

2015. Veterans who are rated as 100 percent disabled by the Department of Veterans Affairs and who own at least 51 percent of their small business receive preferred status in the Federal contracting process.

If the veteran small-business owner passes away, the surviving family members and business partners are not allowed any time to transition away from this preferred status, thereby putting their businesses in jeopardy of losing any Federal contracts they may have. Last year, there were an estimated 500,000 of these businesses nationwide.

This bill provides a 3-year transition period during which the business would keep its preferential status and any Federal contracts associated with that status should the veteran owner pass away.

Current law does, however, allow the surviving spouse to maintain preferred status for up to 3 years following the death of a veteran owner, but only if that veteran had a 100 percent service-connected disability rating and died due to the disability.

H.R. 1313 further expands the transition period from 3 to 10 years after the veteran owner's death if the veteran were either 100 percent disabled or died from a service-connected disability.

H.R. 1313 is a fair policy that will ensure we protect the hard work and investment of our service-connected disabled veterans who own small businesses.

I would like to thank Chairman WENSTRUP and Ranking Member TAKANO of the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity of the Veterans' Affairs Committee for their support of this bill and Mr. MCNERNEY for bringing it to us.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. WENSTRUP. Mr. Speaker, at this time, I, again, reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. TITUS. Mr. Speaker, at this time, I yield 5 minutes to the gentleman from California (Mr. MCNERNEY).

Mr. MCNERNEY. Mr. Speaker, first, I want to thank Chairman WENSTRUP and Ranking Member TAKANO for their continued work on behalf of our Nation's veterans and for bringing these commonsense bills to the floor today.

Small businesses are the economic drivers in our communities, and we must give them opportunities they need to grow and prosper. Veteran entrepreneurs, in particular, are some of the most apt at starting, managing, and growing small businesses.

In the United States, there are about 5 million veteran-owned businesses and an estimated 500,000 service-disabled veteran-owned small businesses. A service-disabled veteran-owned small business is one that must be at least 51 percent directly owned and controlled by one or more service-disabled veterans.

The Federal Government established procurement contracting goals for

small businesses in 1978 and set aside 3 percent of the total value of all Federal contracts for veteran-owned small businesses. Although some Federal agencies meet these goals, there are no penalties for not meeting the 3 percent small business procurement goal. The VA is diligent, on the other hand, in meeting this goal.

Under current law, if a veteran who was rated 100 percent disabled and owned a service-disabled veteran-owned small business passes away, the surviving spouse has 10 years to transition the business away from service-disabled veteran-owned small business status for contracts that the company has with the VA.

However, if the veteran businessowner was rated at less than 100 percent disabled or dies of a nonservice-connected injury, the surviving spouse has only 1 year to transition the business for contracts with the VA.

Unfortunately, this is not enough transition time for service-disabled veteran-owned small businesses whose owner passes away and was rated at less than 100 percent disabled to reposition the business, putting many service-disabled veteran-owned small businesses at a disadvantage. We need to correct this deficiency in the law.

That is why I introduced H.R. 1313, the Service Disabled Veteran Owned Small Business Relief Act. My bill allows the service-disabled veteran-owned small business, whose principal owner passes away and was rated at less than 100 percent disabled at the time of death, with a reasonable 3-year transition period from service-disabled veteran-owned small business status with the VA.

It is only right that we provide our heroes and their families and the employees with flexibility and certainty to ensure their businesses continue to thrive. The loss of a veteran businessowner is already tragic enough for their families and can put service-disabled veteran-owned small businesses at severe risk of closing or downsizing because of the loss of Federal contracts.

H.R. 1313 is supported by the Paralyzed Veterans of America, AMVETS, Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, The American Legion, and Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America. In addition, the VA said, at a subcommittee hearing on March 24 of this year, that the bill is a reasonable approach.

I hope that my colleagues will join me in passing this commonsense bill and support veteran-owned small businesses across the country.

Mr. WENSTRUP. Mr. Speaker, at this time, I have no further speakers, and I reserve the balance of my time.

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

I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 1313, to ensure that our service-connected disabled-veteran small-business owners are able to leave a legacy for their families and coworkers when they pass away.

At this point, I don't have any other speakers, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. WENSTRUP. Once again, Mr. Speaker, I encourage all Members to support H.R. 1313, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. WENSTRUP) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 1313.

