

and resources, I rise today in strong support of H.R. 2333, the "Suicide Prevention Coordinators Act."

I support H.R. 2333 because this legislation will provide much needed assistance to the VA to reduce the incidence of suicide among our veterans. The "SPCA" provides DVA suicide prevention coordinators with the resources needed to effectively do their job of providing veterans with critical mental health resources to veterans in need.

Madam Speaker, veteran suicide is a pervasive and critical issue, threatening, and in to many heartbreaking cases, taking the lives of many of our heroes.

Although, the Department of Veterans Administration has screening protocols designed to aid veterans and to stage suicide interventions, about 6,000 veterans fall through the cracks of this system annually, finding themselves without the necessary aid and resources that were promised to them.

Many suicide prevention coordinators and offices specializing in veterans affairs report being overworked and unable to keep up with the demand for their services.

On average, about 20 veterans die every day by suicide and since 2017, 25 veterans have taken their lives on the grounds of Veterans Affairs hospitals, including seven this year and at least four last month. These veterans were actively seeking help from an unprepared and under resourced agency before they took their lives.

It is long past time for Congress to provide the help needed to address the troubling increase in veteran suicides and help improve suicide prevention and mental health resources at the at DVA.

It is imperative that the DVA has the tools it needs to serve every veteran that walks through the door.

The "Suicide Prevention Coordinators Act" would require the Comptroller General to assess the responsibilities, workload, and vacancy rates of the Department of Veterans Affairs Suicide Prevention Coordinators and report it to Congress within one year, on the ability of the DVA to detect and protect veterans from self-harm.

It is critically important that we provide suicide prevention coordinators with the resources needed to successfully combat the troubling trend of veteran suicide, and I believe this bill is a necessary step in the right direction.

Madam Speaker, it is unconscionable that a veteran will commit suicide every hour.

The fact that veterans make up just 20 percent of the male population, yet veterans make up close to 32 percent of all male suicides is shocking and must spur our action.

It does not have to be this way, Madam Speaker, and we can do something about it, starting with the passage of H.R. 2333, the "Suicide Prevention Coordinators Act."

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. TAKANO) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 2333.

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

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

FOSTERING INTERGOVERNMENTAL HEALTH TRANSPARENCY IN VETERAN SUICIDES ACT

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 2340) to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide to Congress notice of any suicide or attempted suicide of a veteran in a Department of Veterans Affairs facility, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 2340

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

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Fostering Intergovernmental Health Transparency in Veteran Suicides Act" or "FIGHT Veteran Suicides Act".

SEC. 2. CONGRESSIONAL NOTICE OF SUICIDES AND ATTEMPTED SUICIDES OF VETERANS IN DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS FACILITIES.

Section 1720F of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new subsection:

"(1) CONGRESSIONAL NOTICE REQUIREMENTS.—(1) In the case of the suicide or attempted suicide of any veteran that occurs in, or on the grounds of, a Department facility, the Secretary shall submit to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and the House of Representatives and the Senators and member of Congress representing the district in which the facility is located and the Senators and member of Congress representing the district in which the veteran resides the following notices:

"(A) Not later than seven days after the date on which the suicide or attempted suicide occurs, notice of—

"(i) the suicide or attempted suicide; and

"(ii) the name of the facility and location where the suicide or attempted suicide occurred.

"(B) Subject to subparagraph (C), not later than 60 days after such date, notice of the following information (if available) regarding the veteran who committed or attempted to commit suicide:

"(i) The enrollment status of the veteran with respect to the patient enrollment system of the Department under section 1705 of this title.

"(ii) The most recent encounter between the veteran and any employee or facility of the Veterans Health Administration before the suicide or attempted suicide occurred.

"(iii) Whether the veteran had other medical insurance or coverage (including TRICARE, Medicare, and Medicaid).

"(iv) The Armed Force in which the veteran served.

"(v) The time period when the veteran served in the Armed Forces.

"(vi) The age of the veteran.

"(vii) The marital status of the veteran.

"(viii) The employment status of the veteran.

"(ix) The housing status of the veteran.

