

EMERGENCY SERVICES COALITION
FOR MEDICAL PREPAREDNESS,
Falls Church, VA, November 19, 2012.

Hon. GUS BILIRAKIS,
Chairman, Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Communications,
Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives, Washington, DC.

DEAR CHAIRMAN BILIRAKIS: The Emergency Services Coalition for Medical Preparedness is pleased to support H.R. 5997 and the proposed amendment of the Homeland Security Act of 2002. The need for home and workplaces of medical caches to protect the emergency services providers in the nation remains high. Recent reports for the congressionally-chartered WMD Commission emphasize the continuing threat posed by biological weapons. Ensuring a resilient emergency services sector is an imperative for a superior response, a major part of this planning is the provision of Medkits pre-event to these professionals.

Emergency services professionals have unique roles, and are expected to serve and protect even in dangerous circumstances. Having responsible pre-event protections in place is necessary to ensure they can carry out this role. Individual physician-based prescription efforts have provided protection to hundreds of postal employees and federal employees, but not the millions of protectors and their families. Your bill addresses this gap.

We look forward to working with you and your staff in the passage of the Bill. Thank you for your leadership and continuing support in "protecting the protectors."

Sincerely,

TIM STEPHENS,
Advisor.

Mr. THOMPSON of Mississippi. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 5997, the Medical Preparedness Allowable Use Act, and yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, although I support H.R. 5997, it is not without reservation and concern about the reduced funding this Congress has allocated to important Homeland Security Grant Programs over the past few years. Due to significantly diminished appropriations for the Homeland Security Grant Program, important targeted grant programs such as the Metropolitan Medical Response System were consolidated into larger umbrella grant programs, such as the Urban Area Security Initiative and the State Homeland Security Grant Program in FY 2012.

I'm concerned that Congress' failure to specify a funding allocation for the Metropolitan Medical Response System sends the message that medical preparedness is no longer a priority.

H.R. 5997 authorizes the use of funding awarded under the Urban Area Security Initiative and the State Homeland Security Grant Program to enhance medical preparedness, medical surge capacity, and mass distribution of medical countermeasures. All of these activities would have been eligible under H.R. 1411, the Metropolitan Medical Response Systems Program Act of 2011.

H.R. 1411, which would have authorized the Metropolitan Medical Response System, was introduced by Representative BILIRAKIS and was marked up by the Subcommittee on Emergency

Preparedness, Response and Communications last year. I would rather be standing here today in support of H.R. 1411, which would send a clear message that medical preparedness is a priority for this Congress.

That said, I will support H.R. 5997 because I understand that grant resources are limited and that State and local governments must have the flexibility to utilize the scarce resources available to improve medical preparedness.

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

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I have no other speakers. I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. THOMPSON of Mississippi. Mr. Speaker, despite my reservations regarding this measure, I encourage my colleagues to support H.R. 5997, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Ranking Member, we'll continue to work on getting that bill passed. I promise you. That's my bill, and we worked very hard. As you said, it was marked up in committee, and we'll continue to advocate on behalf, of course, of the MMRS grant program.

Mr. Speaker, I once again urge Members to support this very important bill that ensures medical preparedness activities remain an allowable use under Homeland Security Grant Programs.

I yield back the balance of my time. The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Florida (Mr. BILIRAKIS) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 5997, as amended.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds being in the affirmative, the ayes have it.

Mr. THOMPSON of Mississippi. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, and the Chair's prior announcement, further proceedings on this question will be postponed.

CLOTHE A HOMELESS HERO ACT

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 6328) to amend title 49, United States Code, to direct the Assistant Secretary of Homeland Security (Transportation Security Administration) to transfer unclaimed clothing recovered at airport security checkpoints to local veterans organizations and other local charitable organizations, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 6328

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 "Clothe a Homeless Hero Act".

