

critical role of those people who represent and staff the homes. In 1954, administrators and senior staff of State veterans' homes around the country joined together to form an all-volunteer, non-profit organization to promote the common interests of the homes and the elderly, disabled veterans that they serve. The organization, the National Association of State Veterans Homes, has been and continues to be in the forefront of developing and supporting new methods and models for providing long term care services to elderly veterans, such as hospice care, respite care, Alzheimer's care, and adult day health care. I commend the organization for their strong commitment to ensuring that State homes receive the tools they need to provide the best care possible for America's heroes.

I would also like to commend and thank all of the individuals who work in the State homes system for providing such a vital service to those men and women who have worn the uniform of our Nation. I believe the work that these individuals do helps us fulfill the promise laid out long ago by President Lincoln, "to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and his orphan." They have dedicated themselves to provide the best care possible for our elderly and disabled veterans, and we in Congress must equally dedicate ourselves to ensure that they continue to receive sufficient support and resources from the Department of Veterans Affairs to maintain that quality of care.

H. Con. Res. 347 honors the invaluable work of those who staff State veterans' homes, the important role of the National Association of State Veterans Homes, and affirms the support of Congress in the continuation of the State Veterans' Home program.

I urge my colleagues to join me in recognizing the importance of State veterans' homes for their role in caring for our Nation's aging and disabled military heroes.

Mr. LARSON of Connecticut. Madam Speaker, I rise today in strong support of H. Con. Res. 347, a resolution honoring the National Association of State Veterans Homes and the 119 State veteran's homes nationwide who serve the health care services to our Nation's veterans.

The long and distinguished history of the Connecticut State Veterans Hospital can be traced back nearly 140 years of 1864 when Benjamin Finch opened the first veterans' home in the Nation, Fitch's Home for Soldiers and Their Orphans in Darien, to care for veterans of the Civil War. Now located in the First Congressional District in Rocky Hill, the modern day State Veterans Hospital has served Connecticut veterans since 1940. Over the years, the State veteran's hospital has grown to include nearly 40 buildings on the 90-acre Rocky Hill campus, including a domicile providing rehabilitative care and other health care services. In addition to serving the general health care needs of the State's 280,000 veterans, the hospital provides other critical services meant to help veterans in all aspects of their lives, including substance abuse treatment, education and vocational assistance, and job skill development and training.

While the staff of the State Veterans Home provides unmatched professional care for their veterans, the hospital's core facilities and campus infrastructure are almost 70 years old and is struggling to meet the needs of the vet-

erans they serve. That is why I worked so hard in helping the State obtain a \$22 million grant from the Department of Veterans Affairs' State Home Program to fund the first new construction on the Rocky Hill campus in nearly 65 years. This funding will be used to build a new state of the art facility with five new residential wards, a 25-bed Alzheimer's unit, a hospice facility, and an occupational and physical therapy department. In addition to improving service for current residents and veterans, this new facility is especially important as more soldiers in need of medical and mental health treatment return home each day from operations in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Our veterans have given so much to our Nation and they deserve the highest quality of care in return for their service. Even after 140 years, the Connecticut State Veterans Home remains an essential component of our long-term veterans' care and helps fulfill the promise of quality care for those who have proudly served our country. I look forward to continuing to work closely with our State Commissioner of Veterans Affairs, Dr. Linda Schwartz, and her staff to ensure that they have the resources they need to serve the veterans of our State and our Nation.

Mr. SALAZAR. Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from New Hampshire (Mr. BRADLEY). I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from New Hampshire (Mr. BRADLEY) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the concurrent resolution, H. Con. Res. 347.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the concurrent resolution was agreed to.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

HIRE A VETERAN WEEK

Mr. BRADLEY of New Hampshire. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the concurrent resolution (H. Con. Res 125) expressing support for the designation and goals of "Hire a Veteran Week" and encouraging the President to issue a proclamation supporting those goals.

