

Mr. SABLAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of S. 3245, extending authorization of the EB-5 Regional Center program another three years to September 2015. The EB-5 program provides conditional permanent resident status to foreign investors in economic units known as Regional Centers. In doing so, the program promotes economic growth, improves regional productivity, and creates jobs in the geographic area where a Center is located. This is exactly the kind of incentive needed in my district, the Northern Mariana Islands, which has seen gross domestic product decline from \$1.2 billion in 2002 to \$600 million in 2009. Already several proposals have come forward for the Northern Mariana Islands, predicated on the establishment EB-5 Regional Centers, that will inject foreign investment capital and create jobs. These Regional Centers do not just represent jobs and salary for their direct employees—they represent investments in our community. For every new job created, and for every additional dollar of salary paid, our workforce and pay scale are benefitted across the board. The extension of this program provided in S. 3245 will ensure that these opportunities can continue to benefit our economy. I commend Senator LEAHY and Senator GRASSLEY for introducing this bipartisan legislation and the bipartisan House leadership for bringing this bill to the floor for approval.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. CHAFFETZ). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Texas (Mr. SMITH) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, S. 3245. The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds being in the affirmative, the ayes have it.

Mr. SMITH of Texas. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, further proceedings on this question will be postponed.

IMPROVING TRANSPARENCY OF EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES FOR VETERANS ACT OF 2012

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 4057) to amend title 38, United States Code, to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to develop a comprehensive policy to improve outreach and transparency to veterans and members of the Armed Forces through the provision of information on institutions of higher learning, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 4057

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. COMPREHENSIVE POLICY ON PROVIDING EDUCATION INFORMATION TO VETERANS.

(a) COMPREHENSIVE POLICY REQUIRED.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Chapter 36 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new section:

“§3698. Comprehensive policy on providing education information to veterans

“(a) COMPREHENSIVE POLICY REQUIRED.—The Secretary shall develop a comprehensive policy

to improve outreach and transparency to veterans and members of the Armed Forces through the provision of information on institutions of higher learning.

“(b) SCOPE.—In developing the policy required by subsection (a), the Secretary shall include each of the following elements:

“(1) The most effective way to inform individuals of the educational and vocational counseling provided under section 3697A of this title.

“(2) A centralized way to track and publish feedback from students and State approving agencies regarding the quality of instruction and accreditation, recruiting practices, and post-graduation employment placement of institutions of higher learning.

“(3) The merit of and the manner in which a State approving agency shares with an accrediting agency or association recognized by the Secretary of Education under subpart 2 of part H of title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1099b et seq.) information regarding the State approving agency's evaluation of an institution of higher learning.

“(4) The manner in which information regarding institutions of higher learning is provided to individuals participating in the Transition Assistance Program under section 1144 of title 10.

“(5) The most effective way to provide veterans and members of the Armed Forces with information regarding postsecondary education and training opportunities available to the veteran or member.

“(c) POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION INFORMATION.—(1) The Secretary shall ensure that the information provided pursuant to subsection (b)(5) includes—

“(A) an explanation of the different types of accreditation available to educational institutions and programs of education;

“(B) a description of Federal student aid programs; and

“(C) for each institution of higher learning, for the most recent academic year for which information is available—

“(i) whether the institution is public, private nonprofit, or proprietary for-profit;

“(ii) the name of the national or regional accrediting agency that accredits the institution, including the contact information used by the agency to receive complaints from students;

“(iii) information on the State approving agency, including the contact information used by the agency to receive complaints from students;

“(iv) whether the institution participates in programs under title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1070 et seq.);

“(v) the tuition and fees;

“(vi) the median amount of debt from Federal student loans under title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1070 et seq.) held by students at institution;

“(vii) the cohort default rate, as defined in section 435(m) of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1085(m)), of the institution;

“(viii) the enrollment rates, graduation rates, and retention rates;

“(ix) for each program of education offered by the institution that is designed to prepare a student for an occupation that requires a licensure or certification test offered by a Federal, State, or local government or has other preconditions or requirements, the degree to which the program prepares the student for the particular occupation;

“(x) whether the institution provides students with technical support, academic support, and other support services, including career counseling and job placement; and

“(xi) whether the institution accepts academic credit by students who are transferring to the institution, including credits awarded by a proprietary for-profit institution.

