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Amending pension-laws

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AMENDING PENSION-LAWS.

FEBRUARY 24, 1876.—Committed to a Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union and ordered to be printed.

Mr. GOLDSMITH W. HEWITT, from the Committee on Invalid Pensions, submitted the following

REPORT:

[To accompany bill H. R. 2283.]

The Committee on Invalid Pensions, to whom were referred House bills No. 86, No. 260, No. 317, and No. 1143, granting pensions to certain soldiers of the war with Mexico in 1846; and also House bill No. 784, granting pensions to certain soldiers of the Florida and Seminole wars; and also House bill No. 474, granting pensions to certain soldiers of the war with Mexico and of the Seminole war of 1836; and also the petition of certain survivors of the Black Hawk war, praying to be placed upon the pension-rolls, have had the same under consideration and submit the following report, which is, in substance, the report made to the Forty-third Congress by the minority of the Committee of Invalid Pensions of that Congress upon petition praying that certain soldiers of the Mexican war be placed upon the pension-rolls:

The Federal Government, at an early day, adopted the wise policy of rewarding its brave soldiers and sailors who periled their lives in the military and naval service to establish and perpetuate the republic, with land-bounties as well as by moneyed pensions. This policy has been steadily adhered to as just and humane. The soldiers of the Mexican war suffered incredible hardships under a tropical sun and in a malarious climate, and by their endurance, valor, and indomitable energy, vanquished the enemy of their country and crowned our arms with a victory so glorious as to entitle them to the gratitude of the Government, and now, in their old age and poverty, the Government should take care of them and their widows.

The fruits of the Mexican war added an immense area of rich territory to our public domain, out of which new States have been carved and others are yet to be added, besides a mineral wealth that has not only given great impetus to, but has enlarged and diversified, the industry and commerce of the western continent. The war commenced in the spring of 1846, and our soldiers were disbanded in July, 1848. Thus in about two years our troops marched into the enemy's country of vast extent, lying more than a thousand miles from the center of our population, containing eight million people, subdued them, and dictated their own terms of peace.

What did we gain by that war? The great State of Texas was involved. The Mexicans claimed *all* that vast territory. This peace enabled us to establish her present lines, and sever her forever from that domination. By the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of February 2, 1848, and the Gadsden purchase of December, 1853, Mexico ceded to the United States the territory now covered by the States of California, Nevada, part of Nebraska, also all claim to the territory covered by the State of Texas, and by the Territories of Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico, by portions of the Territories of Wyoming and Colorado, and by the unorganized territory lying west of the Indian Territory, embracing in all about 937,875 square miles. This vast area contained more territory than all the organized States of the Union did at the time of its acquisition. To form some estimate of its richness and fertility, its value and commercial importance, we have but to examine its statistics for the past few years. The entire population of the newly-acquired territory in 1850 only numbered 406,657 inhabitants, and in 1870 had increased to 1,772,060 persons. The total wealth in 1850 was \$31,062,899; but in 1870 it had swelled to \$965,622,071. But so rapidly have the population and wealth increased within the past few years that at least one-fifth may be added to these figures for the years since the taking of the census, which will give

ns over two million inhabitants, and about \$1,200,000,000 of wealth. And in all the industries of the country, this acquired section will bear a favorable comparison according to population and wealth. In mining-resources, however, it outstrips all the balance of the Union together; it is literally the great gold-field of America, and of the world. Take, for example, the year 1860, and the total product of gold and silver in the United States amounted to \$61,500,000, of which sum the following amounts were produced, to wit:

California.....	\$22,500,000
Colorado and Wyoming.....	4,000,000
Arizona.....	1,000,000
New Mexico.....	500,000
Nevada.....	14,000,000
Total.....	42,000,000

And if this should be taken as an average year since 1850, say for the past twenty-five years, then we will have a yield of \$1,050,000,000, or over one billion dollars. This enormous sum has been sufficient of itself to give an impetus to the commerce of the whole continent, and has had its influence on the civilized world. But the mining-resources of this section are believed to be inexhaustible. We have but just commenced, as it were, to dig the hidden wealth imbedded in this El Dorado of America. A recent discovery of a *bonanza* in the silver-mines of Nevada is variously estimated by mining engineers to be worth from \$300,000,000 to a sum surpassing belief, stated as high as \$1,500,000,000.

But this territory was not only valuable in itself on account of its intrinsic wealth and resources, but it became the great highway to the Pacific Ocean and the Orient for the older and more densely populated States of the Union. In this respect, alone, it would more than compensate for all the expenditures of the Mexican war. Who is capable of estimating the value and importance of this acquisition, or by what method can it be estimated? If we undertake to fix a value upon it, we must do so by statistics of what it is now, and what it was when acquired, comparing the one with the other in all the changes that have been wrought. But this must fail to give any just idea of its greatness and value to the country. We can form a better idea by asking the question, for what consideration would the General Government part with this 937,785 square miles, with its two millions of people and untold resources, and commanding position in the continent, holding in its arms the great gate-way to the empires of the East? No money consideration could buy it at all; its value is beyond price; we could not do without it; we can see in it a bright and glorious future of a dense population, containing all the true characteristics of wealth, refinement, and a high order of civilization. No war with a foreign country has produced such results in so short a time, and no troops acquitted themselves with more honor and made greater sacrifices during that period of their service. Having gained for the whole country that which for value cannot be estimated, and having reached a period when many of these veterans are in need, many of them in absolute want, and without the privilege of asylum in the Home established by a fund in which every soldier who served in Mexico has an interest, the country should not refuse to reward such faithful and worthy patriots. These soldiers who entered service in 1846, 30 years ago, must be over 53 years of age, and are too feeble to compete with younger men in physical labor. The proceedings of the convention and a report of the officers of the association appointed by the convention to gather statistics in regard to the numbers of surviving veterans, have been submitted to the committee, from which it appears that less than 4,000 are known to be alive. From the testimony submitted, the committee are of opinion that 10 per centum of the whole number of officers, soldiers, sailors, and marines, engaged in the war from beginning to end, will cover in round numbers the survivors. Of this number a large proportion are now on the pension-rolls for wounds received in Mexico and in later wars. Several of the State legislatures have passed resolutions requesting their Representatives in Congress to favor the passage of a law granting pensions to these old soldiers; and if the question was left to the decision of the people by a popular vote, in view of all the facts, the pension would undoubtedly be allowed by an overwhelming majority.

These soldiers have fought those battles and acquired that territory, and, without regard to past or present or political views, should be recognized by the Government.

There can be no question as to the duty of the Government to pension the aged soldiers of the Florida and Black Hawk wars in the light of past legislation upon the subject of pensions.

The committee report a substitute for said House bills and recommend that the same do pass.