The Clerk read as follows:

H. CON. RES. 125

Whereas the people of the United States have a sincere appreciation and respect for the military personnel who serve in the Armed Forces of the United States;

Whereas veterans possess special qualities and skills that make them ideal candidates for employment, but many veterans encounter difficulties in securing employment;

Whereas it would be inconsistent, inconsiderate, and contrary to the economic competitiveness of the United States to neglect the post-military needs of the military personnel who have served in the Armed Forces of the United States;

Whereas many of the brave men and women who have served the United States so gallantly and selflessly in the war on terrorism and the war in Iraq since September 11, 2001, are beginning to return home to be reunited with their loved ones and will be reentering the workforce or searching for their first jobs outside of military service; and

Whereas the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Department of Labor, the Office of Personnel Management, and many State and local governments administer veterans programs and have veterans employment representatives both to ensure that veterans receive the services to which they are entitled and to promote employer interest in hiring veterans: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the House of Representatives (the Senate concurring), That Congress—

(1) recognizes the importance of the men and women who have served or who currently serve in the Armed Forces of the United States;

(2) supports the designation of an appropriate week as "Hire a Veteran Week"; and

(3) encourages the President to issue a proclamation calling upon employers, labor organizations, veterans service organizations, and Federal, State, and local governmental agencies (including such agencies in the several States, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, and any other territory or possession of the United States) to lend their support to increase employment of the men and women who have served in the Armed Forces of the United States.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from New Hampshire (Mr. BRADLEY) and the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. SALAZAR) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New Hampshire.

Mr. BRADLEY of New Hampshire. Madam Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

(Mr. BRADLEY of New Hampshire asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. BRADLEY of New Hampshire. Madam Speaker, this resolution calls upon the President to establish a national Hire a Veteran Week.

No group in America deserves special employment opportunity more than our Nation's veterans. These men and women have volunteered to put themselves in harm's way to preserve the Nation's way of life and economic system. They serve on every continent, in hundreds of occupations, in remote locations, and in the toughest of combat conditions. They answer the Nation's call to duty, asking in return only our support and our thanks.

Veterans are one of the most diverse communities in America, with significant representation from all major ethnic and socioeconomic groups. Today's veterans bring a solid work ethic, understand the chain of command, are accustomed to working within a system, are highly motivated, and are comfortable with technology. Hiring a veteran to fill a good-paying job is an important way to say thank you for your service and brings a quality employee to the workforce.

Madam Speaker, this bill was jointly referred to the Committee on Armed Services which waived consideration of the bill. I would like to thank Chairman BUYER, chairman of the full committee, Acting Ranking Member FILLNER, Ranking Member EVANS, Chairman HUNTER, and Ranking Member SKELTON for their help in moving this resolution to the floor. I would also

like to commend my colleague from Colorado (Mr. SALAZAR) for his work on this bill, and thank Mr. HOLT of New Jersey for introducing this resolution.

Madam Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. SALAZAR. Madam Speaker, I yield myself as much time as I may consume.

I rise in support of House Concurrent Resolution 125, a resolution supporting the goals of Hire a Veteran Week, and I thank Mr. HOLT of New Jersey for sponsoring this great legislation.

Every day, the men and women of our Armed Forces sacrifice to protect and preserve our way of life whether by putting themselves in harm's way or by enduring time away from their loved ones at home.

Each year, 200,000 servicemembers separate from military service and hope to enjoy the privileges and opportunities they sacrificed to preserve, but many veterans face difficulties in entering the civilian workforce when they come home. This resolution expresses our support for our country's newest veterans, and it urges the President to call on all levels of government and the private sector to back up our support with action.

I urge my colleagues to support this resolution and to support its spirit, to do everything we can to help our veterans transition into civilian life and to ensure that they are given all the benefits they sacrificed to secure.

Madam Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the distinguished gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. HOLT).

Mr. HOLT. Madam Speaker, I thank the gentleman, and I would also like to thank the chairman and ranking members of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, Mr. BUYER and Mr. FILNER, for bringing this bipartisan bill to the floor. I would also particularly like to thank Mr. BROWN of South Carolina, my partner in this bill, for all of his help in moving the bill through Congress.

Madam Speaker, our Nation was built by citizen soldiers, whom all too often we fail to repay for their service. We should be giving them employment opportunities, the opportunities they deserve. By virtue of their discipline, their work ethic, their clear thinking, veterans make outstanding employees; and we should be doing all we can to help them find jobs, and yet we know veterans return from the field and have trouble breaking into the workforce.