“(2) To the extent possible, the Secretary shall provide the information described in paragraph (1) by including hyperlinks on the Internet website of the Department to other websites that

contain such information in a form that is comprehensive and easily understood by veterans, members, and other individuals.

“(d) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

“(1) The term ‘institution of higher learning’ has the meaning given that term in section 3452(f) of this title.

“(2) The term ‘postsecondary education and training opportunities’ means any postsecondary program of education, including apprenticeships and on-job training, for which the Secretary of Veterans Affairs provides assistance to a veteran or member of the Armed Forces.”.

(2) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections at the beginning of such chapter is amended by adding after the item relating to section 3697A the following new item:

“3698. Comprehensive policy on providing education information to veterans.”.

(b) PROHIBITION ON INDUCEMENTS.—Section 3696 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new subsection:

“(e) The Secretary shall not approve an educational institution if the educational institution provides any commission, bonus, or other incentive payment based directly or indirectly on success in securing enrollments or financial aid to any persons or entities engaged in any student recruiting or admission activities or in making decisions regarding the award of student financial assistance.”.

(c) SURVEY.—In developing the policy required by section 3698(a) of title 38, United States Code, as added by subsection (a), the Secretary shall conduct a market survey to determine the availability of the following:

(1) A commercially available off-the-shelf online tool that allows a veteran or member of the Armed Forces to assess whether the veteran or member is academically ready to engage in postsecondary education and training opportunities and whether the veteran or member would need any remedial preparation before beginning such opportunities.

(2) A commercially available off-the-shelf online tool that provides a veteran or member of the Armed Forces with a list of providers of postsecondary education and training opportunities based on criteria selected by the veteran or member.

(d) REPORT.—Not later than 90 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall submit to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Representatives and the Senate, the Committee on Education and the Workforce of the House of Representatives, and the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions of the Senate a report that includes—

(1) a description of the policy developed by the Secretary under section 3698(a) of title 38, United States Code, as added by subsection (a);

(2) a plan of the Secretary to implement such policy; and

(3) the results of the survey conducted under subsection (b), including whether the Secretary plans to implement the tools described in such subsection.

(e) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

(1) The term ‘commercially available off-the-shelf’ has the meaning given that term in section 104 of title 41, United States Code.

(2) The term ‘postsecondary education and training opportunities’ means any postsecondary program of education, including apprenticeships and on-job training, for which the Secretary of Veterans Affairs provides assistance to a veteran or member of the Armed Forces.

SEC. 2. STATE CONSIDERATION OF MILITARY TRAINING IN GRANTING CERTAIN STATE CERTIFICATIONS AND LICENSES AS A CONDITION ON THE RECEIPT OF FUNDS FOR VETERANS EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Section 4102A(c) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following:

“(9)(A) As a condition of a grant or contract under which funds are made available to a State in order to carry out section 4103A or 4104 of this title for any program year, the Secretary shall require the State to disclose to the Secretary in writing the following:

“(i) Criteria applicants must satisfy to receive a certification or license described in subparagraph (B) by the State.

“(ii) A description of the standard practices of the State for evaluating training received by veterans while serving on active duty in the Armed Forces and evaluating the documented work experience of such veterans during such service for purposes of approving or denying a certification or license described in subparagraph (B).

“(iii) Identification of areas in which training and experience described in clause (ii) fails to meet criteria described in clause (i).

“(B) A certification or license described in this subparagraph is any of the following:

“(i) A license to be a nonemergency medical professional.

“(ii) A license to be an emergency medical professional.

“(iii) Any commercial driver's license.

“(C) The Secretary shall share the information the Secretary receives under subparagraph (A)(ii) with the Secretary of Defense to help the Secretary of Defense improve training for military occupational specialties so that individuals who receive such training are able to receive a certification or license described in subparagraph (B) from a State.

