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No. 23

## House of Representatives

The House met at noon and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. FARENTHOLD).

### DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Speaker:

WASHINGTON, DC,  
February 9, 2016.

I hereby appoint the Honorable BLAKE FARENTHOLD to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

PAUL D. RYAN,  
*Speaker of the House of Representatives.*

### MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

A message in writing from the President of the United States was communicated to the House by Mr. Brian Pate, one of his secretaries.

### MORNING-HOUR DEBATE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 5, 2016, the Chair would now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning-hour debate.

### RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until 2 p.m. today.

Accordingly (at 2 o'clock and 1 minute p.m.), the House stood in recess.

□ 1400

### AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. FARENTHOLD) at 2 p.m.

### PRAYER

The Chaplain, the Reverend Patrick J. Conroy, offered the following prayer: Merciful God, we give You thanks for giving us another day.

We ask Your special blessing upon the Members of this people's House. They face difficult decisions in difficult times, with many forces and interests demanding their attention.

Enlighten the hearts of those who are faithful and tireless in securing equal justice under the law. Fulfill the hopes of those who long for peace and security for their children. Guide and protect all elected officials and all who choose to serve this Nation through public service.

Unite Your people and keep them focused on essentials that reflect Your kingdom, even in the midst of conflicting opinions, philosophical differences, and the contentiousness of an election season.

Bless us, O God, and be with us all this day and every day to come. May all that is done be for Your greater honor and glory.

Amen.

### THE JOURNAL

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair has examined the Journal of the last day's proceedings and announces to the House his approval thereof.

Pursuant to clause 1, rule I, the Journal stands approved.

### PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Will the gentleman from Texas (Mr. BABIN) come forward and lead the House in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. BABIN led the Pledge of Allegiance as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

### MAKING GOVERNMENT WORK BETTER

(Mr. LAMALFA asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. LAMALFA. Mr. Speaker, our charge in Congress is to be very careful and frugal and honest with the people's money that they send via their hard-earned tax dollars.

Today we have an opportunity to make good on part of that with our commitment to making the government work better for the people it serves, control spending, and work at finally getting down the national debt.

The VA medical facility construction process is broken and highly in need of major reform. For example, in Colorado, the VA spent at least triple, probably quadruple, even quintuple, what it was expected to spend on the construction of a replacement hospital due to mismanagement and lack of accountability.

The GAO found in 2013 that the VA's four largest medical construction projects were experiencing significant delays and massive cost increases. In my district, the VA plans to build two replacement clinics, in Redding and in Chico, which the VA says will take 5 years.

In order to streamline and improve the VA's medical facility construction process, the House will vote on H.R. 3106 today, which is sponsored by Chairman JEFF MILLER of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

The bill includes commonsense reforms that will require the VA to use industry standards for medical facility construction projects and increase congressional oversight.

I am proud to support this bill and to continue to work to be accountable to the American people, especially our veterans, who need and deserve clear access, present access, and timely access to the health care they deserve.

□ This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., □ 1407 is 2:07 p.m.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.



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H597

## FLINT, MICHIGAN, WATER CRISIS

(Mr. KILDEE asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. KILDEE. Mr. Speaker, the families and the children exposed to high levels of lead in my hometown of Flint deserve action by the people who did this to them.

The State of Michigan—Governor Snyder's administration—created this public health emergency through their own inaction and by decisions that their appointed emergency manager made in the city of Flint, which has led to this crisis. They need to act in a manner equal to the gravity of this terrible situation.

The Federal Government can help as well. The President has already declared a state of emergency, but Congress can act, too. I have legislation that I introduced last week that is a comprehensive set of solutions that not only deals with the need to replace those lead service lines that are leaching lead into the water system in households, but also provides the kind of support for children and families to get through this crisis and give them, as individuals, and my community, as a community, a chance on a future.

Resources are needed, not just a get well card, not just an apology, but we need financial resources. The State needs to step up. I am asking this Congress to do so as well.

COMMUNICATION FROM THE  
CLERK OF THE HOUSE

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

OFFICE OF THE CLERK,  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,  
Washington, DC, February 8, 2016.

Hon. PAUL D. RYAN,  
The Speaker, House of Representatives,  
Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. SPEAKER: Pursuant to the permission granted in Clause 2(h) of Rule II of the Rules of the U.S. House of Representatives, the Clerk received the following message from the Secretary of the Senate on February 8, 2016 at 3:26 p.m.:

That the Senate communicates S. Res. 364 (relative to the death of Marlow Cook).

With best wishes, I am  
Sincerely,

KAREN L. HAAS.

COMMUNICATION FROM THE  
CLERK OF THE HOUSE

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

OFFICE OF THE CLERK,  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,  
Washington, DC, February 9, 2016.

The Hon. PAUL D. RYAN,  
The Speaker, House of Representatives,  
Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. SPEAKER: Pursuant to the permission granted in Clause 2(h) of Rule II of the Rules of the U.S. House of Representatives, the Clerk received the following mes-

sage from the Secretary of the Senate on February 9, 2016 at 10:44 a.m.:

Appointments:  
Washington's Farewell Address.  
With best wishes, I am  
Sincerely,

KAREN L. HAAS.

THE BUDGET MESSAGE OF THE  
PRESIDENT—MESSAGE FROM  
THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED  
STATES (H. DOC. NO. 114-86)

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following message from the President of the United States; which was read and, together with the accompanying papers, referred to the Committee on Appropriations and ordered to be printed:

*To the Congress of the United States:*

As I look back on the past seven years, I am inspired by America's progress—and I am more determined than ever to keep our country moving forward. When I took office, our Nation was in the midst of the worst recession since the Great Depression. The economy was shedding 800,000 jobs a month. The auto industry was on the brink of collapse and our manufacturing sector was in decline. Many families were struggling to pay their bills and make ends meet. Millions more saw their savings evaporate, even as retirement neared.

But thanks to the grit and determination of the American people, we rescued our economy from the depths of the recession, revitalized our auto industry, and laid down new rules to safeguard our economy from recklessness on Wall Street. We made the largest investment in clean energy in our history, and made health care reform a reality. And today, our economy is the strongest, most durable on Earth.

Our businesses have created more than 14 million jobs over 70 months, the longest streak of job growth on record. We have cut our unemployment rate in half. Our manufacturing sector has added nearly 900,000 jobs in the last six years—and our auto industry just had its best year of sales ever. We are less reliant on foreign oil than at any point in the previous four decades. Nearly 18 million people have gained health coverage under the Affordable Care Act (ACA), cutting the uninsured rate to a record low. Our children are graduating from high school at the highest rate ever. And we managed to accomplish all of this while dramatically cutting our deficits by almost three-quarters and setting our Nation on a more sustainable fiscal path. Together, we have brought America back.

Yet while it is important to take stock of our progress, this Budget is not about looking back at the road we have traveled. It is about looking forward. It is about making sure our economy works for everybody, not just those at the top. It is about choosing investments that not only make us stronger today, but also reflect the kind of country we aspire to be—the

kind of country we want to pass on to our children and grandchildren. It is about answering the big questions that will define America and the world in the 21st Century.

My Budget makes critical investments while adhering to the bipartisan budget agreement I signed into law last fall, and it lifts sequestration in future years so that we continue to invest in our economic future and our national security. It also drives down deficits and maintains our fiscal progress through smart savings from health care, immigration, and tax reforms. And, it focuses on meeting our greatest challenges not only for the year ahead, but for decades to come.

First, by accelerating the pace of American innovation, we can create jobs and build the economy of the future while tackling our greatest challenges, including addressing climate change and finding new treatments—and cures—for devastating diseases.

The challenge of climate change will define the contours of this century more dramatically than any other. Last year was the hottest on record, surpassing the record set just a year before. Climate change is already causing damage, including longer, more severe droughts and dangerous floods, disruptions to our food and water supply, and threats to our health, our economy, and our security.

We have made great strides to foster a robust clean energy industry and move our economy away from energy sources that fuel climate change. In communities across the Nation, wind power is now cheaper than dirtier, conventional power, and solar power is saving Americans tens of millions of dollars a year on their energy bills. The solar industry employs more workers than the coal industry—in jobs that pay better than average.