This bill is an affirmation of the commitment of Congress to encourage all employers, government at all levels, nonprofits, trade associations, and the private sector, to think of veterans when making hiring decisions. The bill itself calls upon the President to proclaim an annual Hire a Veteran Week and to use the occasion to remind all employers of the value of hiring veterans.

Let there be no doubt, the need for a renewed national focus on veterans employment is real. If you look at the Bu-

reau of Labor statistics, for example, and take the age cohort of 18 to 24 years old, you will find among veterans recently returned from the front, unemployment is at 18.7 percent compared with 9.9 in the general population in that age cohort. The data about women actually are worse. And these aren't simply numbers. These are men and women who put on our country's uniform to protect each and every one of us. We can and we must do what we can to help them find good-paying jobs, to use their skills to contribute to our society.

This is especially true now with our country at war in multiple theaters of operation, as we are minting new veterans every day. For them to make a successful transition from military to civilian life, their employment, their job training, their readjustment needs must be a top priority for our country. I would ask my colleagues, how could we tolerate a high unemployment rate among veterans, higher than among the general population that has not served in uniform?

As the original GI bill showed us, when we invest in our veterans, our society reaps the rewards many times over. The same philosophy should guide us as we seek to help veterans obtain and sustain meaningful good-paying jobs in their civilian lives.

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This bill is a step in that direction.

Again, I thank the ranking member and the chairman of the committee and Mr. BROWN for their help.

Madam Speaker, I want to begin by thanking the chairman and ranking member of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, Mr. BUYER and Mr. FILNER, for bringing this bipartisan bill to the floor. I also want to thank my colleague and partner on this bill, Mr. BROWN of South Carolina, for all of his help in moving this bill through the Congress.

Our Nation was built by citizen-soldiers, but too often, we fail to repay their service properly by giving them the employment, education, and other opportunities they deserve. By virtue of their discipline, work ethic, and clear thinking, veterans make outstanding employees, and we should be doing all we can to help them find good jobs that benefit them and their families.

This bill is an affirmation of Congress's commitment to encourage all employers—government at all levels, nonprofits, trade associations, and the private sector—to think of veterans first when making hiring decisions.

The bill itself calls upon the President to proclaim an annual "Hire a Veteran" week and to use that occasion to remind all employers of the value of hiring veterans. I hope the President acts on this legislation swiftly, because the need for a renewed national focus on veterans' employment is real and urgent.

According to the most recent U.S. Labor Department data, in August 2005, 20- to 24-year-old veterans had an unemployment rate of 18.7 percent compared with their non-veteran counterparts. For all of 2005, the annual rate was 15.6 percent for 20- to 24-year-old veterans compared with 8.7 percent for nonveterans in that age group.

These aren't simply numbers; these are men and women who put on our country's uniform to protect each and every one of us. We can and must do more to help them find good-paying jobs that allow them to build a career and a life in the Nation they served and protected.

This is especially true now, with our country at war in multiple theaters of operation and with tens of thousands of new veterans being created every year. For them to make a successful transition from military to civilian life, veterans' employment, job training, and readjustment need to be a top national priority.

As the original GI bill showed us, when we invest in our veterans, our society reaps the rewards many times over. The same philosophy should guide us as we seek to help veterans obtain and sustain meaningful, good-paying jobs in their civilian lives. This bill is a first step in that direction, but we need to do more. We need to ensure that within both the DoD and VA budgets, we devote the necessary resources to transition assistance, job retraining—where necessary—and related activities that help veterans in their search for civilian careers.

Again, I thank my friends, the gentleman from Indiana, Mr. BUYER, and California, Mr. FILNER, for their help and support in securing passage of this bill today.

Mr. SALAZAR. Madam Speaker, I would like to, once again, commend Mr. HOLT for his tireless effort on veterans issues. I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. BROWN of South Carolina. Madam Speaker, I am proud to be the Republican sponsor of H. Con. Res. 125 along with my good friend from New Jersey, Congressman RUSH HOLT.