"(x) The gender identity of the veteran.

"(xi) The sexual orientation of the veteran.

"(xii) The race of the veteran.

"(xiii) Confirmation that the Secretary has provided notice to the immediate family members of the veteran regarding any Department support or assistance for which such family members may be eligible.

"(C) In collecting and reporting information under subparagraph (B), the Secretary shall take all steps the Secretary determines necessary to respect the privacy and dignity of the veteran and the family of the veteran.

"(2) Each notice submitted under subparagraph (A) or (B) of paragraph (1) shall include a copy of guidance developed by the Secretary

for purposes of dissemination that is designed to—

"(A) deter the sensationalism of suicide;

"(B) provide information regarding warning signs that are often exhibited by veterans at risk of suicide; and

"(C) provide notice of the resources the Department offers to veterans who may be at risk of suicide, including the Veterans Crisis Line and readjustment counseling provided through Vet Centers."

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from California (Mr. TAKANO) and the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. DAVID P. ROE) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 2340, as amended.

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

There was no objection.

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

Madam Speaker, since the beginning of this year, seven—seven—veterans have died by suicide in or on the grounds of VA facilities. Sadly, another suicide occurred at a VA hospital in Washington just this weekend.

Currently, VA staff notify both the House and Senate Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the events as a matter of courtesy; however, should the Department's leadership change, there is no assurance this courtesy would continue.

I have made veteran suicide prevention the top priority for the Committee on Veterans' Affairs because 20 suicides a day is far too many. One suicide is far too many. But to address this alarming trend, Congress must be informed when a suicide occurs on a VA campus and must be provided all relevant data.

This information will allow the committee to conduct appropriate oversight, write legislation that will improve outcomes, and, when necessary, hold individuals accountable when there are clear failures that impact the timely and adequate care for veterans.

As such, H.R. 2340, as amended, the FIGHT Veteran Suicides Act, would require the VA Secretary to notify Congress following an attempted or a completed suicide by a veteran in or on the grounds of a VA facility.

This measure also requires VA to provide Congress with communications guidance to deter the sensationalism of suicide, provide information on identifying the warning signs often exhibited by veterans at risk of suicide, and identify resources offered by the Department for at-risk veterans, including the Veterans Crisis Line and Vet Center readjustment counseling.

It is essential that this information be shared, regardless of leadership at

VA, what party controls Congress, or who occupies the White House.

I thank Congressman ROSE, a combat veteran, for leading the fight against this tragic national public health crisis, and I want to commend him for his leadership and for writing this important legislation that will ensure Congress has all the data it needs to truly understand and reduce veteran suicide.

I encourage my colleagues to join me in voting “yes” on this bill.

Madam Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. DAVID P. ROE of Tennessee. Madam Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 2340, as amended, the FIGHT Veteran Suicides Act.

This bill would require the Department of Veterans Affairs to report to the local congressional delegation, as well as to the committee, whenever a veteran attempts or dies by suicide in or on the grounds of a VA facility.

We have all heard the heartbreaking stories of veterans who have died by suicide on VA campuses, including five veteran suicide deaths in the last several weeks alone. There is no indication that these events represent an increase in the rate of suicide among servicemembers and veterans, but they are particularly poignant because they occur so close to help and appear to be an indictment on the healthcare system that was created to support them.

To be clear, suicide is a national public health crisis that is not unique to VA, the military, or veterans. However, we must pay careful attention to the incidents of suicide among those who have served and sacrificed on our behalf and do everything we can to point those in crisis to the resources they need to recover from the traumas and live long, full, healthy lives.

I am grateful to Congressman MAX ROSE from New York for sponsoring this bill, which will allow us to learn all we can about the suicides that occur on VA campuses so that we can take action that may save other lives in the future.

I encourage all Members to support this much-needed piece of legislation.

Madam Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I, too, ask my colleagues to join me in passing H.R. 2340, 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 California (Mr. TAKANO) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 2340, 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.