Despite these advances, we can and must do more. Rather than shrinking from the challenge, America must foster the spirit of innovation to create jobs, build a climate-smart economy of the future, and protect the only planet we have. To speed our transition to an affordable, reliable, clean energy system, my Budget funds Mission Innovation, our landmark commitment to double clean energy research and development funding. It also calls for a 21st Century Clean Transportation initiative that would help to put hundreds of thousands of Americans to work modernizing our infrastructure to ease congestion and make it easier for businesses to bring goods to market through new technologies such as autonomous vehicles and high-speed rail, funded through a fee paid by oil companies. It proposes to modernize our business tax system to promote innovation and job creation. It invests in strategies to make our communities more resilient to floods, wildfires, and other effects of climate change. And, it protects and modernizes our water supply and preserves our natural landscapes. These investments, coupled with those

in other cutting-edge technology sectors ranging from manufacturing to space exploration, will drive new jobs, new industries, and a new understanding of the world around us.

Just as a commitment to innovation can accelerate our efforts to protect our planet and create a sustainable economy, it can also drive critical medical breakthroughs. The Budget supports a new “moonshot” to finally cure cancer, an effort that will be led by the Vice President and will channel resources, technology, and our collective knowledge to save lives and end this deadly disease. It also supports the Precision Medicine Initiative to accelerate the development of customized treatments that take into account a patient’s genes, environment, and lifestyle, as well as the BRAIN Initiative, which will dramatically increase our understanding of how the brain works.

Second, we must work to deliver a fair shot at opportunity for all, both because this reflects American values and because, in the 21st Century global economy, our competitiveness depends on tapping the full potential of every American. Even as we have rebounded from the worst economic crisis of our lifetimes, too many families struggle to reach the middle class and stay there, and too many kids face obstacles on the path to success.

Real opportunity begins with education. My Budget supports the ambitious goal that all children should have access to high-quality preschool, including kids from low-income families who too often enter kindergarten already behind. It also supports States and cities as they implement a new education law that will place all students on a path to graduate prepared for college and successful careers. The bipartisan Every Student Succeeds Act sets high standards for our schools and students, ensures that States are held accountable for the success of all students, including those in the lowest performing schools, spurs innovation in education, helps schools recruit and support great teachers, and encourages States to reduce unnecessary testing. And because jobs in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics are projected to grow faster than other jobs in the years ahead, the Budget makes critical investments in math and science. Through a new Computer Science for All initiative, the Budget will expand the teaching and learning of these important concepts across America’s schools, better preparing our Nation’s students for today’s innovative economy.

Higher education is the clearest path to the middle class. By 2020, two-thirds of jobs will require some education beyond high school. For our students and for our economy, we must make a quality college education affordable for every American. To support that goal, the Budget strengthens Pell Grants to help families pay for college by increasing the scholarships available to students who take enough courses to

stay on track for on-time graduation, allowing students making progress toward their degrees to get support for summer classes, and providing scholarships to help incarcerated Americans turn their lives around, get jobs, and support their families. It also offers two years of free community college to every responsible student and strengthens the American Opportunity Tax Credit.

In addition to preparing students for careers, we must help workers gain the skills they need to fill jobs in growing industries. My Budget builds on the progress we have made to improve the Nation’s job training programs through implementation of the bipartisan Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. It funds innovative strategies to train more workers and young people for 21st Century jobs. And it doubles down on apprenticeships—a proven pathway to the middle class—and supports a robust set of protections for the health, safety, wages, working conditions, and retirement security of working Americans.

Even as we invest in better skills and education for our workforce, we must respond to dramatic changes in our economy and our workforce: more automation; increased global competition; corporations less rooted in their communities; frequent job changes throughout a worker’s career; and a growing gap between the wealthiest and everyone else. These trends squeeze workers, even when they have jobs, even when the economy is growing. They make it harder to start a career, a family, a business, or retirement.

To address these changes and give Americans more economic security, we need to update several key benefit structures to make sure that workers can balance work and family, save for retirement, and get back on their feet if they lose a job. The Budget supports these priorities by funding high-quality child care, encouraging State paid leave policies, extending employer-based retirement plans to part-time workers, putting us on a path to more portable benefit models, and providing a new tax credit for two-earner families. It also modernizes the unemployment insurance system, so that more unemployed workers receive the unemployment benefits they need and an opportunity to retrain for their next job. And, if that new job does not pay as much initially, it offers a system of wage insurance to encourage workers to rejoin the workforce and help them pay their bills. The Budget includes tax cuts for middle-class and working families that will make paychecks go further in meeting the costs of child care, education, and saving for retirement. It builds upon the demonstrated success of the Earned Income Tax Credit by expanding it for workers without children and non-custodial parents.

Providing opportunity to all Americans means tackling poverty. Too many Americans live in communities

with under-performing schools and few jobs. We know from groundbreaking new research that growing up in these communities can put lifelong limits on a child’s opportunities. Over the past few years, we have made progress in supporting families that were falling behind. For example, working family tax credits keep more than 9 million people—including 5 million children—out of poverty each year, and the ACA provides access to quality, affordable health care to millions. Nevertheless, we need to do more to ensure that a child’s zip code does not determine his or her destiny. Improving the opportunity and economic security of poor children and families is both a moral and an economic imperative.

The Budget funds innovative strategies to support this goal, including helping families move to safer neighborhoods with better schools and more jobs, revitalizing distressed communities to create more neighborhoods of opportunity, preventing families experiencing a financial crisis from becoming homeless, and ensuring that children have enough to eat when school is out for the summer. It also supports efforts to break the cycle of poverty and incarceration through criminal justice reform.

Finally, as we work to build a brighter future at home, we must also strengthen our national security and global leadership. The United States of America is the most powerful nation on Earth, blessed with the finest fighting force in the history of the world.

Still, this is a dangerous time. We face many threats, including the threat of terrorist attacks and violent extremism in many forms. My highest priority is keeping the American people safe and going after terrorist networks. That is why my Budget increases support for our comprehensive strategy to destroy the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), in partnership with more than 60 other countries, by eliminating its leadership, cutting off its financing, disrupting its plots, stopping the flow of terrorist fighters, and stamping out its vicious ideology. If the Congress is serious about winning this war and wants to send a message to the troops and the world, it should specifically authorize the use of military force against ISIL.

The Budget also sustains and builds the strength of our unmatched military forces, making the investments and reforms that will maintain our Nation’s superiority and ensure our advantage over any potential adversary. It also makes investments to ensure that our men and women in uniform, who sacrifice so much to defend our Nation and keep us safe, get the support they have earned to succeed and thrive when they return home.

Cybersecurity is one of our most important national security challenges. As our economy becomes increasingly digital, more sensitive information is vulnerable to malicious cyber activity. This challenge requires bold, aggressive action. My Budget significantly

increases our investment in cybersecurity through a Cybersecurity National Action Plan. This Plan includes retiring outdated Federal information technology (IT) systems that were designed in a different age and increasingly are vulnerable to attack, reforming the way that the Federal Government manages and responds to cyber threats, and recruiting the best cyber talent. It will also help strengthen cybersecurity in the private sector and the digital ecosystem as a whole, enhancing cyber education and making sure companies and consumers have the tools they need to protect themselves. But many of our challenges in cybersecurity require bold, long-term commitments to change the way we operate in an increasingly digital world. That is why, to complement these steps, I am also creating a commission of experts to make recommendations for enhancing cybersecurity awareness and protections inside and outside of Government, protecting privacy, and empowering Americans to take better control of their digital security.

To ensure security at home, we must also demonstrate leadership around the world. Strong leadership means not only a wise application of military power, but also rallying other nations behind causes that are right. It means viewing our diplomacy and development efforts around the world as an essential instrument of our national security strategy, and mobilizing the private sector and other donors alongside our foreign assistance to help achieve our global development and climate priorities. The Budget supports this vision with funding for effective global health programs to fight HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other illnesses; assistance for displaced persons and refugees, including from Syria; and expanding educational opportunities for girls, among many other critical development initiatives.

As we make these investments to meet our greatest challenges, we are also working to build a 21st Century Government that delivers for the American people. The Budget supports efforts to make the Federal Government more efficient and effective, through smarter IT delivery and procurement, improving digital services, eliminating outdated regulations, and recruiting and retaining the best talent. It also invests in a new approach to working in local communities, one that disrupts an outdated, top-down approach, and makes our efforts more responsive to the ideas and concerns of local citizens. The Budget supports the use of data and evidence to drive policymaking, so the Federal Government can do more of what works and stop doing what does not.

The Budget is a roadmap to a future that embodies America's values and aspirations: a future of opportunity and security for all of our families; a rising standard of living; and a sustainable, peaceful planet for our kids. This future is within our reach. But just as it

took the collective efforts of the American people to rise from the recession and rebuild an even stronger economy, so will it take all of us working together to meet the challenges that lie ahead.

