

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON

OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, July 15, 2019

Ms. NORTON. Madam Speaker, on July 12, 2019, I was unable to attend votes because I was attending to official business. Had I been present, I would have voted: NAY on Roll Call No. 462; YEA on Roll Call No. 463; YEA on Roll Call No. 464; YEA on Roll Call No. 465; YEA on Roll Call No. 466; YEA on Roll Call No. 467; YEA on Roll Call No. 468; YEA on Roll Call No. 469; YEA on Roll Call No. 470; and YEA on Roll Call No. 471.

**RETIREMENT OF HELENA BERGER,
A CHAMPION OF AMERICANS
WITH DISABILITIES**
HON. STENY H. HOYER

OF MARYLAND

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, July 15, 2019

Mr. HOYER. Madam Speaker, I rise to mark the twenty-ninth anniversary next week of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) being signed into law by President George H.W. Bush on July 26, 1990. This transformative and trailblazing piece of legislation, which was supported by both Democrats and Republicans, serves as a lasting reminder that Congress can bring so much opportunity for our people when we join together for the greater good. The ADA calls us to continue to act on behalf of millions of Americans with disabilities to ensure that their hopes, dreams, and aspirations are as valid and attainable as those of every other American. It remains a powerful expression of Congress's determination that disability rights are civil rights.

On July 23, advocates for those with disabilities are also pausing to celebrate and recognize the many contributions of Helena Berger, President & CEO of the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD), who will be retiring this August after thirty years of service and leadership in the disability rights movement. Ms. Berger held several leadership positions with AAPD prior to becoming President & CEO, including Executive Director, Chief Operating Officer, and Executive Vice President. Under Ms. Berger's leadership, AAPD has significantly increased its reach and impact across the country, including through the expansion of AAPD's renowned Summer Internship Program, which cultivates the next generation of leaders in the disability rights movement.

I join in thanking Ms. Berger for her years of service to AAPD and the broader disability rights community, for her tireless efforts to fight for representation and economic opportunities for Americans with disabilities, and for ensuring that AAPD can continue to advocate on their behalf for years to come. I hope all of my colleagues who value and celebrate what the ADA represents will join me in paying tribute to Ms. Berger for her leadership and wishing her all the best in her retirement.

SUPPORTING THE NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2020
HON. GILBERT RAY CISNEROS, JR.

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, July 15, 2019

Mr. CISNEROS. Madam Speaker, I rise today to express my gratitude that the House has approved H.R. 2500, the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year FY) 2020. The bill contains many much-needed and valuable provisions and I am proud to have had the opportunity to work with Chairman Smith as well as Democratic and Republican members of the Armed Services Committee to secure them. I urge these provisions to be maintained through the conference process.

H.R. 2500 is a boon for transition assistance that servicemembers rely upon when they leave the military. I am proud to have secured bipartisan language to assist active-duty reservists and national guardsmen, veterans, their dependents, and Gold Star families apply for and secure jobs in the civilian workforce. Specifically, the provision would help states across the nation expand or establish a pilot program to provide job placement assistance and related employment services to those servicemembers, veterans, and their families. As a veteran myself, I understand firsthand the challenges servicemembers, and their families, face when they enter the civilian workforce, and I am proud to have been able to secure provisions to assist these heroes as they transition to civilian life. Similarly, I am proud to have fought for and secured language calling on the Department of Defense to provide separating servicemembers with a comprehensive and individualized statement of benefits listing the benefits to which each servicemember is entitled and directing them to modernize the DD214 form that will facilitate better connectivity with veterans that have separated from the military. Additionally, at my request, H.R. 2500 requires the Department of Defense to review recent Transition Assistance Program reforms and provide a progress report on implementation to date. I look forward to receiving this report so that Congress may determine how to best improve upon the program and ensure our servicemembers are receiving the guidance and services they need to succeed when they transition to civilian life. Finally, I am pleased that H.R. 2500 includes language from my bill, H.R. 2944, the TALENT Act, which directs the Department of Defense to create a two-way exchange program between the Department's acquisition workforce and the private sector. The program will enable Department personnel, including military officers, to gain private sector experience and bring best practices they have learned back to the Department. Such a program brings benefits to the Department and to the individuals who may seek civilian employment after they conclude their military service.

Another area of importance I worked to address in H.R. 2500 is improving access to and outcomes in military health. I am proud to have secured language in the bill to extend and expand an ongoing pilot program jointly run with the U.S. Air Force and Department of Veterans Affairs under the Transition Assistance Program that educates transitioning serv-

icewomen about women's health care at the VA and encourages female servicemembers to participate. Furthermore, I worked with the Armed Services Committee to include language in the bill to direct the Department of Defense to create a comprehensive policy for mental health care across several key elements: pain management, opioid addiction, suicide prevention, and post-traumatic stress disorder. I would also like to note that I worked with colleagues to respond to the disturbing reports of hazardous and unhealthy privatized military housing at installations across the nation. H.R. 2500 includes language to ensure safe privatized military housing through the creation of a tenant's bill of rights, prohibition on the use of non-disclosure agreements in connection with entering into, continuing, or terminating a lease for a housing unit, establishment of a dispute resolution process, and creation of an electronic work order system. Finally, I am also happy to state that my colleagues and I were also able to secure language in H.R. 2500 encouraging the Department of Defense to accelerate research and development into technology or equipment solutions to eliminate the need for open air burn pits and establish long-term solutions for toxic waste disposal.

As a Latino and former officer in the Navy, I am proud to have worked to secure language in H.R. 2500 that will improve diversity and inclusion in the Department of Defense. I know firsthand the benefits a diverse leadership can have on the force. Moreover, I believe a diverse military force reflects our values as a democratic society and provides the United States with a strategic advantage. To that end, I secured language in the bill to direct the Department of Defense to develop a new strategic plan for diversity and inclusion and worked with my colleagues to secure provisions to improve research capacity at Historic Black Colleges and Universities. Additionally, I was happy to support language during the Committee markup of H.R. 2500, under the leadership of Representative Jackie Speier, to require gender integration of Marine Corps basic training at Parris Island and San Diego. The Marine Corps is the only remaining military service that does not integrate basic training and it is time the Corps caught up to the other services in this regard. Finally, this bill includes an amendment—offered by myself and several colleagues and adopted on the House floor—to require that qualifications for eligibility to serve in an armed force account only for the ability of an individual to meet gender-neutral occupational standards and not include any criteria relating to the race, color, national origin, religion, or sex (including gender identity or sexual orientation) of an individual. We cannot stand for bans on individuals, including transgender individuals, serving in the armed forces purely because of who they are.

I also worked to ensure H.R. 2500 includes provisions to address sexual assault in the military. I was troubled to learn of the findings in 2018 Department of Defense annual report on sexual assault in the military. According to the report, 20,500 service members—13,000 women and 7,500 men—across the Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force and the National Guard experienced “contact or penetrative sexual assault” while serving in the military in 2018—an increase from 14,900 in 2016. That is simply unacceptable. I am proud to have