H. Con. Res. 125 is a very important piece of legislation that calls for the designation of "Hire-A-Veteran Week" and issuance of a presidential proclamation calling upon employers, labor organizations, and federal, state, and local governmental agencies to hire our veterans—old and new.

According to the most current data, 10.8 percent of all male veterans and 13.3 percent of female veterans between the ages of 20 and 24 are unemployed. The situation is even more troubling for minority veterans. For black male veterans and female veterans between 20–24 years of age, the unemployment rate is 17 percent and 23.9 percent respectively and for Hispanic male and female veterans in that age bracket, the rate is 8.7 percent and 21.6 percent respectively.

It is shameful that so many of our veterans who have risked their own lives to defend our freedom can't find jobs and must endure homelessness and lives of poverty after they return home. On any given day as many as 250,000 veterans are living on the streets or in homeless shelters and perhaps twice as many experience homelessness at some point during the course of a year.

The designation of "Hire-A-Veteran Week" would provide an effective and more focused way to do more to help all of our veterans find good, secure jobs and ensure better living standards for themselves and their families.

I urge all of my colleagues to support H. Con. Res. 125.

Ms. BORDALLO. Madam Speaker, I rise today in strong support of H. Con. Res. 125,

which expresses support for the designation and goals of "Hire a Veteran Week" and encourages the President to issue a proclamation supporting those goals. Certain technical abilities, discipline, teamwork, and commitment to getting a job done right the first time are among the unique skills, experiences, and qualities that our veterans possess as a result of their military service.

Civilian employers recognize these attributes as valuable to their companies. It is essential that the benefits of hiring a veteran be promoted in order to ensure that veterans are fully considered for civilian jobs upon separating from the U.S. Armed Forces.

Unfortunately, many veterans experience difficulty finding employment following their service in the U.S. Armed Forces. H. Con. Res. 125 and "Hire a Veteran Week" represent a commitment to improving the civilian professional and economic opportunities for the dedicated men and women who have worn our country's uniform.

I urge support for H. Con. Res. 125.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. BRADLEY of New Hampshire. 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. Con. Res. 125.

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

There was no objection.

Mr. BRADLEY of New Hampshire. Madam Speaker, I urge my colleagues to unanimously support H. Con. Res. 125.

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

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from New Hampshire (Mr. BRADLEY) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the concurrent resolution, H. Con. Res. 125.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the concurrent resolution was agreed to.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

VETERANS SMALL BUSINESS AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS ACT OF 2006

Mr. BRADLEY of New Hampshire. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 3082) to amend title 38, United States Code, to require that 9 percent of procurement contracts entered into by the Department of Veterans Affairs be awarded to small business concerns owned by veterans, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 3082

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

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE; TABLE OF CONTENTS.

(a) **SHORT TITLE.**—This Act may be cited as the "Veterans Small Business and Memorial Affairs Act of 2006".

(b) **TABLE OF CONTENTS.**—The table of contents for this Act is as follows:

Sec. 1. Short title; table of contents.

TITLE I—SMALL BUSINESS

Sec. 101. Department of Veterans Affairs goals for participation by small businesses owned and controlled by veterans in procurement contracts.

Sec. 102. Department of Veterans Affairs contracting priority for veteran-owned small businesses.

Sec. 103. Effective date.

TITLE II—MEMORIAL AFFAIRS

Sec. 201. Eligibility of Indian tribal organizations for grants for the establishment of veterans cemeteries on trust lands.

Sec. 202. Repeal of expiration and expanded application of Department of Veterans Affairs benefit for Government markers or headstones for marked graves of veterans buried in private cemeteries.

Sec. 203. Provision of Government memorial headstones or markers and memorial inscriptions for deceased dependent children of veterans whose remains are unavailable for burial.

TITLE III—VETERANS' EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING

Sec. 301. Professional qualifications for disabled veterans' outreach program specialists and local veterans' employment representatives.

Sec. 302. Rules for part-time employment for disabled veterans' outreach program specialists and local veterans' employment representatives.

Sec. 303. State licensing and certification programs for veterans.

Sec. 304. Training of new disabled veterans' outreach program specialists and local veterans' employment representatives by NVTI required.