It will not be easy. But I have never been more optimistic about America's future than I am today. Over the past seven years, I have seen the strength, resilience, and commitment of the American people. I know that when we are united in the face of challenges, our Nation emerges stronger and better than before. I know that when we work together, there are no limits to what we can achieve. Together, we will move forward to innovate, to expand opportunity and security, and to make our Nation safer and stronger than ever before.

BARACK OBAMA.  
THE WHITE HOUSE, February 9, 2016.

#### RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until approximately 3 p.m. today.

Accordingly (at 2 o'clock and 25 minutes p.m.), the House stood in recess.

□ 1503

#### AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. RIBBLE) at 3 o'clock and 3 minutes p.m.

#### ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, the Chair will postpone further proceedings today on motions to suspend the rules on which a recorded vote or the yeas and nays are ordered, or on which the vote incurs objection under clause 6 of rule XX.

Record votes on postponed questions will be taken later.

#### COMMISSION ON CARE FINAL REPORT DEADLINE EXTENSION

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 4437) to extend the deadline for the submittal of the final report required by the Commission on Care.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.  
The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 4437

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

#### SECTION 1. EXTENSION OF DEADLINE FOR SUBMITTAL OF FINAL REPORT BY COMMISSION ON CARE.

Section 202(b)(3)(B) of the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014 (Public Law 113-146; 128 Stat. 1773) is amended by striking "Not later than 180 days after the

date of the initial meeting of the Commission" and inserting "Not later than June 30, 2016".

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MILLER) and the gentleman from Florida (Ms. BROWN) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Florida.

#### GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. MILLER of Florida. 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 any extraneous material on H.R. 4437.

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

There was no objection.

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 4437, a bill that I am honored to sponsor, to extend the deadline for the submittal of the final report that is required by the Commission on Care.

The Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act, which Congress passed in 2014 in response to the Department of Veterans Affairs' crisis that saw far too many veterans waiting too long for the care that they needed, required the establishment of a Commission on Care to examine veteran access to care and recommend how to best organize the VA healthcare system over the next 20 years.

The law required the Commission to develop a final report 180 days after their first meeting, or by February 20, 2016.

However, the Commission has requested that Congress extend the reporting deadline to June in order to provide the commissioners more time to develop their findings and recommendations. As such, H.R. 4437 would extend the Commission's final reporting deadline to June 30 of this year.

The Commission's work is vitally important to determining the future of the VA healthcare system, and I am proud to sponsor this bill to allow the commissioners more time to carry out their mission on behalf of our Nation's veterans.

I urge all my colleagues to support H.R. 4437, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 4437, of which I am an original cosponsor.

When the Congress passed and the President signed into law the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014, we included a section requiring an independent assessment of the hospital care, medical services, and other health care furnished in medical facilities of the VA. We also established a Commission on Care to examine the access of veterans to health care from the

Department of Veterans Affairs and strategically examine how best to organize the Veterans Health Administration, local health care resources, and deliver health care to veterans over the next 20 years.

The Commission has contacted us to explain that they will not be able to meet the statutory deadline of presenting their report to us in time, and would like an extension until June of 2016.

I feel this is a very important report, and I am willing to extend the authorization for the Commission on Care in order to receive this information.

I urge my colleagues to support this legislation.

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

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I urge all Members to support H.R. 4437.

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. MILLER) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 4437.

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.

#### CONSTRUCTION REFORM ACT OF 2016

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 3106) to authorize Department major medical facility construction projects for fiscal year 2015, to amend title 38, United States Code, to make certain improvements in the administration of Department medical facility construction projects, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 3106

*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 "Construction Reform Act of 2016".

#### SEC. 2. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS CONSTRUCTION REFORMS.

(a) APPLICATION OF INDUSTRY STANDARDS; ASSISTANCE.—Section 8103 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new subsections:

"(f) To the maximum extent practicable, the Secretary shall use industry standards, standard designs, and best practices in carrying out the construction of medical facilities.

"(g)(1) The Secretary shall provide to a non-Department Federal entity with which the Secretary has entered into an agreement under subsection (e)—

"(A) design, planning, and construction assistance before the entity issues a request for proposals for the design or construction of the super construction project covered by the agreement;

"(B) any documents or information needed for the entity to carry out the responsibilities

of the entity with respect to the super construction project; and

"(C) upon the request of the entity, any other assistance that the entity determines necessary to carry out such responsibilities.

"(2) Any assistance provided under paragraph (1) shall be provided to the non-Department Federal entity on a non-reimbursable basis.

"(h)(1) With respect to a proposed change to a contract entered into by a non-Department Federal entity with which the Secretary has entered into an agreement under subsection (e) that is estimated at a value of less than \$250,000, the non-Department Federal entity shall issue a final decision regarding such change not later than 30 days after the date on which the change is proposed.

"(2) With respect to a proposed change to such a contract that is estimated at a value of \$250,000 or more—

"(A) the Secretary may provide to the entity the recommendations of the Secretary regarding such change;

"(B) during the 30-day period beginning on the date on which the entity furnishes to the Secretary information regarding such change, the Secretary may issue the final decision regarding such change; and

"(C) if the Secretary does not issue a final decision under subparagraph (B), during the 30-day period following the period described in such paragraph, the entity shall issue a final decision regarding such a change no later than 90 days from when the entity furnished information regarding such a change to the Secretary.

"(i) The Secretary shall ensure that each employee of the Department with responsibilities relating to the construction or alteration of medical facilities, including such construction or alteration carried out pursuant to contracts or agreements, undergoes a program of ongoing professional training and development. Such program shall be designed to ensure that employees maintain adequate expertise relating to industry standards and best practices for the acquisition of design and construction services. The Secretary may provide the program under this subsection through a contract or agreement with a non-Federal entity or with a non-Department Federal entity."

(b) LIMITATION ON PLANNING AND DESIGN FOR SUPER CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Section 8104(a) of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(A) by redesignating paragraph (3) as paragraph (4);

(B) by inserting after paragraph (2) the following new paragraph (3):

"(3) The Secretary may not obligate or expend funds for advance planning or design for any super construction project, until the date that is 60 days after the date on which the Secretary submits to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs and the Committee on Appropriations of the Senate and the Committee on Veterans' Affairs and the Committee on Appropriations of the House of Representatives notice of such obligation or expenditure."; and

(C) in paragraph (4), as redesignated by paragraph (1) of this subsection, by adding at the end the following new subparagraph:

"(C) The term 'super construction project' means a project for the construction, alteration, or acquisition of a medical facility involving a total expenditure of more than \$100,000,000, but such term does not include an acquisition by exchange."

(2) APPLICABILITY.—The amendments made by paragraph (1) shall take effect on the date of the enactment of this Act and shall apply with respect to a construction project that is initiated on or after that date.

(c) CONGRESSIONAL APPROVAL OF CERTAIN PROJECTS.—

(1) PROJECTS THAT EXCEED SPECIFIED AMOUNT.—Subsection (c) of section 8104 of title 38, United States Code, is amended to read as follows:

"(c)(1) The Secretary may not obligate funds for a major medical facility project or a super construction project approved by a law described in subsection (a)(2) in an amount that would cause the total amount obligated for that project to exceed the amount specified in the law for that project (or would add to total obligations exceeding such specified amount) by more than 10 percent unless the Committee on Veterans' Affairs and the Committee on Appropriations of the Senate and the Committee on Appropriations of the House of Representatives each approve in writing the obligation of those funds.

"(2) The Secretary shall—

"(A) enter into a contract with an appropriate non-department Federal entity with the ability to conduct forensic audits on medical facility projects for the conduct of an external forensic audit of the expenditures relating to any major medical facility or super construction project for which the total expenditures exceed the amount specified in the law for the project by more than 25 percent; and

"(B) enter into a contract with an appropriate non-department Federal entity with the ability to conduct forensic audits on medical facility projects for the conduct of an external audit of the medical center construction project in Aurora, Colorado."

(2) USE OF EXTRA AMOUNTS.—Subsection (d) of such section is amended—

(A) in paragraph (2)(B), in the matter preceding clause (i), by striking "Whenever" and inserting "Before"; and

(B) by adding at the end the following new paragraph:

"(3) The Secretary may not obligate any funds described in paragraph (1) or amounts described in paragraph (2) before the date that is 30 days after the notification submitted under paragraph (1) or paragraph (2)(B), as the case may be, unless the Committee on Veterans' Affairs and the Committee on Appropriations of the Senate and the Committee on Veterans' Affairs and the Committee on Appropriations of the House of Representatives each approve in writing the obligation of those funds or amounts."

