

realities of this particular bill and the procedures.

Mr. Speaker, it would be nice if we actually dealt with the good of the body and recognize that reauthorizations are important so that we can reevaluate what kinds of programs actually exist and if they are still necessary. We don't do a very good job in Congress of doing that. We allow reauthorizations to lapse, and then we simply go on automatic pilot, unfortunately.

This is the situation with this particular program because the Sea Grant College Program expired in 2014 and has never been reauthorized by Congress since that time. The appropriators still put money into it, even though they are not supposed to do it. But once again, when we, as a Congress, fail to do the reauthorization investigation and hearings and prioritize, then we make major mistakes in what we are attempting to do. We certainly don't have the priorities that we should when these programs were originally started to make sure that they are doing what we originally intended them to do, or if, indeed, there needs to be a change, like including the Great Salt Lake in many of its provisions so that you actually do something positive for the rest of the world.

Mr. Speaker, Congress in the last year, fiscal year 2019, even though this was not an authorized program, still spent \$72 million to do that, even though it was eliminated from the administration's budget. The House in this fiscal year appropriated in the 2020 bill only \$71 million for this program.

There is, of course, a glitch in that appropriation, which simply means that unlike other Senate bills that are coming here to the floor, this one will not go directly to the President's desk. It has to go back to the Senate for some kind of a revote and reanalysis with it. But this is not simply a reauthorization of a program. This is a reauthorization that changes things, including of which is a much higher amount with that program.

So, beginning with this bill, this would change it not only from \$70 million; it would take it to the \$87.5 million for fiscal year 2020 and add a generous 5 percent increase to each year through 2024. In addition, it funds an additional \$30 million for six specific research and extension activities.

Now, once again, whether those are justifiable or not—it would be nice—that should be part of the discussion in a reauthorization program before you actually come up with these kinds of numbers that go into that. The increases won't necessarily result in more Sea Grant marine research or outreach because it also increases the percentage of funds that can be used by program administration.

Now, the CBO score of this bill is at \$513 million. A half-billion dollars for any program is simply a big deal if it is not considered in the context of the other priorities that this government

should have, and that is one of the programs and processes that should be done.

So, this bill, like its House companion bill, goes beyond simple reauthorization. It adds new priorities. It adds new programs that benefit certain offices more than others. I am not just going to contend that this has a disproportionate influence on certain bodies, but let's just say this provides for free office work, fellows that are placed in offices year after year.

In the latest list of congressional placements and their opportunities, out of 29 total spots in both the House and the Senate, only five were put in Republican offices. Maybe there is a reason for that. Maybe there is simply a process that we are not looking at in the reauthorization and the way this program is managed, which, once again, should be considered before you go through the reauthorization approach to it.

The problem is that some of these positions now go in there, and it should not be that Congress provides itself its own free staff, but that is exactly what this is attempting to do. Those free staffs are involved in drafting legislation that benefits the Sea Grant program, which is, of course, a built-in conflict of interest.

With those other conflicts of interests, there is another advantage that has now been built-in for these fellows that I don't think is appropriate and something we should actually think about properly before we even go forward with that and decide if these kinds of programs need to be done at taxpayer expense. The Sea Grant bill also gives preferential access to Federal jobs. This bill allows the direct hire of fellows by any Federal agency, regardless of if there are better qualified candidates.

So, fellows already receive a unique educational professional experience that provides advancement in opportunities that others in the same field may not have. Yet, they are now being asked to reduce the competition to get a job in the Federal workforce to help a select few in this program.

I am sorry, that is a process that is simply not in the best interest of good government. It is that process that needs to be revisited, that should be revisited.

Actually, this also eliminates some of the transparency. Right now, this program needs to report to Congress on a yearly basis. By this bill, the advisory board will have to report every other year to Congress.

I understand that the Sea Grant program is popular among some States, especially coastal States. Even as a representative from an inland State, I have to applaud the efforts for research and outreach that are conducted by Sea Grant universities and institutions, and I also don't object to fellows at all who are placed in the executive branch. But I have grave concerns regarding the politicized nature of this

program, the fellowship program. I have problems with the direct-hire incentives and authorities that are given in this particular program, also, without actually having some rationale for it, just the mandatory increase in spending that goes along with this type of program.

Therefore, I cannot vote for this particular piece of legislation. Obviously, for me, I will vote "no" and urge the rejection of this.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. HUFFMAN. Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. BISHOP of Utah. Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman has no other speakers, I yield back the balance of my time.

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

Mr. Speaker, I am grateful for the broad bipartisan support for this bill and its House companion bill, and I urge an "aye" vote.

Mr. Speaker, 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. HUFFMAN) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, S. 910, 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.

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS WEBSITE ACCESSIBILITY ACT OF 2019

Mrs. LURIA. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (S. 3587) to require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to conduct a study on the accessibility of websites of the Department of Veterans Affairs to individuals with disabilities, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

S. 3587

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 "Department of Veterans Affairs Website Accessibility Act of 2019".

SEC. 2. STUDY ON THE ACCESSIBILITY OF WEBSITES OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS TO INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES.

(a) STUDY.—Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall conduct a study of all websites of the Department of Veterans Affairs to determine whether such websites are accessible to individuals with disabilities in accordance with section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. 794d).

(b) REPORT.—Not later than 90 days after completing the study under subsection (a), the Secretary shall submit to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Representatives a report on such study.