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. WENSTRUP. 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, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

#### BOOSTING RATES OF AMERICAN VETERAN EMPLOYMENT ACT

Mr. WENSTRUP. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 1382) to amend title 38, United States Code, to authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, in awarding a contract for the procurement of goods or services, to give a preference to offerors that employ veterans, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 1382

*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 "Boosting Rates of American Veteran Employment Act" or the "BRAVE Act".

#### SEC. 2. PREFERENCE FOR OFFERORS EMPLOYING VETERANS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Subchapter II of chapter 81 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding after section 8128 the following new section:

#### “§ 8129. Preference for offerors employing veterans

“(a) PREFERENCE.—In awarding a contract (or task order) for the procurement of goods or services, the Secretary may give a preference to offerors that employ veterans on a full-time basis. The Secretary shall determine such preference based on the percentage of the full-time employees of the offeror who are veterans.

“(b) ENFORCEMENT PENALTIES FOR MISREPRESENTATION.—(1) Any offeror that is determined by the Secretary to have willfully and intentionally misrepresented the veteran status of the employees of the offeror for purposes of subsection (a) shall be debarred from contracting with the Department for a period of not less than five years.

“(2) In the case of a debarment under paragraph (1), the Secretary shall commence debarment action against the offeror by not later than 30 days after determining that the offeror willfully and intentionally misrepresented the veteran status of the employees of the offeror as described in paragraph (1) and shall complete debarment actions against such offeror by not later than 90 days after such determination.

“(3) The debarment of an offeror under paragraph (1) includes the debarment of all

principals in the offeror for a period of not less than five years.”

(b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections at the beginning of such chapter is amended by inserting after the item relating to section 8128 the following new item:

“8129. Preference for offerors employing veterans.”

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. WENSTRUP) and the gentlewoman from Nevada (Ms. TITUS) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Ohio.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. WENSTRUP. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and to add extraneous material on H.R. 1382, as amended.

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

There was no objection.

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

Mr. Speaker, to improve employment opportunities for veterans and business opportunities for the companies that employ them, H.R. 1382, as amended, would require the Secretary to consider the number of veterans working for an offeror in the decision to award a contract.

Under the bill, the Secretary may give a preference to such employers based on the percentage of the workforce made up by veterans. The bill would also provide the Secretary with debarment authority for any offeror who willfully and intentionally misrepresents the number of veterans they employ.

Mr. Speaker, the unemployment rate among certain age groups of veterans still exceeds their nonveteran peers, and this is one commonsense step to increase job opportunities for veterans of all ages.

I thank Miss RICE for her hard work on this bill.

I reserve the balance of my time.

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

I rise in support of H.R. 1382, as amended, the Boosting Rates of American Veteran Employment Act, or BRAVE Act, of 2015.

According to the April 2015 Bureau of Labor Statistics report, almost 7 percent of post-9/11 veterans are unemployed, which is higher than the national average.

□ 1630

These men and women have dutifully served their country. Now it is our job as Members of Congress to craft policies that will improve and increase employment opportunities for them. This includes improving the Federal contracting process to incentivize private sector companies to hire more veterans when they come home.

The Department of Veterans Affairs establishes long-term contracts with

private sector businesses to provide veterans medical equipment, supplies, services, and other things. Currently, the VA gives preference for these contracts to veteran-owned small businesses, but it does not give preference to businesses that actively employ veterans. This bipartisan BRAVE Act allows the VA to consider the proportion of veterans employed by a prospective contractor when awarding those Federal contracts. It also encourages and incentivizes current VA contractors to employ more veterans.

H.R. 1382 deters companies from exaggerating the number of veterans they employ in order to become more competitive for procurement, requiring debarment for any company that knowingly misrepresents its proportion of veteran employees.

H.R. 1382 does not require offsets nor does it add any burdens on taxpayers. This bipartisan legislation will reward companies who hire veterans, thus incentivizing the private sector recruitment of veteran employees. It is, indeed, a win-win-win policy for the private sector, for the Federal Government, and, most importantly, for the veterans, themselves.

I want to thank Miss RICE, who is the sponsor of this bill, Chairman MILLER for bringing it to the floor, and Dr. WENSTRUP and Mr. TAKANO—the chairman and ranking member of the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity—for their work on the bill.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. WENSTRUP. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. TITUS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 5 minutes to the gentlewoman from New York (Miss RICE), who is the sponsor of this important legislation.

Miss RICE of New York. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of my legislation, H.R. 1382, the Boosting Rates of American Veteran Employment Act.