(3) NOTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS.—

(A) COMMITTEES REQUIRED.—Subsection (d)(1) of such section is amended by striking "each committee" and inserting "the Committee on Veterans' Affairs and the Committee on Appropriations of the Senate and the Committee on Veterans' Affairs and the Committee on Appropriations of the House of Representatives".

(B) USE OF AMOUNTS FROM BID SAVINGS.—Subsection (d)(2)(B) of such section is amended by adding at the end the following new clause:

"(iv) With respect to the major construction project that is the source of the bid savings—

"(I) the amounts already obligated or available in the project reserve for such project;

"(II) the percentage of such project that has been completed; and

"(III) the amount of such bid savings that is already obligated or otherwise being used for a purpose other than such project."

(d) QUARTERLY REPORT ON SUPER CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—At the end of subchapter I of chapter 81 of title 38, United States Code, add the following new section:

**“§ 8120. Quarterly report on super construction projects**

“(a) QUARTERLY REPORTS REQUIRED.—Not later than 30 days after the last day of each fiscal quarter the Secretary shall submit to the Committees on Veterans’ Affairs of the Senate and House of Representatives on the super construction projects carried out by the Secretary during such quarter. Each such report shall include, for each such project—

“(1) the budgetary and scheduling status of the project, as of the last day of the quarter covered by the report; and

“(2) the actual cost and schedule variances of the project, as of such day, compared to the planned cost and schedules for the project.

“(b) SUPER CONSTRUCTION PROJECT DEFINED.—In this section, the term ‘super construction project’ has the meaning given such term in section 8104(a)(4)(C) of this title.”

(2) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections at the beginning of the chapter is amended by adding at the end of the items relating to such subchapter the following new item:

“8120. Quarterly report on super construction projects.”

(e) ACCELERATED MASTER PLANNING FOR EACH MEDICAL FACILITY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.—

(1) EXISTING FACILITIES.—Not later than December 31, 2016, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall complete a master plan described in paragraph (3) for each medical facility of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

(2) NEW FACILITIES.—For each medical facility of the Department for which construction is completed after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall complete a master plan described in paragraph (3) for the facility by not later than the earlier of the following dates:

(A) The date on which activation is completed.

(B) The date of the formal dedication of the facility.

(3) MASTER PLAN DESCRIBED.—A master plan described in this paragraph is, with respect to a medical facility of the Department, a plan to inform investment decisions and funding requests over a 10-year period for construction projects at such medical facility—

(A) to meet the health care needs of a changing veteran population through a combination of health care from the Department and other community resources; and

(B) to maximize the best use of the land and structures comprising such medical facility.

**SEC. 3. ASSISTANT INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR CONSTRUCTION.**

(a) IN GENERAL.—Chapter 3 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by inserting after section 312 the following new section:

**“§ 312A. Assistant Inspector General for Construction**

“(a) IN GENERAL.—There is in the Office of Inspector General an Assistant Inspector General for Construction. The Assistant Inspector General for Construction is responsible for conducting, supervising, and coordinating audits, evaluations, and investigations of the planning, design, contracting, execution, and construction of facilities and infrastructure of the Department, including major and minor construction projects and leases.

“(b) QUALIFICATIONS.—Each individual appointed as Assistant Inspector General for Construction shall be an individual who has expertise in construction and facilities management.

“(c) REPORTS.—(1) Not later than 60 days after the appointment of an individual as the Assistant Inspector General for Construc-

tion, and every calendar quarter thereafter, the Assistant Inspector General for Construction shall submit to the Committees on Veterans’ Affairs of the Senate and House of Representatives a report summarizing the activities of the Assistant Inspector General for Construction during the 120-day period ending on the date of such report.

“(2) In addition to the report required in paragraph (1), and the requirements contained in section 5 of the Inspector General Act of 1978 (5 U.S.C. App.), the Assistant Inspector General for Construction shall promptly provide to the Committees on Veterans’ Affairs of the Senate and House of Representatives the findings of any investigation undertaken by the Assistant Inspector General for Construction, and shall notify the Committees promptly if the Assistant Inspector General for Construction identifies any serious or flagrant problem or deficiency relating to the administration or operation of any construction program of the Department, if, during the course of any investigation, the Assistant Inspector General for Construction determines that Congress should take immediate action.

“(3) Nothing in this subsection shall be construed to authorize the public disclosure of information that is—

“(A) specifically prohibited from disclosure by any other provision of law;

“(B) specifically required by Executive Order to be protected from disclosure in the interest of national defense or national security or in the conduct of foreign affairs; or

“(C) a part of an ongoing criminal investigation.”

(b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections at the beginning of such chapter is amended by inserting after the item relating to section 312 the following new item:

“312A. Assistant Inspector General for Construction.”

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

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Florida.

**GENERAL LEAVE**

Mr. MILLER of Florida. 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. 3106, as amended.

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

There was no objection.  
Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I do rise in support of H.R. 3106, as amended, the Construction Reform Act of 2016. This bill would strengthen the Department of Veterans Affairs’ major construction program by making a number of needed improvements to VA’s construction management processes.

As the owner and operator of one of the Federal Government’s largest real property portfolios, VA manages a complex and costly major medical facility construction program.

In recent years, that program has been fraught with failures and mismanagement that has led to millions of dollars of cost increases and years of schedule delays on all of VA’s major medical facility construction projects.

The most glaring example of these failings can be seen in the construction

of the replacement VA medical center in Denver, Colorado.

The discussion surrounding that facility—if my colleagues will recall—began more than 16 years ago, in 1999. Construction is now expected to conclude in 2018. Upon completion, that project will be more than \$1 billion over budget and many, many years behind schedule. That is assuming, of course, that the project does not experience any further delays.

To prevent any further construction calamities like the ongoing one in Denver, this bill would require VA to use industry standards, standard designs, and best practices for all medical facility construction projects; to complete a master plan for each VA medical facility; and to provide regular reports on super construction projects.

To further strengthen oversight of VA’s construction projects, the bill would also create an assistant inspector general for construction within the VA Office of Inspector General.

These are commonsense reforms that will lead, ultimately, to better facilities for our veterans and better use of our taxpayers’ hard-earned dollars. I urge all my colleagues to support this legislation.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I want to thank the chairman for his fair and even leadership on this committee. While we don’t agree on all issues, I feel he has made an effort to allow all voices to be heard, and for that I want to thank him. I thank the chairman for bringing this important legislation to our attention.

As we have seen by recent events, the VA has been challenged with major construction projects. Before they undertook the most recent medical center construction projects, it had been at least 15 years since a new medical center had been built.

This lack of experience showed and continues to show today. Not one of the major hospitals is on its original timeline. However, the VA has demonstrated they are able to do small, less complicated projects on time and under budget.

The bill also references “a non-department Federal entity to provide full project management services for the super construction project, including management over the project design, acquisition, construction, and contract changes.”

We all know from experience that there is only one Federal entity that fits that description, and that is the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

For those projects that have not broken ground yet, the VA and the Corps of Engineers are already working on plans to include the Corps in the planning and construction of major projects over \$100 million.

I continue to believe that the threshold for a super construction project should be at least \$250 million. As a member of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, I know how busy the Army Corps is in responding to the projects that the committee requires them to complete. It is important that they do not get bogged down with projects of insufficient complexity. I will continue to watch the construction process and follow the complexity issue to determine if the threshold needs to be increased in the future.

I am pleased this legislation also includes an assistant inspector general for construction. Oversight of the projects needs a person who has the expertise to evaluate the complexity of VA's ongoing construction projects.

I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting this legislation.

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

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. COFFMAN), my good friend, a member of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, and somebody who has been on this from the very, very beginning.

Mr. COFFMAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of the Construction Reform Act of 2016, an important piece of legislation that will further reform VA's severely troubled major construction program.

For decades, the Government Accountability Office has documented hundreds of millions of dollars in cost overruns on mismanaged VA major construction projects. GAO reports from 1981, 1993, 2009, and 2013 all reflect a stunning degree of bureaucratic incompetence in VA's construction management. In my own district, a single VA hospital project is over \$1 billion over budget, and years behind schedule.

VA's construction failures represent billions of wasted tax dollars that should have gone towards VA's core mission: taking care of our Nation's veterans.

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Since 2012, the House Veterans' Affairs Committee has conducted at least six separate hearings exploring the VA's construction failures, and this bill's reforms incorporate many of the committee's findings.