“(D) The Secretary shall publish on the Internet website of the Department—

“(i) any guidance the Secretary gives the Secretary of Defense with respect to carrying out this section; and

“(ii) any information the Secretary receives from a State pursuant to subparagraph (A).”.

(b) **EFFECTIVE DATE.**—The amendment made by subsection (a) shall apply with respect to a program year beginning on or after October 1, 2013.

SEC. 3. CONDITIONS ON THE AWARD OF PER DIEM PAYMENTS BY THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS FOR THE PROVISION OF HOUSING OR SERVICES TO HOMELESS VETERANS.

(a) **CONDITION.**—

(1) **IN GENERAL.**—Paragraph (1) of section 2012(c) of title 38, United States Code, is amended to read as follows:

“(1) Except as provided in paragraph (2), a per diem payment may not be provided under this section to a grant recipient or eligible entity unless the entity submits to the Secretary a certification that the building where the entity provides such housing or services is in compliance with codes relevant to the operations and level of care provided, including the most current Life Safety Code or International Fire Code and all applicable State and local housing codes, licensing requirements, fire and safety requirements, and any other requirements in the jurisdiction in which the project is located regarding the condition of the structure and the operation of the supportive housing or service center.”.

(2) **EFFECTIVE DATE.**—The amendment made by paragraph (1) shall apply with respect to an application for a per diem payment under section 2012 of title 38, United States Code, submitted on or after the date of the enactment of this Act.

(b) **ANNUAL REPORT.**—Section 2065(b) of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) by redesignating paragraph (6) as paragraph (7); and

(2) by inserting after paragraph (5) the following new paragraph (6):

“(6) The Secretary's evaluation of the safety and accessibility of facilities used to provide programs established by grant recipients or eligible entities under section 2011 and 2012 of this title, including the number of such grant recipients or eligible entities who have submitted a certification under section 2012(c)(1).”.

(c) **TREATMENT OF CURRENT RECIPIENTS.**—In the case of the recipient of a per diem payment under section 2012 of title 38, United States Code, that receives such a payment during the year in which this Act is enacted, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall require the recipient to submit the certification required under section 2012(c)(1) of such title, as amended by subsection (a)(1), by not later than two years after the date of the enactment of this Act. If the recipient fails to submit such certification by such date, the Secretary may not make any additional per diem payments to the recipient under such section 2012 until the recipient submits such certification.

SEC. 4. ESTABLISHMENT OF OPEN BURN PIT REGISTRY.

(a) **ESTABLISHMENT OF REGISTRY.**—Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall—

(1) establish and maintain an open burn pit registry for eligible individuals who may have been exposed to toxic chemicals and fumes caused by open burn pits;

(2) include any information in such registry that the Secretary of Veterans Affairs determines necessary to ascertain and monitor the health effects of the exposure of members of the Armed Forces to toxic chemicals and fumes caused by open burn pits;

(3) develop a public information campaign to inform eligible individuals about the open burn pit registry, including how to register and the benefits of registering; and

(4) periodically notify eligible individuals of significant developments in the study and treatment of conditions associated with exposure to toxic chemicals and fumes caused by open burn pits.

(b) **REPORT TO CONGRESS.**—

(1) **REPORT BY INDEPENDENT SCIENTIFIC ORGANIZATION.**—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall enter into an agreement with an independent scientific organization to develop a report containing the following:

(A) An assessment of the effectiveness of actions taken by the Secretaries to collect and maintain information on the health effects of exposure to toxic chemicals and fumes caused by open burn pits.

(B) Recommendations to improve the collection and maintenance of such information.

(C) Using established and previously published epidemiological studies, recommendations regarding the most effective and prudent means of addressing the medical needs of eligible individuals with respect to conditions that are likely to result from exposure to open burn pits.

(2) **SUBMITTAL TO CONGRESS.**—Not later than 18 months after the date on which the registry under subsection (a) is established, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to Congress the report developed under paragraph (1).

(c) **DEFINITIONS.**—In this section:

(1) The term “open burn pit” means an area of land located in Afghanistan or Iraq that—

(A) is designated by the Secretary of Defense to be used for disposing solid waste by burning in the outdoor air; and

(B) does not contain a commercially manufactured incinerator or other equipment specifically designed and manufactured for the burning of solid waste.