Sec. 305. Matters for inclusion in annual report on VETS program.

Sec. 306. Demonstration project on contracting for placement of certain disabled veterans.

Sec. 307. Performance incentive awards for employment service offices.

Sec. 308. Department of Labor implementation of priority of service for veterans requirement.

Sec. 309. Demonstration project on credentialing and licensure of veterans.

TITLE IV—EDUCATION

Sec. 401. Exception for institutions offering Government-sponsored nonaccredited courses to requirement of re-funding unused tuition.

Sec. 402. Extension of work-study allowance.

Sec. 403. Report on improvement in administration of educational assistance benefits.

Sec. 404. Restoration of lost entitlement for individuals who had to discontinue a course of education because of being ordered to full-time National Guard duty.

Sec. 405. Technical amendments.

TITLE I—SMALL BUSINESS

SEC. 101. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS GOALS FOR PARTICIPATION BY SMALL BUSINESSES OWNED AND CONTROLLED BY VETERANS IN PROCUREMENT CONTRACTS.

(a) **IN GENERAL.**—Subchapter II of chapter 81 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new section:

"§8127. Small business concerns owned and controlled by veterans; Department contracting goals and preferences

"(a) CONTRACTING GOALS.—(1) In order to increase contracting opportunities for small busi-

ness concerns owned and controlled by veterans and small business concerns owned and controlled by veterans with service-connected disabilities, the Secretary shall—

"(A) establish a goal for each fiscal year for participation in Department contracts (including subcontracts) by small business concerns owned and controlled by veterans who are not veterans with service-connected disabilities in accordance with paragraph (2); and

"(B) establish a goal for each fiscal year for participation in Department contracts (including subcontracts) by small business concerns owned and controlled by veterans with service-connected disabilities in accordance with paragraph (3).

"(2) The goal for a fiscal year for participation under paragraph (1)(A) shall be determined by the Secretary.

"(3) The goal for a fiscal year for participation under paragraph (1)(B) shall be not less than the Government-wide goal for that fiscal year for participation by small business concerns owned and controlled by veterans with service-connected disabilities under section 15(g)(1) of the Small Business Act (15 U.S.C. 644(g)(1)).

"(4) The annual performance review of the senior official of each Administration of the Department and each Assistant Secretary of the Department with procurement authority shall include an assessment of whether or not that official or Assistant Secretary met the contracting goals established pursuant to this subsection during the year for which the performance review is conducted with respect to contracts awarded during that year for which that official or Assistant Secretary had responsibility. If the official or Assistant Secretary is found not to have met such contracting goals, the official or Assistant Secretary shall not receive an award known as a performance award or an award known as a presidential rank award for that year.

"(5) In the case of a subcontract of a Department contract that is counted for purposes of meeting a goal established pursuant to this section, the Secretary shall conduct a review of the contract and subcontract to verify that the subcontract was actually awarded to a business concern that may be counted for purposes of meeting that goal.

"(6) The Secretary shall maintain a list based on the reviews conducted under paragraph (5) that contains the name of the contractor associated with each contract reviewed under that paragraph and whether each subcontract awarded by the contractor that is counted for purposes of meeting a goal established pursuant to this section was actually awarded to and performed by a business concern that may be counted for purposes of meeting that goal. The Secretary shall make such list publicly available.

"(b) USE OF NONCOMPETITIVE PROCEDURES FOR CERTAIN SMALL CONTRACTS.—For purposes of meeting the goals under subsection (a), and in accordance with this section, in entering into a contract with a small business concern owned and controlled by veterans for an amount less than the simplified acquisition threshold (as defined in section 4 of the Office of Federal Procurement Policy Act (41 U.S.C. 403)), a contracting officer of the Department may use procedures other than competitive procedures.

"(c) SOLE SOURCE CONTRACTS FOR CONTRACTS ABOVE SIMPLIFIED ACQUISITION THRESHOLD.—For purposes of meeting the goals under subsection (a), and in accordance with this section, a contracting officer of the Department may award a contract to a small business concern owned and controlled by veterans using procedures other than competitive procedures if—

"(1) such concern is determined to be a responsible source with respect to performance of such contract opportunity;