First, it forces the VA to leave hospital construction to the experts—to Federal construction managers like the Army Corps of Engineers. In fact, the contractor on the troubled Aurora, Colorado, project demanded that the Army Corps of Engineers take over the project from the VA before they returned to work on the project.

Previously, in 2014, the House unanimously passed my legislation, which required the Army Corps to take over the VA's most troubled projects, including the project in Aurora. I am pleased that my colleagues in both the House and the Senate are now fully

supportive of this transfer of authority.

Second, this bill introduces a much-needed improvement over the contract change order process. The GAO and the Veterans' Affairs Committee identified the VA's inept change order management as a major driver of both cost increases and project delays.

Third, the bill creates a new, independent assistant inspector general for construction who would be required to report directly to Congress when significant construction problems have been discovered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The time of the gentleman has expired.

Mr. MILLER of Florida. I yield the gentleman an additional 1 minute.

Mr. COFFMAN. As we learned with the project in Aurora, the VA went to great lengths to hide the significant problems with the project from the American people, insisting in congressional hearing after hearing that the project was on time and on budget. It was not until the project's contractor sued the VA—and won on every count in December of 2014—that the VA finally admitted it had significant problems with the Aurora project.

I urge all of my colleagues to support this measure and continue with the long-needed construction reforms in the VA.

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

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I encourage all Members to support H.R. 3106, as amended.

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. MILLER) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 3106, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

The title of the bill was amended so as to read: "A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to make certain improvements in the administration of Department medical facility construction projects."

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

**VETERANS EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION, AND HEALTHCARE IMPROVEMENT ACT**

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 3016) to amend title 38, United States Code, to clarify the role of podiatrists in the Department of Veterans Affairs, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 3016

*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 Employment, Education, and Healthcare Improvement Act".

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

Sec. 1. Short title; table of contents.

**TITLE I—VETERANS HEALTH CARE**

- Sec. 101. Role of podiatrists in Department of Veterans Affairs.
- Sec. 102. Priority of medal of honor recipients in health care system of Department of Veterans Affairs.
- Sec. 103. Improvement of care provided to newborn children.
- Sec. 104. Comptroller General audit of budget of Veterans Health Administration.
- Sec. 105. Outreach to veterans regarding effect of certain delayed payments by Department of Veterans Affairs Chief Business Office.
- Sec. 106. Department of Veterans Affairs pilot program on dog training therapy.

**TITLE II—VETERANS ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY AND TRANSITION ADMINISTRATION**

- Sec. 201. Establishment of Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration.
- Sec. 202. Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition.

**TITLE III—EDUCATION ASSISTANCE AND VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION**

- Sec. 301. Modification and improvement of transfer of unused education benefits to family members under Department of Veterans Affairs Post-9/11 Educational Assistance Program.
- Sec. 302. Clarification of eligibility for Marine Gunnery Sergeant John David Fry Scholarship.
- Sec. 303. Approval of courses of education and training for purposes of the vocational rehabilitation program of the Department of Veterans Affairs.
- Sec. 304. Authority to prioritize vocational rehabilitation services based on need.
- Sec. 305. Recodification and improvement of election process for Post-9/11 Educational Assistance Program.
- Sec. 306. Clarification of assistance provided for certain flight training and other programs of education.
- Sec. 307. Consideration of certain time spent receiving medical care from Secretary of Defense as active duty for purposes of eligibility for post-9/11 educational assistance.
- Sec. 308. Work-study allowance.
- Sec. 309. Vocational rehabilitation and education action plan.
- Sec. 310. Reduction in redundancy and inefficiencies in vocational rehabilitation claims processing.

**TITLE IV—ADMINISTRATION OF EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE**

- Sec. 401. Centralized reporting of veteran enrollment by certain groups, districts, and consortiums of educational institutions.
- Sec. 402. Provision of information regarding veteran entitlement to educational assistance.
- Sec. 403. Role of State approving agencies.
- Sec. 404. Criteria used to approve courses.
- Sec. 405. Compliance surveys.

- Sec. 406. Survey of individuals using their entitlement to educational assistance under the educational assistance programs administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.
- Sec. 407. Improvement of information technology of the Veterans Benefits Administration of the Department of Veterans Affairs.
- Sec. 408. Technical amendment relating to in-State tuition rate for individuals to whom entitlement is transferred under All-Volunteer Force Educational Assistance Program and Post-9/11 Educational Assistance.

#### TITLE V—OTHER MATTERS

- Sec. 501. Amount of loan guaranteed under home loan program of Department of Veterans Affairs.
- Sec. 502. Longitudinal study of job counseling, training, and placement service for veterans.
- Sec. 503. Limitations on subcontracts under contracts with small business concerns owned and controlled by veterans.
- Sec. 504. Procedures for provision of certain information to State veterans agencies to facilitate the furnishing of assistance and benefits to veterans.

#### TITLE I—VETERANS HEALTH CARE

##### SEC. 101. ROLE OF PODIATRISTS IN DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

- (a) INCLUSION AS PHYSICIAN.—
- (1) IN GENERAL.—Subchapter I of chapter 74 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new section:
- “§ 7413. Treatment of podiatrists
- “For purposes of this chapter, the term ‘physician’ includes a podiatrist.”
- (2) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections at the beginning of such chapter is amended by inserting after the item relating to section 7412 the following new item:
- “7413. Treatment of podiatrists.”
- (3) CONFORMING AMENDMENT.—Section 7401(1) of such title is amended by striking “Physicians, dentists, podiatrists,” and inserting “Physicians, dentists,”
- (b) QUALIFICATIONS.—Section 7402(b) of such title is amended—
- (1) in paragraph (1)—
- (A) in subparagraph (A), by striking “or of doctor of osteopathy” and inserting “, doctor of osteopathy, or doctor of podiatric medicine”; and
- (B) in subparagraph (C), by inserting “podiatry,” after “surgery,”;
- (2) by striking paragraph (5); and
- (3) by redesignating paragraphs (6) through (14) as paragraphs (5) through (13), respectively.
- (c) PERIOD OF APPOINTMENT.—Section 7403(a)(2) of such title is amended—
- (1) by striking subparagraph (C); and
- (2) by redesignating subparagraphs (D) through (H) as subparagraphs (C) through (G), respectively.
- (d) MODIFICATION OF PAY GRADE.—
- (1) GRADE.—The list in section 7404(b) of such title is amended by striking “CLINICAL PODIATRIST, CHIROPRACTOR, AND OPTOMETRIST SCHEDULE” and inserting “CLINICAL CHIROPRACTOR AND OPTOMETRIST SCHEDULE”.
- (2) APPLICATION.—The amendment made by paragraph (1) shall apply with respect to a pay period of the Department of Veterans Affairs beginning on or after the date that is 30 days after the date of the enactment of this Act.
- (e) CONTRACTS FOR SCARCE SERVICES.—Section 7409(a) of such title is amended by striking “podiatrists,”.

(f) PERSONNEL ADMINISTRATION.—Section 7421(b) of such title is amended—

- (1) by striking paragraph (3); and
- (2) by redesignating paragraphs (4) through (8) as paragraphs (3) through (7), respectively.

(g) MEDICAL DIRECTORS.—Section 7306(a)(4) of such title is amended by inserting “, doctor of podiatric medicine,” after “doctor of medicine”.

(h) APPLICATION.—The amendments made by this section shall apply with respect to podiatrists employed by the Department of Veterans Affairs as of the date of the enactment of this Act or who are appointed on or after such date.

##### SEC. 102. PRIORITY OF MEDAL OF HONOR RECIPIENTS IN HEALTH CARE SYSTEM OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

- (a) ENROLLMENT PRIORITY.—Section 1705(a) of title 38, United States Code, is amended—
- (1) in paragraph (1), by striking the period at the end and inserting the following: “and veterans who were awarded the medal of honor under section 3741, 6241, or 8741 of title 10 or section 491 of title 14.”; and
- (2) in paragraph (3), by striking “veterans who were awarded the medal of honor under section 3741, 6241, or 8741 of title 10 or section 491 of title 14.”.

(b) ELIGIBILITY.—Section 1710(a)(2)(D) of such title is amended by inserting after “war” the following: “, who was awarded the medal of honor under section 3741, 6241, or 8741 of title 10 or section 491 of title 14.”.

(c) EXTENDED CARE SERVICES.—Section 1710B(c)(2) of such title is amended—

- (1) in subparagraph (B), by striking “or”;
- (2) in subparagraph (C), by striking the period at the end and inserting “; or”;
- (3) by adding at the end the following new subparagraph:

“(D) to a veteran who was awarded the medal of honor under section 3741, 6241, or 8741 of title 10 or section 491 of title 14.”.