(2) The term “eligible individual” means any individual who, on or after September 11, 2001—

(A) was deployed in support of a contingency operation while serving in the Armed Forces; and

(B) during such deployment, was based or stationed at a location where an open burn pit was used.

SEC. 5. PERFORMANCE AWARDS IN THE SENIOR EXECUTIVE SERVICE.

For each of fiscal years 2013 through 2017, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs may not pay more than \$1,000,000 in performance awards under section 5384 of title 5, United States Code.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. BILIRAKIS) and the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Florida.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and to include any extraneous material they may have on H.R. 4057, as amended.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Florida?

There was no objection.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

H.R. 4057, as amended, is another bipartisan product of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs' work to improve the effectiveness of several different benefits and health programs for veterans.

I want to express my appreciation to my good friend Chairman MILLER and to my other good friend Ranking Member BOB FILNER, along with each of the subcommittee chairs—MARLIN STUTZMAN and ANN MARIE BUERKLE—as well as Ranking Members BRUCE BRALEY and MIKE MICHAUD, for bringing, of course, these provisions to the full committee and to the floor today.

□ 1600

The bill has five major sections, Mr. Speaker. Section 1 reflects a slightly modified version of the original text of my bill, H.R. 4057, which I introduced in February. This legislation would improve the ability of GI Bill users to choose the school that best meets their educational needs. As we commemorate September 11 today, it is appropriate that this Congress help this generation of post-9/11 veterans make informed choices by using their educational benefits.

Specifically, this legislation will require the VA to create a comprehensive policy that would meet this goal by informing veterans about their eligibility for educational counseling by creating a centralized complaint database on schools, requiring State approving agencies to better communicate with accrediting agencies, requiring VA to link to certain performance-related data points on the College Navigator and other appropriate Web sites, and identifying commercially off-the-shelf available software that would assist students in choosing a school and software that would evaluate their readiness to attend postsecondary education.

I want to thank the veteran service organizations and higher education associations for the support of this section and providing great feedback on ways to improve this bill.

Section 2 contains provisions originally introduced by Congressman STIVERS and my friend from across the aisle, Congressman TIM WALZ, to require States to take military training

into account in awarding licenses to work as medical technicians and other trades. I thank Mr. STIVERS, another good friend of mine, and Mr. WALZ, for their work on these provisions that will speed up servicemembers' transition to civilian life.

Section 3 contains a provision introduced by Congressman DAVID MCKINLEY which would require per diem payment recipients under VA's Homeless Grant and Per Diem Program to certify compliance with the Life Safety Code or the International Fire Code and other relevant fire safety and building codes. It would also require VA to include an accounting and evaluation of the safety and accessibility of facilities used to provide programs for homeless veterans in the annual report on assistance to homeless veterans.

I'm grateful for Mr. MCKINLEY's advocacy on behalf of our homeless veterans, and I thank him for his hard work to ensure that they are cared for in a safe and secure environment.

Section 4, which incorporates language originally introduced by Representative AKIN, would direct the VA to establish and maintain an open burn pit registry for veterans—very important—veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan who may have been exposed to toxic chemicals and fumes caused by open burn pits during deployment. It would require VA to develop a public information campaign to inform eligible veterans of the registry and periodically notify them of significant developments in the study and treatment of conditions associated with burn pit exposure. It would also direct the VA to contract with an independent scientific organization to develop a report on the effectiveness of actions taken to collect and maintain information on the health effects of burn pit exposure and submit the completed report to Congress.

Many of our servicemembers and veterans have returned from Iraq and Afghanistan with grave concerns about the possible long-term health effects of burn pit exposure. With this provision, I hope we will move one step closer to providing them answers which may lead to getting them more effective health care.