VETERANS' COMPENSATION COST-OF-LIVING ADJUSTMENT ACT OF 2019

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 1200) to increase, effective as of December 1, 2019, the rates of compensation for veterans with service-connected disabilities and the rates of dependency and indemnity compensation for the survivors of certain disabled veterans, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read the title of the bill. The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 1200

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

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Veterans’ Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2019”.

SEC. 2. INCREASE IN RATES OF DISABILITY COMPENSATION AND DEPENDENCY AND INDEMNITY COMPENSATION.

(a) RATE ADJUSTMENT.—Effective on December 1, 2019, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall increase, in accordance with subsection (c), the dollar amounts in effect on November 30, 2019, for the payment of disability compensation and dependency and indemnity compensation under the provisions specified in subsection (b).

(b) AMOUNTS TO BE INCREASED.—The dollar amounts to be increased pursuant to subsection (a) are the following:

(1) WARTIME DISABILITY COMPENSATION.—Each of the dollar amounts under section 1114 of title 38, United States Code.

(2) ADDITIONAL COMPENSATION FOR DEPENDENTS.—Each of the dollar amounts under section 1115(1) of such title.

(3) CLOTHING ALLOWANCE.—The dollar amount under section 1162 of such title.

(4) DEPENDENCY AND INDEMNITY COMPENSATION TO SURVIVING SPOUSE.—Each of the dollar amounts under subsections (a) through (d) of section 1311 of such title.

(5) DEPENDENCY AND INDEMNITY COMPENSATION TO CHILDREN.—Each of the dollar amounts under sections 1313(a) and 1314 of such title.

(c) DETERMINATION OF INCREASE.—Each dollar amount described in subsection (b) shall be increased by the same percentage as the percentage by which benefit amounts payable under title II of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 401 et seq.) are increased effective December 1, 2019, as a result of a determination under section 215(i) of such Act (42 U.S.C. 415(i)).

(d) SPECIAL RULE.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs may adjust administratively, consistent with the increases made under subsection (a), the rates of disability compensation payable to persons under section 10 of Public Law 85-857 (72 Stat. 1263) who have not received compensation under chapter 11 of title 38, United States Code.

SEC. 3. PUBLICATION OF ADJUSTED RATES.

The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall publish in the Federal Register the amounts specified in section 2(b), as increased under that section, not later than the date on which the matters specified in section 215(i)(2)(D) of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 415(i)(2)(D)) are required to be published by reason of a determination made under section 215(i) of such Act during fiscal year 2020.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from California (Mr. TAKANO) and the gentleman from Tennessee (DAVID P. ROE) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 1200.

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

There was no objection.

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

Madam Speaker, H.R. 1200, the Veterans’ Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2019 would require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to increase the rates of disability compensation for service-connected veterans and the rates of dependency and indemnity compensation for survivors of veterans, effective December 1, 2019.

Now, this bill would also increase these rates by the same percentage as the percentage by which Social Security benefits are increased effective December 1, 2019, and require that VA publish the increased rates in the Federal Register.

To me, the actual cost-of-living adjustment to veterans’ benefits, otherwise known as COLA, is much more than a rate adjustment tied to inflation. In reality, it is a quality-of-life guarantee in retirement years, especially for veterans suffering with service-connected disabilities and ailments.

It also comes with the assurance for veterans that their survivors will not see a steady decline in benefits if the economy changes and costs rise after they are gone. This guarantee is a great source of comfort for veterans as they age. I know this because they tell me this everywhere I go.

The yearly COLA increase is a recognition and appreciation of a grateful nation of the service and sacrifice of those who volunteer to wear the uniform of our country.

Participating in this gesture of appreciation is one of the most rewarding responsibilities of the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs. As chairman, I am honored to be leading this effort to say thank you.

I want to recognize the work of the Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs Subcommittee chair, ELAINE LURIA, and ranking member, MIKE BOST, for sponsoring H.R. 1200 and for bringing this bill to the floor today.

I am pleased that we are considering this bill early this year so veterans will not be concerned about its passage by the December 1 deadline.

I wholeheartedly support H.R. 1200 and urge all my colleagues to do so as well.

Madam Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. DAVID P. ROE of Tennessee. Madam Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 1200, the Veterans’ Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2019.