(d) COPAYMENT FOR MEDICATIONS.—Section 1722A(a)(3) of such title is amended—

- (1) in subparagraph (B), by striking “or”;
- (2) in subparagraph (C), by striking the period at the end and inserting “; or”;
- (3) by adding at the end the following new subparagraph:

“(D) to a veteran who was awarded the medal of honor under section 3741, 6241, or 8741 of title 10 or section 491 of title 14.”.

(e) APPLICATION.—The priority of enrollment of medal of honor recipients pursuant to chapter 17 of title 38, United States Code, as amended by this section, shall apply to each such recipient, regardless of the date on which the medal is awarded.

##### SEC. 103. IMPROVEMENT OF CARE PROVIDED TO NEWBORN CHILDREN.

Section 1786 of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

- (1) in subsection (a), by striking “seven days” and inserting “42 days”; and
- (2) by adding at the end the following new subsection:

“(c) ANNUAL REPORT.—Not later than October 31, 2016, and each year thereafter through 2020, the Secretary shall submit to the Committees on Veterans’ Affairs of the House of Representatives and the Senate a report on the health care services provided under subsection (a) during the fiscal year preceding the date of the report, including the number of newborn children who received such services during such fiscal year.”.

##### SEC. 104. COMPTROLLER GENERAL AUDIT OF BUDGET OF VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION.

- (a) IN GENERAL.—Subchapter II of chapter 73 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new section:

##### “§ 7330B. Comptroller General audit of VHA budget

“(a) IN GENERAL.—The Comptroller General of the United States shall periodically conduct an audit of elements of the budget of the Veterans Health Administration, including the budget formulation, execution, allocation, and use of funds.

“(b) SELECTION OF ELEMENTS.—(1) In selecting elements of the budget of the Veterans Health Administration for purposes of an audit under subsection (a), the Comptroller General shall take into consideration—

- “(A) knowledge of the programs of the Veterans Health Administration;
- “(B) current issues;
- “(C) national priorities; and
- “(D) priorities expressed by the appropriate congressional committees.

“(2) Not later than 30 days before conducting an audit under subsection (a), the Comptroller General shall submit to the appropriate congressional committees notice of the elements selected by the Comptroller General for purposes of the audit.

“(c) APPROPRIATE CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEES.—In this section, the term ‘appropriate congressional committees’ means—

- “(1) the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs, the Committee on Appropriations, and the Committee on the Budget of the Senate; and
- “(2) the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs, the Committee on Appropriations, and the Committee on the Budget of the House of Representatives.”.

(b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections at the beginning of such chapter is amended by inserting after the item relating to section 7330A the following new item:

“7330B. Comptroller General audit of VHA budget.”.

##### SEC. 105. OUTREACH TO VETERANS REGARDING EFFECT OF CERTAIN DELAYED PAYMENTS BY DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS CHIEF BUSINESS OFFICE.

(a) OUTREACH.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall conduct outreach, including through national and local veterans service organizations, to inform veterans of how to resolve credit issues caused by delayed payment of a claim for emergency hospital care, medical services, or other emergency health care furnished through a non-Department of Veterans Affairs provider. The Secretary shall establish a toll-free telephone number for veterans to report such credit issues to the Chief Business Office of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

(b) ANNUAL REPORT.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—During the five-year period beginning on the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall annually submit to Congress a report on the effectiveness of the Chief Business Office in providing timely payment of proper invoices for emergency hospital care, medical services, or other emergency health care furnished through non-Department of Veterans Affairs providers by the required payment date during both the five-year period preceding the date of the report and the one-year period preceding such date. For any part of the period covered by a report under this subsection that occurred before October 1, 2014, the report shall evaluate the provision of such payments by the Veterans Integrated Service Networks.

(2) MATTERS INCLUDED.—The reports under paragraph (1) shall include, for each period covered by the report, the following:

(A) The number of veterans who contacted the Secretary regarding a delayed payment that negatively affected, or will potentially negatively affect, the credit of the veteran.

(B) The total amount of interest penalties paid by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs

under section 3902 of title 31, United States Code, by reason of a delayed payment.

(C) The number of proper invoices submitted, listed in a table for each quarter and fiscal year of each such period that includes—

(i) the total amount owed by the Secretary under the proper invoices;

(ii) the payment status of each proper invoice, as of the date of the report; and

(iii) the period that elapsed until each proper invoice was paid, including an explanation of any delayed payment.

(D) Any comments regarding delayed payments made by medical providers.

(E) A description of the best practices that the Chief Business Office can carry out to provide timely payment of a proper invoice, including a plan to improve such timely payments.

(C) QUARTERLY REPORTS ON PENDING CLAIMS.—During the five-year period beginning on the date of the enactment of this Act, the Chief Business Office of the Department of Veterans Affairs shall submit to Congress quarterly reports on the number of pending claims for reimbursement for emergency hospital care, medical services, and other emergency health care furnished through non-Department of Veterans Affairs providers. Each such report shall include each of the following:

(1) The total number of such pending claims for each hospital system of the Department, as of the last day of the quarter covered by the report.

(2) The total number of veterans who submitted such a pending claim in each State, as of such day.

(3) The aggregate amount of all such pending claims in each State, as of such day.

(4) As of such day—

(A) the number of such pending claims that have been pending for 30 days or longer;

(B) the number of such pending claims that have been pending for 90 days or longer; and

(C) the number of such pending claims that have been pending for 365 days or longer.

(5) For each hospital system, for the quarter covered by the report—

(A) the number of claims for reimbursement for emergency hospital care, medical services, and other emergency health care furnished through non-Department of Veterans Affairs providers approved during such quarter;

(B) the number of such claims denied during such quarter; and

(C) the number of such claims denied listed by each denial reason group.

(d) COMPTROLLER GENERAL STUDY.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Comptroller General of the United States shall conduct a study that evaluates the effectiveness of the Chief Business Office in providing timely payment of a proper invoice for emergency hospital care, medical services, or other emergency health care furnished through non-Department of Veterans Affairs providers by the required payment date.

(2) SUBMITTAL.—The Comptroller General shall submit to Congress a report on the study conducted under paragraph (1), including the total amount of interest penalties paid by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs under section 3902 of title 31, United States Code, by reason of a delayed payment.

(e) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

(1) The term “delayed payment” means a proper invoice that is not paid by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs until after the required payment date.

(2) The term “proper invoice” has the meaning given that term in section 3901(a) of title 31, United States Code.

(3) The term “required payment date” means the date that payment is due for a

contract pursuant to section 3903(a) of title 31, United States Code.

**SEC. 106. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS PILOT PROGRAM ON DOG TRAINING THERAPY.**

(a) IN GENERAL.—Commencing not later than 120 days after the date of the enactment of the Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall carry out a pilot program under which the Secretary shall enter into a contract with one or more appropriate non-government entities for the purpose of assessing the effectiveness of addressing post-deployment mental health and post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms through a therapeutic medium of training service dogs for veterans with disabilities.

(b) DURATION OF PILOT PROGRAM.—The pilot program required by subsection (a) shall be carried out during the five-year period beginning on the date of the commencement of the pilot program.

(c) LOCATIONS OF PILOT PROGRAM.—In entering into contracts for purposes of the pilot program, the Secretary shall seek to enter into contracts with appropriate non-government entities located in close proximity to at least three but not more than five medical centers of the Department.

(d) APPROPRIATE NON-GOVERNMENT ENTITIES.—For purposes of the pilot program, an appropriate non-government entity is an entity that is certified in the training and handling of service dogs and that has a training area that would be appropriate for use in educating veterans with mental health conditions in the art and science of service dog training and handling. Such training area shall—

(1) include a dedicated space that is suitable for grooming and training dogs indoors;

(2) be wheelchair accessible;

(3) include classroom or lecture space;

(4) include office space for staff;

(5) include a suitable space for storing training equipment;

(6) provide for periodic use of other training areas for training the dogs with wheelchairs and conducting other exercises;

(7) include outdoor exercise and toileting space for dogs; and

(8) provide transportation for weekly field trips to train dogs in other environments.