I doubt there is a single Member of this body who would disagree that American veterans—men and women who have stepped up to protect our country and preserve the freedom that we cherish—deserve our full support when they have completed their service. They deserve the opportunity to find a good job, to support themselves and their families. They deserve the opportunity to succeed in civilian life, to adapt their extraordinary skills, training, and experience in order to thrive in a civilian workforce, and to continue making a meaningful contribution to our economy.

We have seen real progress in adding veterans to the workforce, but we cannot be satisfied with that progress while so many men and women still struggle to find the good jobs they deserve. We cannot be satisfied when the unemployment rate among post-9/11 veterans remains higher than the national average. We cannot be satisfied if even a single American veteran who wants to work is not given the opportunity to do so—is left jobless, home-

less, forgotten, and abandoned by the country he or she served.

Unemployment among veterans is not only a stain on the character of our country, it is not only a dereliction of the promise we make to the people who risk their lives to protect us; it is a missed opportunity.

Veterans have received the most advanced and sophisticated training the world has to offer. They have unique skills and experience. They know how to work as members of a team. They know how to succeed in the most difficult conditions. They know how to get the job done, whatever that job may be. They received that training, they developed those skills, and gained that experience because we invested in them as servicemembers, and we would be foolish not to double down on that investment. We would be foolish not to invest in them as veterans—invest in their potential to adapt their training and skills and experience so they may use it to thrive in a civilian workforce and contribute to our economy.

We need businesses in the private sector to recognize the benefit of having veterans in their workforces. We need businesses to recognize that it is in their self-interest to actively seek out and employ veterans, not as an act of charity, but because they are excellent workers who know how to get the job done and how to bring out the best in their fellow employees. That is why it is so important that we pass H.R. 1382.

This legislation will make the kind of investment that Members of both parties can be pleased to support—the kind that costs no money. The Department of Veterans Affairs is already authorized for \$19 billion in total procurement and contracting spending. This legislation will simply ensure that, when the Secretary of the VA is awarding those contracts, he has the authority to give preference to businesses with high concentrations of full-time veteran employees, businesses that make it a priority to actively seek out veterans and provide them with meaningful full-time employment.

As has been noted, the VA can already give such preference to veteran-owned businesses, as it should. We should give that same advantage to contractors who actively invest in veterans, who recognize their value and their potential to thrive in the civilian workforce.

Such companies do exist, and this legislation will reward them for their commitment to giving veterans the opportunities they have earned. But in doing so, in creating such an advantage, this legislation will also create an incentive for other contractors to do the same, to be proactive, to make it a priority to seek out veterans who are looking for employment. In time, I have no doubt that they will recognize the value of investing in veterans as they will find themselves with a more productive, efficient, and effective workforce.

Mr. Speaker, I want to give a special thanks to my colead sponsor on the other side of the aisle, Congressman PAUL COOK, a combat veteran who served 26 years and retired as a colonel from the United States Marine Corps.

I also think it is important to note that this bill has the support of several major veteran service organizations, including the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the American Legion, and the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would like to express my support for another bill that I am proud to cosponsor, Dr. WENSTRUP'S legislation—H.R. 474, the Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Programs Reauthorization Act.

The HVRP provides critical support to help reintegrate homeless veterans into the workforce and to address the underlying issues that so often lead to life on the streets—services ranging from job training, job placement, and career counseling to clothing, housing, transportation, and treatment for mental health and substance abuse disorders. This program has been successful, and passing a 5-year reauthorization will secure its future and allow State and local agencies to plan long-term programming.

I thank Dr. WENSTRUP for his leadership on this issue, and I urge my colleagues to give H.R. 474 their full support.

Ms. TITUS. Mr. Speaker, I strongly support H.R. 1382, and I urge my colleagues to do the same.

I don't have any additional speakers, so I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. WENSTRUP. Mr. Speaker, once again, I encourage all Members to support H.R. 1382, as amended, and I thank Miss RICE for presenting this legislation.

I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. WENSTRUP) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 1382, as amended.

The question was taken.

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

Mr. WENSTRUP. 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, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

#### VETERAN'S I.D. CARD ACT

Mr. WENSTRUP. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 91) to amend title 38, United States Code, to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to issue, upon request, veteran identification cards to certain veterans, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 91

*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 "Veteran's I.D. Card Act".

