

EQUALIZATION OF BOUNTIES.

JUNE 17, 1878.—Committed to the Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union and ordered to be printed.

Mr. STRAIT, from the Committee on Military Affairs, submitted the following

REPORT:

[To accompany bill H. R. 5211.]

The Committee on Military Affairs, to whom were referred sundry bills for an equalization of bounties to Union soldiers in the late war, have fully considered the same, and report back to the House the accompanying bill as a substitute for all others, and recommend its passage.

The question of the equalization of bounties to soldiers who served in the late war for the suppression of the rebellion is one that has occupied the attention of Congress for several years past. Many bills have been introduced at the present session, as also in the past, each aiming to provide for a just settlement of this matter, and pay to the soldier or his heirs his just demands.

It has been found under existing laws that many who served in the late war have been deprived of their bounty for various causes, totally inadequate in reason or justice, owing to the laws failing to cover all classes of service, thus depriving many worthy soldiers of a just reward for their valuable and noble services.

This bill will remedy the existing want, and equalize the benefits of the bounty system by giving to each soldier who was honorably discharged bounty at the rate of \$8.33 $\frac{1}{3}$ per month for the period actually served, without reference to the term of enlistment.

Your committee find that the government has paid under existing laws \$300 to those who enlisted for three years, between September 23, 1863, and April 1, 1864 (under law July 4, 1864), and served the full time, or were discharged on account of wounds, while \$200 only has been paid to those who enlisted prior to September, 1863, thus rewarding better those who came at the eleventh hour than those who reported at the first call and bore the heat and burden of the war.

Gross inequality of compensation for services rendered has fallen heavily also on several classes of our patriotic soldiers who served their country with great fidelity, viz: those who were discharged before the expiration of their term of service on account of diseases contracted in the line of duty, and upon those whose enlistment was intermediate between calls for troops.

Your committee do not undertake to enter upon a lengthy interpretation of the statutes giving bounties to soldiers to show that their legal right to the benefits provided for in this bill is incontrovertible. If we are not certain that the strict letter of the law is upon the soldier's side,

we have no doubt whatever that his claim is based upon the very spirit and life of that law. We interpret the bounty legislation of the country in accordance with its conscious needs, and not by any legal technicalities. When the soldier—detaching himself from business and its hopes, the comfort and ties of home, from wife and children—laid his all upon the altar of his country, he did not stop to critically peruse the “statutes,” but interpreted them in the light of his own noble convictions and generous sacrifices.

Your committee have not for one moment hesitated upon the justice of this measure, and they cordially hope that the benefits that will result from the passage of this bill to those who in time of extreme peril to the life of the nation offered their services will more than counterbalance the effect of taking from the public revenues the money necessary to meet the wants of this measure.

Your committee are keenly aware of the financial distress now afflicting our country, and have been sensitive in their duty to impose new burdens upon the tax-payers when recommending the passage of this bill and the payment of bounty to a portion of our most worthy and needy citizens. Yet duty demands that the government created by the people, and upheld in its hour of danger by the noble band of Union patriots—many of whom now lie slumbering in the soil dedicated to and held sacred to their memories—must not for one moment forget its duty to the living nor fail to discharge its obligations to the poor widow and orphan children. And the sense of right inherent in every true American citizen of native or foreign birth, demands without delay the adoption of the bill.

Your committee do not present this measure as a compensation to them who, by their toil, privation, and suffering and faithfulness have preserved to us our proud position among the nations of the earth. We appreciate the fact that Congress can never adequately compensate these Union soldiers, especially those who move among us mere wrecks of their former vigorous manhood, and much less can we hope to compensate those widows and orphans who, in their loneliness, and, in many cases, destitution, find their grief overmastering their patriotic pride.

Your committee also desire to call attention to this: That of all classes of claims against the general government the soldiers alone have been measured by the strictest, harshest letter of the law. Against the most deserving, the most needy of the nation's creditors, we have discriminated.

Your committee call attention to the fact that in the cases of the soldiers of the war of 1812, and of the Indian and Mexican wars, Congress has by legislation bestowed favors upon them which no one pretends were demanded by their original contracts of enlistment. Why should a few brave Union soldiers of the late war be thus discriminated against? The passage of this bill will cheer the hearts of many who have the first and most enduring claim upon our gratitude and benevolence. And it must not be forgotten that the great mass of our soldiers in the late war were comparatively poor men, and many are now suffering in poverty. This bill, if passed, will in many cases relieve their wants.

Your committee have not gone into a critical examination of the amount it will take from the Treasury. They believe, however, from data in the Second Auditor's Office and upon information from other sources, that the amount will not be large. The late Hon. Henry Wilson, of Massachusetts, who gave this matter careful consideration and

greater research than any other public man, when living, and who was a diligent worker in the interest of the soldier, stated in the early part of 1875 "that under no possibility could it take from the Treasury more than ten or twelve million dollars"; then, to a nation like ours, young, vigorous, and teeming with resources, growing in power, harmonizing its interests throughout the length and breadth of its domain, let it not be said that the small pittance proposed to be paid by this bill shall longer be withheld from the poor Union soldier, the widow, and orphan children.

Your committee desire to embody in this report and do reiterate the sentiments of the Hon. Philip Cook, of Georgia, one of the most gallant and distinguished soldiers of the late Confederate army, as contained in his report of March 11, 1876, viz :

It is true that the embarrassed financial condition of the country and the paralysis in business may well cause Representatives to reflect seriously upon all measures involving large appropriations of money, but this is not a sufficient argument against the passage of this bill. The government, in respect of these bounties, is a debtor, and while she may fairly examine into the justice of particular cases, yet duty and good faith require her to pay them. The government is better able to pay these just demands than those entitled thereto are to lie out of them.

Your committee in conclusion appeal to the sense of honor of the nation's Representatives to no longer delay, but act promptly and reward but in a small measure the defenders of our Union and national government, that is to-day bestowing its blessings upon millions of intelligent freemen.