Finally, section 5, which incorporates language offered by Mr. STEARNS, a good friend of mine from the State of Florida, would limit the total amount of bonuses paid to senior VA employees to \$1 million for fiscal years 2013 to 2017. On average, over the last several years, VA paid nearly \$4 million a year to senior executives who are already paid very well. In a tight fiscal climate when so many improvements are needed for veterans, we must prioritize every dollar. Extravagant executive bonuses are to be the least of our priorities. I'm pleased this section would recognize that reality.

Mr. Speaker, I would also note that the cost of these sections are fully paid for.

I encourage all Members to support this bill, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I certainly thank the members of the committee and Mr. BILIRAKIS for working in such a bipartisan manner to protect servicemembers and protect veterans. I think Mr. BILIRAKIS gave a very comprehensive overview of the bill. Let me just make a couple of points here.

The Post-9/11 GI Bill, which a Democratic Congress passed a couple of years ago, was really a milestone for our current crop of veterans. Almost 800,000 veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan have now made use of the benefits that this bill provides. We ought to be, as a Congress, very proud of that kind of legislation.

With so many thousands of veterans using their Post-9/11 GI Bill, it's important, obviously, that they understand their benefits and eligibility and have all the information available to them. That's what H.R. 4057 does, which Mr. BILIRAKIS outlined quite nicely. Veterans are going to be able to get the kind of information that they need to get the best educational benefits that are suited to them.

Let me just say one thing about section 4 of the bill, which authorizes the Department of VA to establish a burn pit registry for eligible veterans.

Mr. Speaker, every time that we send men and women into combat, we have to make sure we understand the risks associated with exposures to toxic substances and take responsibility when we expose our own troops to these effects. We haven't done that in the past. We ought to learn more from history. Whether it was atomic testing in World War II, whether it was agent orange in the Vietnam War, whether it was depleted uranium, we've done the same thing over and over again. We've either denied or underestimated the risks. It took years, even decades, to admit the risks. When we finally did that, we still make our veterans undergo lots of bureaucratic hoops to get the benefits that come from exposure to the very substances that we put them at risk for.

Let's not repeat that pattern. This open pit registry will be part of that effort. We want to understand the risks. We want people to know where they have been exposed.

I requested the General Accountability Office to help us in our efforts to better understand health risks associated with the burn pits in Iraq and Afghanistan. We all know that the preliminary reports have shown that the fumes from these pits produce a considerable amount of contaminants that may cause short-term and long-term harm to our servicemembers.

Finally we're having a proactive measure and one which I hope will benefit veterans in an extremely positive way. I thank Mr. BILIRAKIS and his colleagues for working with our col-

leagues for the bill, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to yield 3 minutes to a senior member of the Veterans Committee, my good friend from Florida (Mr. STEARNS).

Mr. STEARNS. I thank my distinguished chairman and colleague.

I rise today in support of H.R. 4057, the Improving Transparency of Education Opportunities for Veterans Act of 2012. It has been offered by my colleague from Florida, GUS BILIRAKIS.

My colleagues, this bill would provide veterans and servicemembers the resources that they need to make informed decisions when choosing the right institution or school for the career they wish to pursue. The other provisions included would help veterans with State certification credentials for skills acquired while on active duty. It ensures homeless veterans have access to shelters, in compliance with the State and local codes, and would require the Secretary to establish and maintain a burn pit registry program for individuals who may have been exposed to toxic chemicals.

During the committee markup, I offered an amendment that would limit the amount the VA would pay in performance awards to senior staff from fiscal year 2013 to 2017 to adequately cover the costs associated with H.R. 4057, along with the provisions included from the other three bills.

□ 1610

My colleagues, in the last 3 years, the worst economic climate this country has seen since the Great Depression, almost 800,000 VA employees received monetary awards totaling \$1.1 billion. This limitation amendment I offered affects only the Senior Executive Service, the SES, as they are called, who are considered to be like the generals of the Federal workforce and make between \$120- and \$180,000 a year.

The VA has an agency that has underperformed, yet they continue to provide performance bonuses at the expense of taxpayers and the well-being of our veterans. Today's VA backlog stands at 840,000 claims, of which more than 55 percent have been pending for more than 125 days. It is unconscionable that these senior executive employees are receiving bonuses averaging \$40,000 a year, on top of their six-figure salaries, when the number of backlog claims is close to the number of monetary awards given.