#### SEC. 2. VETERANS IDENTIFICATION CARD.

(a) FINDINGS.—Congress finds the following:

(1) Currently, veteran identification cards are issued to veterans who have either completed the statutory time-in-service requirement for retirement from the Armed Forces or who have received a medical-related discharge from the Armed Forces.

(2) A veteran who has served a minimum obligated time in service, but who does not meet the criteria described in paragraph (1), does not receive a means of identifying the veteran's status as a veteran other than using the official DD-214 discharge papers of the veteran.

(3) Goods, services, and promotional activities are often offered by public and private institutions to veterans who demonstrate proof of service in the military but it is impractical for a veteran to always carry official DD-214 discharge papers to demonstrate such proof.

(4) A general purpose veteran identification card made available to a veteran who does not meet the criteria described in paragraph (1) would be useful to such veteran in order to demonstrate the status of the veteran without having to carry and use official DD-214 discharge papers.

(5) The Department of Veterans Affairs has the infrastructure in place across the United States to produce photographic identification cards and accept a small payment to cover the cost of these cards.

(b) PROVISION OF VETERAN IDENTIFICATION CARDS.—Chapter 57 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding after section 5705 the following new section:

#### "§ 5706. Veterans identification card

"(a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall issue an identification card described in subsection (b) to any covered veteran who—

"(1) requests such card;

"(2) was discharged from the Armed Forces under honorable conditions;

"(3) presents a copy of the DD-214 form or other official document from the official military personnel file of the veteran that describes the service of the veteran; and

"(4) pays the fee under subsection (c)(1).

"(b) IDENTIFICATION CARD.—An identification card described in this subsection is a card that—

"(1) displays a photograph of the covered veteran;

"(2) displays the name of the covered veteran;

"(3) explains that such card is not proof of any benefits to which the veteran is entitled to;

"(4) contains an identification number that is not a social security number; and

"(5) serves as proof that such veteran—

"(A) honorably served in the Armed Forces; and

"(B) has a DD-214 form or other official document in the official military personnel file of the veteran that describes the service of the veteran.

"(c) COSTS OF CARD.—(1) The Secretary shall charge a fee to each veteran who receives an identification card issued under this section, including a replacement identification card.

"(2)(A) The fee charged under paragraph (1) shall equal an amount that the Secretary determines is necessary to issue an identification card under this section.

"(B) In determining the amount of the fee under subparagraph (A), the Secretary shall ensure that the total amount of fees collected under paragraph (1) equals an amount necessary to carry out this section, including costs related to any additional equipment or personnel required to carry out this section.

"(C) The Secretary shall review and reassess the determination under subparagraph (A) during each five-year period in which the Secretary issues an identification card under this section.

"(3) Amounts collected under this subsection shall be deposited in an account of the Department available to carry out this section. Amounts so deposited shall be—

"(A) merged with amounts in such account;

"(B) available in such amounts as may be provided in appropriation Acts; and

"(C) subject to the same conditions and limitations as amounts otherwise in such account.

"(d) EFFECT OF CARD ON BENEFITS.—(1) An identification card issued under this section shall not serve as proof of any benefits that the veteran may be entitled to under this title.

"(2) A covered veteran who is issued an identification card under this section shall not be entitled to any benefits under this title by reason of possessing such card.

"(e) ADMINISTRATIVE MEASURES.—(1) The Secretary shall ensure that any information collected or used with respect to an identification card issued under this section is appropriately secured.

"(2) The Secretary may determine any appropriate procedures with respect to issuing a replacement identification card.

"(3) In carrying out this section, the Secretary shall coordinate with the National Personnel Records Center.

"(4) The Secretary may conduct such outreach to advertise the identification card under this section as the Secretary considers appropriate.

"(f) CONSTRUCTION.—This section shall not be construed to affect identification cards otherwise provided by the Secretary to veterans enrolled in the health care system established under section 1705(a) of this title.

"(g) COVERED VETERAN DEFINED.—In this section, the term 'covered veteran' means a veteran who—

"(1) is not entitled to retired pay under chapter 1223 of title 10; and

"(2) is not enrolled in the system of patient enrollment under section 1705 of this title."

(c) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections at the beginning of such chapter is amended by inserting after the item relating to section 5705 the following new item:

"5706. Veterans identification card."

(d) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendments made by this Act shall take effect on the date that is 60 days after the date of the enactment of this Act.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. WENSTRUP) and the gentleman from Nevada (Ms. TITUS) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Ohio.

#### GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. WENSTRUP. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and to add extraneous material on H.R. 91, as amended.

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