(c) ELEMENTS.—The report required by subsection (b) shall include the following:

(1) A list of each website described in subsection (a) that is not accessible to individuals with disabilities in accordance with section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. 794d).

(2) For each website identified in the list under paragraph (1)—

(A) the plan of the Secretary to bring the website into compliance with the requirements of section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. 794d); and

(B) a description of the barriers to bringing the website into compliance with the requirements of such section, including any barriers relating to vacant positions at the Department of Veterans Affairs.

(d) WEBSITE DEFINED.—In this section, the term “website” includes the following:

(1) A file attached to a website.

(2) A web-based application.

(3) A kiosk at a medical facility of the Department of Veterans Affairs, the use of which is required to check in for scheduled appointments.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentlewoman from Virginia (Mrs. LURIA) and the gentleman from Florida (Mr. BILIRAKIS) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Virginia.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mrs. LURIA. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and insert extraneous materials to S. 3587.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from Virginia?

There was no objection.

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

Mr. Speaker, S. 3587 will require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to conduct a study on the accessibility of VA websites to our veterans and VA employees with disabilities and to ensure that these websites comply with the accessibility standards established by section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

Section 508 ensures that disabled Americans have equal access to electronic and information technology. As it stands today, the VA has not brought all of its online services into compliance with this existing law. This bill forces the VA to take a closer look at all of its websites and electronic services, identify the ones that are not legally compliant, and develop a corrective plan to make those services functional for the disabled. This will be particularly helpful to our blind veterans.

According to a 2018 study conducted by the Veterans Health Administration, our country has an estimated 131,500 legally blind veterans, though that number is projected to grow in the coming decades. Because these individuals depend on screen readers and magnification software when using websites, apps, kiosks, and telehealth tools, it is imperative that all VA programs be compatible with accessible communications technologies. That

way, every veteran has equal access to the essential information and services that the Department provides.

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Mr. Speaker, not only will this legislation better assist veterans seeking care and benefits from the VA, it will also assist the Department’s own disabled employees. Far too often, the VA utilizes inaccessible PDF formats when conducting internal operations, hindering its own employees who rely on screen readers in their work and in their service to our veterans. This legislation will identify and improve these barriers for services to the public.

Last year, I met with a group of blinded veterans, and they explained the structure of the VA websites and how it makes it difficult for them to learn about treatments and schedule doctor appointments. To remedy this problem, I introduced the House companion to this bill, H.R. 1199, the VA Website Accessibility Act.

Blinded veterans deserve equal access to all VA services, and I am honored to champion their cause. Our heroes should not have to wait a day longer. Today, we can help thousands of veterans receive better access to healthcare resources. I urge support of the VA Website Accessibility Act.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of S. 3587, the Department of Veterans Affairs Website Accessibility Act of 2019. This bill will require the Department of Veterans Affairs to conduct a study of all VA websites, apps, and electronic forms; determine which are inaccessible to veterans with disabilities; and develop a plan to make each of them accessible and compliant with section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

Although the VA has taken steps to improve the accessibility of its website, the committee has heard concerns from Blinded Veterans of America that “a web page that was easily accessed one day cannot be read or even located during the next visit to the site.” Of course that is unacceptable as far as I am concerned.

Moreover, visually impaired veterans, in particular, often face barriers to accessing information from VA because they are directed to forms or pages that are incompatible with screen readers.

Given that over 4.9 million veterans have at least one service-connected disability, it is unacceptable that the VA’s delivery of information falls short of disabled veterans’ needs. This bill will require the VA to take systematic action to address these issues.

I applaud Senator BOB CASEY and Congresswoman ELAINE LURIA, who does an outstanding job on the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs, for their leadership on this particular bill and their efforts to ensure that all veterans

are able to access the information they need from the VA.

I will be supporting this bill today, and I urge my colleagues to join me.

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

Mrs. LURIA. Mr. Speaker, I have no further speakers, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentlewoman from Virginia (Mrs. LURIA) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, S. 3587.

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.

TRAVIS W. ATKINS DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS CLINIC

Mrs. LURIA. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (S. 900) to designate the community-based outpatient clinic of the Department of Veterans Affairs in Bozeman, Montana, as the “Travis W. Atkins Department of Veterans Affairs Clinic”, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

S. 900

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

SECTION 1. DESIGNATION OF TRAVIS W. ATKINS DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS CLINIC IN BOZEMAN, MONTANA.

(a) DESIGNATION.—The community-based outpatient clinic of the Department of Veterans Affairs located in Bozeman, Montana, shall after the date of the enactment of this Act be known and designated as the “Travis W. Atkins Department of Veterans Affairs Clinic” or the “Travis W. Atkins VA Clinic”.

(b) REFERENCE.—Any reference in any law, regulation, map, document, paper, or other record of the United States to the community-based outpatient clinic referred to in subsection (a) shall be considered to be a reference to the Travis W. Atkins Department of Veterans Affairs Clinic.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentlewoman from Virginia (Mrs. LURIA) and the gentleman from Florida (Mr. BILIRAKIS) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Virginia.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mrs. LURIA. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and to insert extraneous materials on S. 900, as amended.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from Virginia?

There was no objection.

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise to remember the life of Army Staff Sergeant Travis Atkins, who was killed in Iraq on June 1,