(e) DESIGN OF PILOT PROGRAM.—Each contract entered into under subsection (a) shall provide that the non-government entity shall—

(1) ensure that veterans participating in the program receive training from certified service dog training instructors;

(2) ensure that in selecting assistance dogs for use in the program, dogs residing in animal shelters or foster homes are looked at as an option, if appropriate, and ensure that all dogs used in the program have adequate temperament and health clearances;

(3) ensure that each service dog in training participating in the pilot program is taught all essential commands pertaining to service dog skills;

(4) ensure that each service dog in training lives at the pilot program site or a volunteer foster home in the vicinity of such site while receiving training;

(5) ensure that the pilot program involves both lecture of service dog training methodologies and practical hands-on training and grooming of service dogs; and

(6) ensure that the pilot program is designed to—

(A) maximize the therapeutic benefits to veterans participating in the program; and

(B) provide well-trained service dogs to veterans with disabilities; and

(7) in hiring service dog training instructors to carry out training under the pilot program, give a preference to veterans who have successfully graduated from post-trau-

matic stress disorder or other residential treatment programs and who have received adequate certification in service dog training.

(f) ADMINISTRATION.—In order to carry out the pilot program under section (a), the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall—

(1) administer the program through the Recreation Therapy Service of the Department of Veterans Affairs under the direction of a certified recreational therapist with sufficient administrative experience to oversee the pilot program; and

(2) establish a director of service dog training with a background working in social services, experience in teaching others to train service dogs in a vocational setting, and at least one year of experience working with veterans or active duty service members with post-traumatic stress disorder in a clinical setting.

(g) VETERAN ELIGIBILITY.—The Secretary shall select veterans for participation in the pilot program. A veteran with post-traumatic stress disorder or other post-deployment mental health condition may volunteer to participate in the pilot program, if the Secretary determines that there are adequate program resources available for such veteran at the pilot program site. Veterans may participate in the pilot program in conjunction with the compensated work therapy program of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

(h) COLLECTION OF DATA.—The Secretary shall collect data on the pilot program required under subsection (a) to determine how effective the program is for the veterans participating in the program. Such data shall include data to determine how effectively the program assists veterans in—

(1) reducing stigma associated with post-traumatic stress disorder or other post-deployment mental health condition;

(2) improving emotional regulation;

(3) improving patience;

(4) instilling or re-establishing a sense of purpose;

(5) providing an opportunity to help fellow veterans;

(6) reintegrating into the community;

(7) exposing the dog to new environments and in doing so, helping the veteran reduce social isolation and withdrawal;

(8) building relationship skills, including parenting skills;

(9) relaxing the hyper-vigilant survival state;

(10) improving sleep patterns; and

(11) enabling veterans to decrease the use of pain medication.

(i) REPORTS TO CONGRESS.—Not later than one year after the date of the commencement of the pilot program under subsection (a), and each year thereafter for the duration of the pilot program, the Secretary shall submit to Congress a report on the pilot program. Each such report shall include—

(1) the number of veterans participating in the pilot program;

(2) a description of the services carried out under the pilot program;

(3) the effects that participating in the pilot program has on the following—

(A) symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder and post-deployment adjustment difficulties, including depression, maintenance of sobriety, suicidal ideations, and homelessness;

(B) potentially relevant physiological markers that possibly relate to the interactions with the service dogs;

(C) family dynamics;

(D) insomnia and pain management; and

(E) overall well-being; and

(4) the recommendations of the Secretary with respect to the extension or expansion of the pilot program.

(j) DEFINITION.—For the purposes of this section, the term “service dog training instructor” means an instructor who provides the direct training of veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder and other post-deployment issues in the art and science of service dog training and handling.

## TITLE II—VETERANS ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY AND TRANSITION ADMINISTRATION

### SEC. 201. ESTABLISHMENT OF VETERANS ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY AND TRANSITION ADMINISTRATION.

(a) VETERANS ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY AND TRANSITION ADMINISTRATION.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Part V of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new chapter:

#### “CHAPTER 80—VETERANS ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY AND TRANSITION ADMINISTRATION

“Sec.

“8001. Organization of Administration.

“8002. Functions of Administration.

##### “§ 8001. Organization of Administration

“(a) VETERANS ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY AND TRANSITION ADMINISTRATION.—There is in the Department of Veterans Affairs a Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration. The primary function of the Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration is the administration of the programs of the Department that provide assistance related to economic opportunity to veterans and their dependents and survivors.

“(b) UNDER SECRETARY FOR ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY AND TRANSITION.—The Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration is under the Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition, who is directly responsible to the Secretary for the operations of the Administration.

##### “§ 8002. Functions of Administration

“The Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration is responsible for the administration of the following programs of the Department:

“(1) Vocational rehabilitation and employment programs.

“(2) Educational assistance programs.

“(3) Veterans’ housing loan and related programs.

“(4) The verification of small businesses owned and controlled by veterans pursuant to subsection (f) of section 8127 of this title, including the administration of the database of veteran-owned businesses described in such subsection.

“(5) The Transition Assistance Program under section 1144 of title 10.

“(6) Any other program of the Department that the Secretary determines appropriate.”.

(2) CLERICAL AMENDMENTS.—The tables of chapters at the beginning of title 38, United States Code, and of part V of title 38, United States Code, are each amended by inserting after the item relating to chapter 79 the following new item:

#### “80. Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration ..... 8001”.

(b) EFFECTIVE DATE.—Chapter 80 of title 38, United States Code, as added by subsection (a), shall take effect on October 1, 2017.

(c) FULL-TIME EMPLOYEES.—For fiscal years 2017 and 2018, the total number of full-time equivalent employees authorized for the Veterans Benefits Administration and the Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration, as established under chapter 80 of title 38, United States Code, as added by subsection (a), may not exceed 21,913.

### SEC. 202. UNDER SECRETARY FOR VETERANS ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY AND TRANSITION.

(a) UNDER SECRETARY.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Chapter 3 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by inserting after section 306 the following new section:

#### “§ 306A. Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition

“(a) UNDER SECRETARY.—There is in the Department an Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition, who is appointed by the President, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate. The Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition shall be appointed without regard to political affiliation or activity and solely on the basis of demonstrated ability in—

“(1) information technology; and

“(2) the administration of programs within the Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration or programs of similar content and scope.

“(b) RESPONSIBILITIES.—The Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition is the head of, and is directly responsible to the Secretary for the operations of, the Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration.

“(c) VACANCIES.—(1) Whenever a vacancy in the position of Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition occurs or is anticipated, the Secretary shall establish a commission to recommend individuals to the President for appointment to the position.

“(2) A commission established under this subsection shall be composed of the following members appointed by the Secretary:

“(A) Three persons representing education and training, vocational rehabilitation, employment, real estate, mortgage finance and related industries, and survivor benefits activities affected by the Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration.

“(B) Two persons representing veterans served by the Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration.

“(C) Two persons who have experience in the management of private sector benefits programs of similar content and scope to the economic opportunity and transition programs of the Department.

“(D) The Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

“(E) The chairman of the Veterans’ Advisory Committee on Education formed under section 3692 of this title.

“(F) One person who has held the position of Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition, if the Secretary determines that it is desirable for such person to be a member of the commission.

“(3) A commission established under this subsection shall recommend at least three individuals for appointment to the position of Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition. The commission shall submit all recommendations to the Secretary. The Secretary shall forward the recommendations to the President and the Committees on Veterans’ Affairs of the Senate and House of Representatives with any comments the Secretary considers appropriate. Thereafter, the President may request the commission to recommend additional individuals for appointment.

“(4) The Assistant Secretary or Deputy Assistant Secretary of Veterans Affairs who performs personnel management and labor relations functions shall serve as the executive secretary of a commission established under this subsection.

“(d) QUALIFICATIONS OF RECOMMENDED INDIVIDUALS.—Each individual recommended to the President by the commission for appointment to the position of Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition shall be an individual who has held a senior level position in the private sector with responsibilities relating to at least one of the following:

“(1) Education policy.

“(2) Vocational rehabilitation.

“(3) Employment.

“(4) Job placement.

“(5) Home loan finance.

“(6) Small business development.”.

(2) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections at the beginning of such chapter is amended by inserting after the item relating to section 306 the following new item:

“306A. Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition.”.