Today, September 11, is a day every American will never forget. I urge all my colleagues to support passage of this bill, and by doing so we honor our veterans and servicemembers by supplying them with these needed resources to help rebuild their lives. Mr. Speaker, today is a day we'll never forget. We'll always remember the sacrifices of those brave men and women, and in passage of this bill we will remind everybody of our appreciation for them.

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to our ranking member of the Health Subcommittee, the gentleman from Maine, a fighter for Veterans' Affairs, Representative MICHAUD.

Mr. MICHAUD. I want to thank the gentleman for his strong support for veterans over the years and look forward to continuing to work with him through the rest of this Congress.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today as a cosponsor and a strong supporter of this bill. Each section of it makes important changes that will improve the care and services we provide our veterans. I'm especially proud that it creates a comprehensive educational outreach policy, recognizes that military service meets the standards of many civilian job certifications, and that it establishes an open burn pit registry.

All three of these provisions are the result of the hard work of veterans and their advocates. I had many meetings with veterans who not only identified these issues, but they also provided solutions for the issues as well.

In my time of serving on the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, I've always appreciated that it's one of the places in Congress where bipartisan efforts are working and things do get done. I'm pleased this is the tradition in this particular bill as well.

I want to thank all of my colleagues on the Veterans Affairs Committee, Chairman MILLER of the full committee, Chairwoman BUERKLE of the Health Subcommittee, and TIM WALZ, who has also been a true advocate of veterans' issues, and I thank him for his service as well for this great Nation of ours.

I would encourage my colleagues to support H.R. 4057.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I yield as much time as she may consume to the chairwoman of the Subcommittee on Health, my good friend, the gentleman from New York (Ms. BUERKLE).

Ms. BUERKLE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 4057, as amended, the Improving Transparency of Education Opportunities for Veterans Act of 2012.

As we all know, 11 years ago this morning on September 11, 2001, our country was forever changed when terrorist attacks on American soil resulted in the deaths of over 3,000 innocent souls. Since that time we've been tested like never before, and thanks to the brave service and sacrifices of our Nation's Armed Forces, have emerged as a nation stronger, better, and more resolved to advancing the cause of freedom around the world.

We also have emerged a more grateful Nation, ever mindful of the simple truth that the security and freedoms we enjoy were bought and paid for by the blood, sweat, and tears of those in uniform. Caring for and honoring these heroes is one of our Nation's most sacred obligations and the primary purpose of this bill before us today.

H.R. 4057, as amended, includes two provisions originating from the Sub-

committee on Health, of which I am honored to chair.

Section 3 of the bill would require per diem payment recipients under the Department of VA Homeless Grant and Per Diem program to provide VA with a certification of compliance with a Life Safety Code or the International Fire Code and other relevant fire safety building codes in their jurisdiction. This provision would also require the VA to include an accounting and evaluation of the safety and accessibility of facilities used to provide programs for homeless vets in the annual report on assistance to homeless veterans.

Current law requires the VA to ensure that entities receiving grants under the homeless grant and per diem program meet fire and safety codes. However, VA lacks a similar requirement to ensure per diem recipients are also compliant with these very important codes.

When one of our honored veterans finds him or herself homeless and makes the difficult decision to get help, we must ensure that they are provided the services they need in a safe, secure, and supportive environment. This section of the bill would allow us to do so in a much more comprehensive, effective, and efficient manner.

This provision was introduced by my good friend and colleague from West Virginia, DAVID MCKINLEY, and I thank him for his leadership and his advocacy on behalf of the homeless veterans struggling to rebuild their lives.

Section 4 of the bill would direct the VA to establish and maintain an open burn pit registry for veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan, who may have been exposed to toxic chemicals and fumes caused by open burn pits during deployment. This provision would also require the VA to develop a public information campaign to inform eligible veterans of their registry and periodically notify them of significant developments in the study and treatment of the conditions that may be associated with burn pit exposure.

