

proposals affecting the welfare of the veteran of World War I and his dependents.

Of course, in considering legislation, we realize that priorities must be established. Therefore, we wish to discuss with you today five bills which we believe warrant early and sympathetic consideration by this distinguished committee. We further believe, Mr. Chairman, that the legislative proposals contained in these five bills represent very reasonable requests.

In appearing before this distinguished committee, I wish to assure you, Mr. Chairman, that we are not unmindful of the fact that we are among friends, and you have certainly demonstrated by legislation which you have passed in recent years that you share our concern and interest in the welfare of this Nation's elderly veteran and his dependents, and I wish to assure you that we are deeply appreciative for this. It would certainly be remiss of us not to take this opportunity to express our profound appreciation to each member of this committee for the action you took last year to increase the income limitations for the non-service-connected pension program and thereby prevent veterans and widows from losing their pension because of the cost-of-living increase which they received in their social security benefit. I further wish to assure you, Mr. Chairman, that we also are most mindful and appreciative of the approximate quarter-of-a-billion-dollar increase in non-service-connected pension benefits as a result of legislation reported during the previous Congress by this distinguished committee. You have especially demonstrated your concern for the welfare of the elderly and seriously disabled by the new and outstanding programs such as nursing care, aid-and-attendance cases, and others which you have taken the lead in creating in recent years.

The average age of the World War I veterans is approaching 75, and it is only natural that as his age increases, so do his disabilities. His ability to increase his income is lost, but due to increased medical needs—which are expensive—his living expenses are increasing at a far greater rate than that of the average person in this country. We believe that recent VA statistics which show that, in the past year among the veterans who are still receiving a pension under the so-called old pension law, the number of aid-and-attendance cases has increased from 9,000 to 15,000 clearly demonstrate the great acceleration of the increase in the severity of the disabilities of the World War I veteran. Therefore, Mr. Chairman, in view of the age and infirmities of the average World War I veteran, for you to provide special legislation for him, we believe, would only be in keeping with what we have interpreted from the committee's past action as a policy, and I feel a most commendable one, to grant priority and special consideration for the Nation's most needy and sick veterans.

The five bills, Mr. Chairman, which we believe warrant your early consideration and action, and which we shall discuss briefly today, are H.R. 372, H.R. 690, H.R. 691, H.R. 692, and H.R. 693. I wish to state that we are most appreciative of Chairman Teague's kindness in introducing these bills for us.

H.R. 372 is almost identical to H.R. 18252, which Chairman Teague was kind enough to introduce for us in the closing months of the 90th Congress. There are four principal provisions in this bill.