

# The Ehlers e-Newsletter

Monday, May 19, 2003

## *Last Week in the U.S. House of Representatives*

**CONGRESSMAN EHLERS DELIVERS COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS AT CORNERSTONE UNIVERSITY** – No matter the overcast skies outside, spirits were bright inside Mol Arena at the Bernice Hansen Athletic Center, where for the first time Cornerstone University's traditional commencement ceremony was held Saturday morning in Grand Rapids. Bringing the commencement message was Congressman Vern Ehlers, who spoke about popular sayings and applying them to our lives. The former educator, who taught physics at U.C.-Berkeley and Calvin College before entering politics, took special delight in encouraging the graduating Cornerstone students. For the complete text of a press release from Cornerstone University, follow this link: [http://www.cornerstone.edu/news/news.php?news\\_ID=148](http://www.cornerstone.edu/news/news.php?news_ID=148)

**HOUSE APPROVES PENSION SECURITY LEGISLATION** – The U.S. House of Representatives Wednesday approved legislation designed to give workers more flexibility in their company pension plans. Congressman Ehlers voted with the majority of House members who approved the bill by a 271-157. Among the provisions in the bill, employees would have the option of selling company stock out of their 401(k) accounts under certain conditions, employers could not force employees to invest in company stock, and employees would receive access to qualified investment advice. The bill now moves to the U.S. Senate for consideration.

## **THIS WEEK IN THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES MONDAY, MAY 19**

*The House will convene at 12:30 p.m. for Morning Hour and 2 p.m. for legislative business. Votes will be postponed until 6:30 p.m.*

### **Suspensions (3 bills):**

*(Bills on suspension are generally considered non-controversial and have reduced debate time, but require a two-thirds majority vote to be passed.)*

1. **H.Con.Res. 166 - Sense of Congress in Support of Buckle Up America Week**
2. **H.R. 1018 - James L. Watson United States Court of International Trade Building Designation Act** (in New York, NY).
3. **H.Con.Res. 147 - Commemorating the 20th Anniversary of the Orphan Drug Act and the National Organization for Rare Disorders:** There are 6,000 known rare diseases and conditions, affecting approximately 25 million Americans. These rare diseases and conditions are sometimes referred to as "orphan" diseases and conditions, and drugs (including biological products) to treat them are sometimes referred to as "orphan drugs." Prior to 1983, because so few individuals were affected by any one orphan disease or condition, a pharmaceutical company that developed an orphan drug may have reasonably expected the drug to generate relatively small sales in comparison to the cost of developing the drug and, therefore, to incur a financial loss. The object of the Orphan Drug Act was to stimulate the development of orphan drugs.

## **TUESDAY, MAY 20**

*The House will convene at 9 a.m. for Morning Hour and 10 a.m. for legislative business.*

### **Suspensions (7 bills):**

1. **H.R. 1954 - Armed Forces Naturalization Act of 2003:** A description of this bill was not available at time of publication.
2. **H.R. 1925 - Runaway, Homeless, and Missing Children Protection Act:** Reauthorizes the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act and the Missing Children's Assistance Act, providing the funds to serve the nation's at-risk youth.
3. **H.Res. 217 - Commending the University of Minnesota Golden Gophers for winning the 2003 National Collegiate Athletic Association Division I Men's Ice Hockey Championship**
4. **H.R. 1911 - Amending Title 38, United States Code, to Enhance Cooperation and the Sharing of Resources Between the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Defense**
5. **H.R. 1683 - Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2003:** Provides, effective December 1, 2003, a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) to the rates of disability compensation for veterans with service-connected disabilities and to the rates of dependency and indemnity compensation for survivors of certain service-connected disabled veterans. The percentage amount will be equal to the increase for benefits provided under the Social Security Act, which is calculated based upon changes in the Consumer Price Index.
6. **H.R. 1257 - Selected Reserve Home Loan Equity Act:** Makes the VA home loan program for members of the Selected Reserve permanent, and reduces the funding fee charged to Select Reserve home loan applications to the same amount as the amount paid by active duty servicemembers. It also increases the amount of fees paid by a veteran who is purchasing a home with no down payment for a second or subsequent time.
7. **H.R. 1562 - Veterans Health Care Cost Recovery Act of 2003:** Strengthens the Department of Veterans' Affairs' (VA) rights under law to collect third-party reimbursements from certain third parties for the costs VA incurs in providing health care to veterans and others covered by a private or public health plan, and other improvements to veterans health care programs.

### **Bill Subject to a Rule (1 bill):**

**H.R. 1904 – Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003:** Improves the capacity of the Secretary of Agriculture and the Secretary of the Interior to plan and conduct hazardous fuels reduction projects on National Forest System lands and Bureau of Land Management lands aimed at protecting communities, watersheds, and certain other at-risk lands from catastrophic wildfire. The bill also enhances efforts to protect watersheds and address threats to forest and rangeland health, including catastrophic wildfire, across the landscape. This bill is a comprehensive plan focused on giving federal land managers and their stakeholders and partners the tools to respond to this growing forest health crisis. The legislation directs the timely implementation of scientifically-supported management activities to protect the health and vibrancy of federal forest ecosystems as well as the communities and private lands that surround them.

**WEDNESDAY, MAY 21** and the balance of the week

*The House will convene at 10 a.m. for legislative business.*

**Bills Subject to a Rule (2 bills):**

**H.R. 1588 – National Defense Authorization for FY 2004:** A description of this bill was not available at time of publication.

**H.R. 1298 – United States Leadership Against HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria Act of 2003 Conference Report:** Authorizes the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief announced in the State of the Union Address by authorizing \$15 billion over the next five years (\$3 billion a year, FY 2004-08) for HIV/AIDS care, treatment and prevention in those countries already facing crisis of unprecedented proportions, and also in those countries with alarming recent increases in HIV prevalence. The bill also creates a more responsive, coordinated and effective approach among the various agencies of the U.S. Government involved in the global fight against HIV/AIDS.

**Historical Tidbits**

**On May 19 ...**

**1943** - Winston Churchill told the U.S. Congress that his country was pledging their full support in the war against Japan.

**1954** - Racially segregated public schools were declared inherently unequal by the U.S. Supreme Court. (*Brown vs. the Board of Education*)

**1992** - The 27th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution went into effect. The Amendment prohibits Congress from giving itself midterm pay raises.

**On May 20 ...**

**1775** - North Carolina became the first colony to declare its independence.

**1875** - The International Bureau of Weights and Measures was established.

**1926** - The U.S. Congress passed the Air Commerce Act. The act gave the Department of Commerce the right to license pilots and planes.

**1990** - The Hubble Space Telescope sent back its first photographs.

**On May 21 ...**

**1956** - The U.S. exploded the first airborne hydrogen bomb in the Pacific Ocean over Bikini Atoll.

**On May 22 ...**

**1908** - The Wright brothers registered their flying machine for a U.S. patent.

**1972** - U.S. President Nixon became the first U.S. president to visit Russia. He met with Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev.

**On May 23 ...**

**1900** - Civil War hero Sgt. William H. Carney became the first African American to receive the Medal of Honor, 37 years after the Battle of Fort Wagner.

**1922** - "Daylight Saving Time" was debated in the first debate ever to be heard on radio in Washington, DC.

**1992** - The U.S. and four former Soviet republics signed an agreement in Lisbon, Portugal, to implement the START missile reduction treaty that had been agreed to by the Soviet Union before it was dissolved.

(Please do not respond to this e-mail. To send a message to Congressman Ehlers, please visit our website at <http://www.house.gov/ehlers> and click on "Write Your Rep.")