Further, it would direct the VA to contract with an independent scientific organization to develop a report on the effectiveness of actions taken to collect and maintain information on the health effects of burn pit exposure and submit the completed report to Congress.

I have heard from countless veterans who returned home from a war consumed with concern about the air they breathed in the battle, which was often filled with smoke from the burning of solid waste and could affect their health and well-being. With this provision, we will take first steps towards recognizing and respecting these concerns of our veterans. Importantly, it will also allow us to gather data necessary to discovering new and better ways to care for our veterans today and in future generations.

In closing, I would like to offer my sincere gratitude and appreciation to all of the Members who sponsored the provisions included in this legislation.

I also would like to thank the ranking member on the Health Subcommittee, Mr. MICHAUD of Maine, for his support and all of the work on behalf of our veterans.

I urge all of my colleagues to join me in supporting this legislation. On this day of all days, it is so very important that we support the servicemembers and veterans who have fought for the greatest Nation in the history of mankind, the United States of America.

Mr. FILNER. I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Minnesota, the sergeant major of the United States Congress, Mr. WALZ.

Mr. WALZ of Minnesota. I would like to thank the ranking member of Veterans' Affairs. I have had no greater friend since his time here, and we are grateful for the work he has done.

To Mr. BILIRAKIS and the entire committee for what has been said by several of my colleagues, it's fitting and appropriate today that we are passing legislation to serve those who have served us. It also is fitting and appropriate that we conduct ourselves in a manner fitting of their service.

This committee is one, as Mr. MICHAUD said and so many others have said. We are proud of the work we do together. This is just another example.

I would like to comment just briefly on section 2 of this that my good friend and friend of veterans from Ohio (Mr. STIVERS) has been an absolute, outspoken, untiring advocate of to make sure that we employ these veterans when they come home. Last month, President Obama signed in another bill of ours, the Veteran Skills to Jobs Act, that is now the law of the land, making it easier to credential our veterans when they come back.

This Nation spends \$140 billion training our veterans. These are our best and brightest and most dedicated. When they come back home, they're not victims, but we certainly know there are barriers to employment that we should not be putting up in front of them.

□ 1620

If they've driven that truck and served this Nation in Afghanistan, why should we have to repay to get a CDL license? If they've saved their colleagues on the battlefield and passed the credentialing to be a medic, why can't they ride in an ambulance at the Mayo Clinic in my district? And this bill takes it to the next level and sets that credentialing in coordination between the Federal and State to make sure when our veterans return home that we're not putting barriers in front of them, and to be quite honest, that we're not spending precious resources, whether it's giving them unemployment insurance or retraining them through redundant trainings.

In my office, my veterans staffer was the SHAPE commander's Black Hawk pilot in Europe. And he was the top trainer in the military. If he came back out, civilian-wise, he would have to go

to a 48-month course to able to get through some of these things. That makes no sense, and it's putting our veterans at a disadvantage.

So I want to thank Mr. STIVERS for making this possible. The transition can be there. I also want to thank our States that have been so willing to work with us. There are eight States that have already implemented this proposal. It will make it easier. It's the right thing to do for our veterans. It will give employers great dependable employees, and it will make sure these veterans do what we know is best for their mental health, for their family, and for this country—get back to work and start doing the things that they want to do.

With that, I thank everyone involved for this great bill. I encourage my colleagues to support H.R. 4057.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. I am happy to yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. STIVERS), a veteran of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Mr. STIVERS. I would like to thank the gentleman for yielding, and I would like to thank my colleague, Mr. WALZ, for his help as we've tried to enact the Hire at Home Act, which has been rolled into this bill. The legislation came from a roundtable in my district of veterans last fall. And as veterans return home today with military training they've received, that training is not recognized by civilian authorities and States, and therefore they're forced to go through redundant training to do the job they were doing in the military.

However, if somebody can do a job while serving in a war zone, they can certainly do that same job at home in a safe environment.

With so many veterans returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan, we need to make sure we do everything we can to help get them back to work. It's shameful that the unemployment rate among post-9/11 veterans is 12.7 percent, according to a recent report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics. That's why we introduced the Hire at Home Act. It will help, as Representative WALZ said, remove barriers in front of these soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines and get them the civilian certifications they need to get them to work as soon as they get home. It forces States to do this by ensuring that in order to receive certain workforce development grants, they have to streamline these certifications.

