships totaling \$13,500. The winners will be announced at our congressional banquet tonight.

I would hope you would allow me the privilege of having this group stand to be recognized. [Applause.]

Mr. SCERRA. For the record, I would like this committee to know that this year more than 400,000 boys and girls from over 8,000 public, private and parochial schools took time from the regular activities of their busy lives to think, write, and speak up on "Freedom's Challenge."

Additionally, you should know that the monetary value of scholarships and awards presented to contestants in this country and over-