

Caucus. We actually had an informal hearing here and brought forward individuals to talk to us about how we could remedy this problem. It is something we have to work on, and sexual assault in the military is something that we all know is unacceptable. The counseling program is one step towards helping victims access services that they deserve. And studies, as we know, have shown that three-fourths of the female veterans who are raped did not report the incident to a ranking officer. Many did not know how to, and some even thought that rape was somehow expected in the military. Since August of 2002 until November 1 of this year, there has been an estimated 261 cases of sexual assault in Iraq, Kuwait, Afghanistan and Bahrain.

We must enforce a zero-tolerance policy within the Armed Forces and protect all of our veterans, women and men, from having to cope with these injustices. And I urge the Congress to support this piece of vital legislation and also want to thank those who worked on this legislation to increase the health care services for our veterans.

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

Let me say that this particular piece of legislation is extremely important. I know, as has been mentioned, the importance of the number of veterans that are still estimated to be homeless, some 299,000 veterans out there that sleep under the bridges, and I know that our efforts in this area will help begin to continue to decrease the number of those homeless veterans that are out there.

According to the VA, 45 percent of the homeless veterans also suffer from mental health disorders. We know the importance of coming forth on post-traumatic stress disorder and how critical that is. And I also want to just emphasize how key and how important it is for the sexual trauma situations where we have improved in increasing the number of women in the military, and as we do that, we need to make sure that we have a good safe place for a work environment where they can feel comfortable in addition to the services that are needed.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I rise as a strong supporter of H.R. 3936 the Veterans Health Programs Improvement Act of 2004 which would increase the authorization of appropriations for grants to benefit homeless veterans, would improve programs for management and administration of veterans' facilities and health care programs. I want to thank Chairman SMITH and Ranking Member EVANS for bringing this necessary piece of legislation before this entire body.

Veterans are some of America's most valued members of society. These are people who served our Nation in a time of need, people who risked their lives to protect our own. Yet, it pains me to say that many of these same veterans who fought so bravely and risked so much in lands far abroad have come back to their nation and are now homeless.

The problem of homeless veterans is far more prevalent than we would like to believe. About one-third of the entire adult homeless population has served their country in the Armed Services. On any given day, as many as 250,000 veterans, both male and female, are living on the streets or in shelters, and perhaps twice as many experience hopelessness at some point during the course of a year. Many other veterans are considered near homeless or at risk because of their poverty, lack of support from family and friends, and dismal living conditions in cheap hotels or in overcrowded or substandard housing.

This legislation is necessary not only because this problem is so devastating and prevalent, but also because homeless veterans have special needs that are unique from those faced by the rest of the homeless population. Almost all homeless veterans are male, with three percent being female, the vast majority are single, and most come from poor, disadvantaged backgrounds. Homeless veterans tend to be older and more educated than homeless non-veterans. But similar to the general population of homeless adult males, about 45% of homeless veterans suffer from mental illness and slightly more than 70% suffer from alcohol or other drug abuse problems. Roughly 56% are African American or Hispanic.

I believe that the Veterans Health Programs Improvement Act will help make an impact in helping homeless veterans and ensuring that they have a viable future. This legislation has a number of important provisions, but in my mind none is more important than the issue of homeless veterans. If we cannot even provide our brave veterans with basic necessities then where are we as a Nation? Our Nation's veterans did not risk their lives abroad so that they could come home and feel a cold shoulder. We must all have outrage that so many of our Nation's veterans live this way; only then can we find a way to correct this injustice.

Mr. REYES. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 3936, the Veterans Health Programs Improvement Act of 2004. I would like to thank the sponsors of this legislation, Chairman CHRIS SMITH and Ranking Member LANE EVANS for their work to bring it through the House Veterans Affairs Committee and to the floor expeditiously.

Among other important actions, H.R. 3936 would provide the needed funding to assist our homeless veterans. As a Vietnam veteran and Member of Congress, I know the importance of addressing and appropriately funding programs to end homelessness among our veteran population. I feel this legislation is a step in the right direction to meet this need.

Sadly, today's homeless veteran population are men and women who have resorted to living out in the streets of the very same country they committed to serve. In addition, nearly half of this population consists of veterans who served with me in Vietnam.

Mr. Speaker, I can't stress enough the importance of this legislation, especially at a time of conflict that is increasing the veteran population. We should not forget the sacrifices made by our Nation's veterans. Instead, we need to uphold our promise to care for those who have answered the call to duty.

Mr. Speaker, I strongly urge my colleagues to support the passage of this important bill.

Mr. BEAUPREZ. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 3936, the Veterans Health

Programs Improvement Act of 2004. Today, more than ever, it is imperative that we address the benefits we provide to our Nation's veterans. Over the past few decades, the needs of veterans have evolved, and it is incumbent upon us to ensure the benefits they have so dutifully earned will sufficiently meet those changing needs.

Included in this bill is language to allow the Department of Veterans Affairs to begin negotiations with the University of Colorado for the land on which to build a new, state-of-the-art veterans medical facility on the Fitzsimons Campus in Aurora, CO. This landmark veterans hospital will be capable of providing services that were previously unthinkable in many of the unequipped, outdated VA hospitals of the past.

Through a collaboration between the VA, the DOD, and the University of Colorado, veterans in the Rocky Mountain region will gain access to a higher quality of health care made possible thanks to 21st century innovations and the synergy of this unique partnership.

Mr. Speaker, I applaud the efforts of everyone involved in bringing this bill to the floor for a vote today. It is a paramount piece of legislation not only for the veterans in my district, but for all of our Nation's veterans, and I strongly support its intent.

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

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

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. TERRY). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH) that the House suspend the rules and concur in the Senate amendments to the bill, H.R. 3936.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the Senate amendments were concurred in.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 3936.

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

There was no objection.

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS HEALTH CARE PERSONNEL ENHANCEMENT ACT OF 2004

Mr. SIMMONS. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the Senate bill (S. 2484) to amend title 38, United States Code, to simplify and improve pay provisions for physicians and dentists and to authorize alternate work schedules and executive pay for nurses, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read as follows:

S. 2484

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