I would like to thank all those who have helped make this bill happen today: Representative WALZ, Representative BILIRAKIS, Representative MILLER, and Representative STUTZMAN. And I'd like to thank Senator PRYOR for his interest in the Senate. I would like to call on the United State Senate to pass this bill as soon as we get it done. I'd like to thank the Members of this body for their support and urge all the Members to support this legislation.

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, how much time do I have left?

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman has 6 minutes remaining.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from West Virginia (Mr. MCKINLEY).

Mr. MCKINLEY. Thank you, Congressman BILIRAKIS and Chairman MILLER, for bringing this bill to the floor today.

Let me take this opportunity to highlight a segment of the portion dealing with safe housing for homeless veterans. I had previously sponsored this concern in a separate piece of legislation, and it was subsequently amended into this bill that's before us today.

Currently, there are 2,100 community-based homeless veterans service providers across the country and many other homeless assistance programs that have demonstrated impressive success reaching homeless veterans. I've visited some of the shelters in my home district in West Virginia and was struck by how many were not, unfortunately, in compliance with State, local, or Federal building and fire codes.

Consequently, we began to investigate how broad based this issue was across America. It was unsettling to learn about shelter fires where lives have been lost. There's stories of a homeless shelter fire where occupants were killed due to the fact that there was not a required sprinkler system at the facility or dozens were injured when a sprinkler system was not working properly or where doors were closed that needed to be opened.

All of these could have been avoided. Unfortunately, there is no law mandating a homeless shelter meet building and fire safety codes, only a policy within the VA. As a licensed professional engineer, I found this to be an egregious omission in the law concerning homeless shelters for veterans.

The language in this bill would require any organization that seeks funding for VA for services to homeless veterans have documentation that their building meets or exceeds all building codes. This is commonsense legislation that could ensure the well-being of veterans all across America who have fallen on hard times and are in need of the most assistance. As a Nation, it should be unacceptable for us to allow homeless veterans to be housed in potentially unsafe conditions.

I appreciate the support of this legislation and this provision from the American Legion, the Homeless Veterans Coalition, the International Code Council, and the Fire Marshals Association.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for including this language in the bill today and for your concern for the safety and the living environment of our veterans.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. I am happy to yield 2 minutes to the chairman of the Sub-

committee on Economic Opportunity, the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. STUTZMAN).

Mr. STUTZMAN. I thank the gentleman from Florida (Mr. BILIRAKIS) for yielding.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of H.R. 4057, as amended. This is a bipartisan bill that at its core will help our youngest group of veterans make more informed choices about how to use their VA education benefits. I think it's very appropriate today that as we remember 9/11 and those who died that day and those who have died since defending our Nation that we are discussing this bill on the floor. The post-9/11 GI Bill is a wonderful benefit that thousands of veterans are using or have used to advance their education and training.

H.R. 4057 will further assist these veterans in making decisions on how to best use their GI Bill benefits through new, innovative online tools and by providing greater transparency on certain data from educational institutions. By helping these veterans make more informed choices, we are not only putting them on the path to successful careers, but we are saving taxpayer dollars that may have been misused at a training program that didn't suit the veteran's needs.

As chairman of the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity, I'm proud of the work that Mr. BILIRAKIS, Mr. BRALEY, and the rest of the members of the subcommittee have done to improve this bill; and thanks to our colleagues on the Health Subcommittee for their provisions as well. I want to thank Chairman MILLER and the ranking member for their support of this legislation. I ask my colleagues to support the bill.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, once again, I encourage all Members to support H.R. 4057, as amended, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Florida (Mr. BILIRAKIS) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 4057, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

□ 1630

PUBLIC TRANSIT SECURITY AND LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT SUPPORT ACT

Mr. TURNER of New York. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 3857) to amend the Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007 to require the Secretary of Homeland Security to include as an eligible use the sustainment of specialized operational teams used by local law enforcement