SEC. 2. DISPOSITION OF UNCLAIMED CLOTHING RECOVERED AT AIRPORT SECURITY CHECKPOINTS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Section 44945 of title 49, United States Code, is amended—

(1) in the section heading, by inserting "and clothing" after "money";

(2) by inserting before the text the following: "(a) DISPOSITION OF UNCLAIMED MONEY.—"; and

(3) by adding at the end the following:

"(b) DISPOSITION OF UNCLAIMED CLOTHING.—

"(1) IN GENERAL.—In disposing of unclaimed clothing recovered at any airport security checkpoint, the Assistant Secretary shall make every reasonable effort, in consultation with the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, to transfer the clothing to local veterans organizations or other local charitable organizations for distribution to homeless or needy veterans and veteran families.

"(2) AGREEMENTS.—In implementing paragraph (1), the Assistant Secretary may enter into agreements with airport authorities.

"(3) OTHER CHARITABLE ARRANGEMENTS.—Nothing in this subsection shall prevent an airport or the Transportation Security Administration from donating unclaimed clothing to a charitable organization of their choosing.

"(4) LIMITATION.—Nothing in this subsection shall create a cost to the Government."

(b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections at the beginning of chapter 449 of such title is amended by striking the item relating to such section and inserting the following:

"44945. Disposition of unclaimed money and clothing."

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. BILIRAKIS) and the gentlewoman from New York (Ms. HOCHUL) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Florida.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and include any extraneous material on the bill under consideration.

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

There was no objection.

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

Mr. Speaker, as vice chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee and a senior member of the Committee on Homeland Security, I rise in support of H.R. 6328, again, a bipartisan bill, a bill sponsored by my colleague, Ms. HOCHUL, the Clothe a Homeless Hero Act.

According to estimates from the Department of Housing and Urban Development, in 2011 approximately 14 percent of all homeless adults were veterans, with more than 67,000 veterans homeless on any given night—unacceptable.

We must do all that we can to ensure that the veterans who have courageously served our country are not forgotten and are receiving the care and services they deserve. VA Secretary Eric Shinseki has set a laudable goal of

ending veterans' homelessness by 2015 and has established partnerships with other Federal agencies, such as HUD, to accomplish it.

The bill before us today will forge another important partnership in our efforts to serve homeless veterans, one with the Transportation Security Administration. Each day, as Americans travel through screening checkpoints operated by TSA at our Nation's airports, many articles of clothing are left behind. In fact, TSA reports that they collect between 500 and 1,000 garments per day.

H.R. 6328 directs the TSA Administrator to make every reasonable effort to donate this unclaimed clothing to local organizations that serve homeless or needy veterans.

I urge Members to support this legislation, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. HOCHUL. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 6328, the Clothe a Homeless Hero Act, and yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I just flew in from the Buffalo airport, and there was a dusting of snow on the ground. I'm sure my colleague from Florida did not have a similar experience, but it bodes poorly for the veterans who are going to be spending the nights on the streets of Buffalo and other cold places. As the weather starts to change, it's something that's very hurtful to see, as an American, and to know that there are veterans who put on their uniform and went overseas to fight and protect all of us, and to know that 20,000 recently returning veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan will find themselves homeless tonight.

□ 1720

That is a national disgrace. As all of us rush through airports every week along with many thousands of Americans, it's not uncommon for scarves and hats and other articles of clothing to be inadvertently left behind at TSA checkpoints. In fact, I, myself, left a scarf behind, which prompted my thoughts of how we could handle this surplus clothing. It adds up to thousands of pounds of abandoned clothes annually. There can be no better purpose than for this unclaimed clothing to help America's homeless veterans.

Homelessness has gone on the rise among our veterans. This is absolutely an unconscionable, untenable situation. As a country, we have a moral obligation to do so much more to eradicate this untenable situation. And I know that in a bipartisan way this is one step toward that effort. Even if one of our veterans stays warm this winter because of the clothing provided through this legislation, it would have been well worth the effort.

The Clothe a Homeless Hero Act directs the TSA to make every reasonable effort to transfer unclaimed clothing to local veterans organizations or other local charitable organizations for distribution to homeless veterans and

their dependents. Nothing in this bill prevents airports or the TSA from donating these items to charities of their choosing if they already have relationships in place. And most importantly, this legislation would not create a cost to the government.

