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Pensions to officers and soldiers

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PENSIONS TO OFFICERS AND SOLDIERS.

[To accompany Bill H. R. No. 259.]

FEBRUARY 10, 1858.

Mr. SAVAGE, from the Committee on Invalid Pensions, made the following

REPORT.

The Committee on Invalid Pensions, to whom was referred the petition of the officers and soldiers of the State of New York, and of Thomas Patterson and others of the State of Ohio, praying for a pension for their services in the war of 1812, and requesting the passage of the bill introduced in the House of Representatives at the last session of Congress, entitled, A bill granting pensions to the officers and soldiers of the war with Great Britain of 1812, and those engaged in the Indian wars during that period, beg leave to report:

That they have had the subject-matter of the petitioners under consideration, and adopt the bill No. 539 and report, made to the last Congress, and herewith report the same and recommend its passage.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, August 4, 1856.

Mr. SAVAGE, from the Committee on Invalid Pensions, made the following report.

The Committee on Invalid Pensions, to whom was referred the petition of the officers and soldiers of the State of New York, and others, praying for a pension for their services in the war of 1812, beg leave to report:

That they have had the same under consideration, and are of opinion that it is not only due as a matter of justice to the gallant men who perilled their lives in that dangerous war that they should be relieved by the government from the miseries of poverty in their declining years, but as an act to be done now to affect the future, constituting a military policy, to secure the love and confidence of our people, arousing their ardor and patriotism to meet dangers yet to be

encountered, it strongly recommends itself to the wisdom and prudence of Congress. Your committee consider a liberal pension system almost a necessary consequence, while our military policy continues the same that it has been since the foundation of the government.

It is not the object of your committee to set forth in this report in detail the many considerations upon which their conclusions are grounded. They have thought it most proper to present a few of the prominent reasons which sustain their view of this question, and report a bill general in its provisions, leaving matters of detail and special consideration to discussion and amendments in Committee of the Whole or in the House.

Your committee do not consider that they propose to innovate upon our past policy or inaugurate a new system; they aim to give the soldiers of our "second war of independence" the same justice and generous protection that Congress awarded to the soldiers of the revolution. Your committee are fully satisfied with the military condition of our country; our system as it is, they consider the best in the world; but strike from the character of the citizen a single trait, and none could be worse. From the past history of our conflicts they are of opinion that, while it is the cheapest, it is none the less effective. We have no military establishment compared with other nations. The whole face of Europe, both in time of peace and war, is covered by dark bodies of armed warriors, marshalled around the thrones of absolute power, imposing ruinous taxation upon the sons of toil whose liberties they have subverted. While many of those nations, with whom we, in a just cause, should not fear to go out to battle, maintain a standing army from a hundred thousand to half a million, ours is less than fifteen thousand men; and yet, with the threatening clouds of foreign war and internal commotion impending from every quarter of the horizon for the last twelve months, no man has felt any great solicitude to augment our military establishment. And what is it that brings to the nation this great boon, this quiet and happy security amid surrounding dangers? It is an unshaken confidence, taught by past experience, in the valor and patriotism of the citizen soldier, one whom gold cannot purchase or tyranny overawe. When war assails our country a grand spectacle is presented. You see the farmer, the mechanic, the doctor, the lawyer, the merchant, and the politician—from all ranks in life, and all occupations, men "rush forth like eagles, and fight like lions"—and when the haughty foe has been driven back in ruin and defeat, they return quietly to their homes.

Many of these gallant men return with impaired health—some with ruined constitutions; but no matter how they return, with a few fortunate exceptions, they find that while others who have remained at home have advanced, they have retrograded in the race for the good things of this world, which render man independent and old age comfortable; their business and families have been neglected; their property depreciated, their patronage is in the hands of others; with them it is almost commencing life a second time at the bottom of the ladder, although their absence from home may have been of short duration. As a general rule, they give the strong days of their manhood to the service of the country, and see as much of actual war

in a few campaigns as the soldiers of these vast standing armies do in their lifetime; so that our government secures the same benefit in the hour of danger, for a very small expense, that is obtained by other countries at the enormous cost of their perpetual establishments. The burden and sacrifices of a foreign war are, for this cause, unequally divided between the citizens of the republic, being principally borne by the brave men who, from patriotic motives, thus enter the military service. This view of the subject may be illustrated, by supposing the case of two men of equal ability following the same occupation: the one obeys the impulses of patriotism, enters your service, sheds his blood in your cause, advances your standard to victory and glory, bringing peace and renown to the nation; but in most cases, if he returns at all to the bosom of his family, it is with less ability to toil, with property and business injured, perhaps lost forever, and for no other reason than because he fought your battles; this gallant man goes down to the grave in poverty, and leaves his wife and little ones to misery and want. The other, from accident, necessity, or a greater regard for individual comfort, remains at home, pursues his business, accumulates property, guards his family, and leaves them at his death comfortable and wealthy. Sir, no bounty of the government is likely ever to place these men upon an equality; but a generous people should not let the old soldier die among them, when poverty has been the result of sacrifices for their safety.

Your committee know there are many exceptions to the general rule which they have laid down in regard to the pecuniary consequences resulting to individuals from military service. To some it may have been fortunate; many have or afterwards acquire large estates, and some provision growing out of this consideration may be necessary; but as it is a point upon which there will likely be a wide difference of opinion, your committee have not recommended any rule of discrimination. Your committee have not adopted the rule in regard to the time of service applied to the soldiers of the revolution, but recommend that all who have served for the term of three months, or have been engaged in actual battle with the enemy, shall be placed upon an equal footing. They have done this because, in their opinion, the greatest sacrifice that is usually made by entering our military service consists in the abandonment of home, the neglect of property, loss of business, and injury to health, which are almost as likely to occur to as great an extent in the first three months as for a longer period.

Your committee have endeavored to prepare such a bill as would be most likely to receive the favorable consideration of Congress, and provide to the greatest extent for those persons who merit the aid of the government, which they herewith report, and recommend its passage.