When I offered this proposal in the Committee on Homeland Security, I was so grateful that it received unanimous, bipartisan support from all my colleagues. I thank the overall committee chairman, Mr. PETER KING, Ranking Member THOMPSON, members of the Committee on Homeland Security, and Subcommittee Chairman Mr. BILIRAKIS for all their support.

I urge all of our colleagues to join us in advancing this simple, deficit-neutral bill to assist the heroes who once wore the uniform and have fallen on hard times and need this clothing.

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

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time. If the gentlewoman from New York has no further speakers, I am prepared to close.

Ms. HOCHUL. Mr. Speaker, as you've heard, H.R. 6328 enjoys bipartisan support of the members of the Committee on Homeland Security and deserves the full support of the House today. I think this is an important step we take, particularly with the holiday season approaching, cold weather approaching, and it's a small step that we can take to help these veterans who were heroes at one time and now need the help of all of us as American citizens.

I yield back the balance of my time.
Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I urge Members to support this legislation and, in turn, support homeless veterans.

I yield back the balance of my time.
Mr. THOMPSON of Mississippi. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 6328, the "Clothe a Homeless Hero Act."

At the outset, I would like to commend Representative HOCHUL, the author of H.R. 6328, for her tireless work on behalf of her constituents, our veterans and for her service on the Committee on Homeland Security.

Since she joined the Committee, I have watched as Representative HOCHUL worked to identify bipartisan solutions to our Nation's problems.

H.R. 6328 is the byproduct of her collaborative and thoughtful approach.

This measure requires TSA to make every reasonable effort to transfer unclaimed clothing recovered at airport security checkpoints so that it can get to needy veterans and their families.

One of the unfortunate realities we face following times of war is that some of those who fought for our freedoms face challenges in transitioning to civilian life.

We owe it to our veterans to do all that we can to ensure they get the helping hand needed to get back on their feet when they return from the battlefield.

Thanks to Representative HOCHUL's leadership, the House has an opportunity today to take a small, but important, step in support of our veterans by supporting this bill.

Mr. Speaker, as you have heard, H.R. 6328 enjoys the bipartisan support of the Members

of the Committee on Homeland Security and deserves the support of the Full House today.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Florida (Mr. BILIRAKIS) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 6328.

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.

HOUR OF MEETING ON TOMORROW

Mr. BILIRAKIS. I ask unanimous consent that when the House adjourns today, it adjourn to meet at noon tomorrow.

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

There was no objection.

RESIGNATION FROM THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following resignation from the House of Representatives:

CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES,
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
Washington, DC, November 21, 2012.

Hon. JOHN BOEHNER,
Speaker of the House, The Capitol,
Washington, DC.

MR. SPEAKER: In 1995 when I was first elected to the House of Representatives I came to Washington with a singular purpose—to serve the constituents of the Second District of Illinois. During that time for seventeen years I have traveled on a journey with the citizens of the Second District of Illinois, and with their unwavering support we have worked together to transform what was once an underdeveloped and nearly forgotten South Side of Chicago.

Along this journey we have accomplished much. We have built new train stations, water towers, and emergency rooms. We have brought affordable housing, community centers and healthcare clinics to those who needed it most. In all, nearly a billion dollars worth of infrastructure and community improvement has been made on the South Side of Chicago and thousands of new jobs have been created. We began this journey by promising fresh water for the people of Ford Heights and a new airport that would employ upon completion 300,000 people. Today the people of Ford Heights have fresh water and sitting on the Governor's desk is a \$400,000,000 proposal for an airport that will cost the taxpayers nothing and only awaits the Governor's commitment to build it. And while our journey to strengthen our communities and provide a better future for our children will continue, I know that together we have made the Second District of Illinois a better place.

For seventeen years I have given 100 percent of my time, energy, and life to public service. However, over the past several months, as my health has deteriorated, my ability to serve the constituents of my district has continued to diminish. Against the recommendations of my doctors, I had hoped and tried to return to Washington and continue working on the issues that matter most to the people of the Second District. I know now that will not be possible.