(b) CONFORMING AMENDMENTS.—Title 38, United States Code, is further amended—

(1) in section 306(c)(2), by striking subparagraphs (A) and (E) and redesignating subparagraphs (B), (C), (D), and (F), as subparagraphs (A) through (D), respectively;

(2) in section 317(d)(2), by inserting after “Under Secretary for Benefits,” the following: “the Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition.”;

(3) in section 318(d)(2), by inserting after “Under Secretary for Benefits,” the following: “the Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition.”;

(4) in section 516(e)(2)(C), by striking “Health and the Under Secretary for Benefits” and inserting “Health, the Under Secretary for Benefits, and the Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition”;

(5) in section 541(a)(2)(B), by striking “Health and the Under Secretary for Benefits” and inserting “Health, the Under Secretary for Benefits, and the Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition”;

(6) in section 542(a)(2)(B)(iii), by striking “Health and the Under Secretary for Benefits” and inserting “Health, the Under Secretary for Benefits, and the Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition”;

(7) in section 544(a)(2)(B)(vi), by striking “Health and the Under Secretary for Benefits” and inserting “Health, the Under Secretary for Benefits, and the Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition”;

(8) in section 709(c)(2)(A), by inserting after “Under Secretary for Benefits,” the following: “the Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition.”;

(9) in section 7701(a), by inserting after “assistance” the following: “, other than assistance related to Economic Opportunity and Transition.”; and

(10) in section 7703, by striking paragraphs (2) and (3) and redesignating paragraphs (4) and (5) as paragraphs (2) and (3), respectively.

(c) EFFECTIVE DATE.—Section 306A of title 38, United States Code, as added by subsection (a), and the amendments made by this section, shall take effect on October 1, 2017.

## TITLE III—EDUCATION ASSISTANCE AND VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

### SEC. 301. MODIFICATION AND IMPROVEMENT OF TRANSFER OF UNUSED EDUCATION BENEFITS TO FAMILY MEMBERS UNDER DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS POST-9/11 EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM.

(a) RATE OF PAYMENT.—Subsection (h)(3)(B) of section 3319 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by inserting before the period at the end the following: “, except that the amount of the monthly stipend described in subsection (c)(1)(B) or (g)(3)(A)(ii) of section 3313, as the case may be, shall be payable in an amount equal to 50 percent of

the amount of such stipend that would otherwise be payable under this chapter to the individual making the transfer”.

(b) **APPLICABILITY.**—The amendment made by this section shall apply with respect to an election to transfer entitlement under section 3319 of title 38, United States Code, that is made on or after the date that is 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act.

**SEC. 302. CLARIFICATION OF ELIGIBILITY FOR MARINE GUNNERY SERGEANT JOHN DAVID FRY SCHOLARSHIP.**

(a) **IN GENERAL.**—Section 701(d) of the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014 (Public Law 113-146; 128 Stat. 1796; 38 U.S.C. 3311 note) is amended to read as follows:

“(d) **APPLICABILITY.**—

“(1) **IN GENERAL.**—The amendments made by this section shall apply with respect to a quarter, semester, or term, as applicable, commencing on or after January 1, 2015.

“(2) **DEATHS THAT OCCURRED BETWEEN SEPTEMBER 11, 2001, AND DECEMBER 31, 2005.**—For purposes of section 3311(f)(2) of title 38, United States Code, any member of the Armed Forces who died during the period beginning on September 11, 2001, and ending on December 31, 2005, is deemed to have died on January 1, 2006.”

(b) **ELECTION ON RECEIPT OF CERTAIN BENEFITS.**—Section 3311(f) of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) in paragraph (3), by striking “A surviving spouse” and inserting “Except as provided in paragraph (4), a surviving spouse”;

(2) by redesignating paragraph (4) as paragraph (5); and

(3) by inserting after paragraph (3) the following new paragraph (4):

“(4) **EXCEPTION FOR CERTAIN ELECTIONS.**—

“(A) **IN GENERAL.**—An election made under paragraph (3) by a spouse described in subparagraph (B) may not be treated as irrevocable if such election occurred before the date of the enactment of this paragraph.

“(B) **ELIGIBLE SURVIVING SPOUSE.**—A spouse described in this subparagraph is an individual—

(i) who is entitled to assistance under subsection (a) pursuant to paragraph (9) of subsection (b); and

(ii) who was the spouse of a member of the Armed Forces who died during the period beginning on September 11, 2001, and ending on December 31, 2005.”

(c) **TECHNICAL AMENDMENT.**—Paragraph (5) of subsection (f) of section 3311 of title 38, United States Code, as redesignated by subsection (b)(2), is amended by striking “that paragraph” and inserting “paragraph (9) of subsection (b)”.

(d) **YELLOW RIBBON G.I. EDUCATION ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM.**—Section 3317(a) of such title is amended by striking “paragraphs (1) and (2) of section 3311(b)” and inserting “paragraphs (1), (2), and (9) of section 3311(b) of this title”.

**SEC. 303. APPROVAL OF COURSES OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR PURPOSES OF THE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.**

(a) **IN GENERAL.**—Section 3104(b) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new sentence: “To the maximum extent practicable, a course of education or training may be pursued by a veteran as part of a rehabilitation program under this chapter only if the course is approved for purposes of chapter 30 or 33 of this title. The Secretary may waive the requirement under the preceding sentence to the extent the Secretary determines appropriate.”

(b) **EFFECTIVE DATE.**—The amendment made by subsection (a) shall apply with respect to a course of education or training pursued by a veteran who first begins a pro-

gram of rehabilitation under chapter 31 of title 38, United States Code, on or after the date that is one year after the date of the enactment of this Act.

**SEC. 304. AUTHORITY TO PRIORITIZE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES BASED ON NEED.**

Section 3104 of title 38, United States Code, as amended by section 303, is further amended by adding at the end the following new subsection:

“(c)(1) The Secretary shall have the authority to administer this chapter by prioritizing the provision of services under this chapter based on need, as determined by the Secretary. In evaluating need for purposes of this subsection, the Secretary shall consider disability ratings, the severity of employment handicaps, qualification for a program of independent living, income, and any other factor the Secretary determines appropriate.

“(2) Not later than 90 days before making any changes to the prioritization of the provision of services under this chapter as authorized under paragraph (1), the Secretary shall submit to Congress a plan describing such changes.”

**SEC. 305. RECODIFICATION AND IMPROVEMENT OF ELECTION PROCESS FOR POST-9/11 EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM.**

(a) **IN GENERAL.**—Subchapter III of chapter 33 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new section:

**“§ 3326. Election to receive educational assistance**

“(a) **INDIVIDUALS ELIGIBLE TO ELECT PARTICIPATION IN POST-9/11 EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE.**—An individual may elect to receive educational assistance under this chapter if such individual—

“(1) as of August 1, 2009—

“(A) is entitled to basic educational assistance under chapter 30 of the title and has used, but retains unused, entitlement under that chapter;

“(B) is entitled to educational assistance under chapter 107, 1606, or 1607 of title 10 and has used, but retains unused, entitlement under the applicable chapter;

“(C) is entitled to basic educational assistance under chapter 30 of this title but has not used any entitlement under that chapter;

“(D) is entitled to educational assistance under chapter 107, 1606, or 1607 of title 10 but has not used any entitlement under such chapter;

“(E) is a member of the Armed Forces who is eligible for receipt of basic educational assistance under chapter 30 this title and is making contributions toward such assistance under section 3011(b) or 3012(c) of this title; or

“(F) is a member of the Armed Forces who is not entitled to basic educational assistance under chapter 30 of this title by reason of an election under section 3011(c)(1) or 3012(d)(1) of this title; and

“(2) as of the date of the individual’s election under this paragraph, meets the requirements for entitlement to educational assistance under this chapter.

“(b) **CESSATION OF CONTRIBUTIONS TOWARD GI BILL.**—Effective as of the first month beginning on or after the date of an election under subsection (a) of an individual described by paragraph (1)(E) of that subsection, the obligation of the individual to make contributions under section 3011(b) or 3012(c) of this title, as applicable, shall cease, and the requirements of such section shall be deemed to be no longer applicable to the individual.

“(c) **REVOCAION OF REMAINING TRANSFERRED ENTITLEMENT.**—

“(1) **ELECTION TO REVOKE.**—If, on the date an individual described in paragraph (1)(A) or (1)(C) of subsection (a) makes an election under that subsection, a transfer of the entitlement of the individual to basic educational assistance under section 3020 of this title is in effect and a number of months of the entitlement so transferred remain unutilized, the individual may elect to revoke all or a portion of the entitlement so transferred that remains unutilized.

“(2) **AVAILABILITY OF REVOKED ENTITLEMENT.**—Any entitlement revoked by an individual under this paragraph shall no longer be available to the dependent to whom transferred, but shall be available to the individual instead for educational assistance under chapter 33 of this title in accordance with the provisions of this section.

“(3) **AVAILABILITY OF UNREVOKED ENTITLEMENT.**—Any entitlement described in paragraph (1) that is not revoked by an individual in accordance with that paragraph shall remain available to the dependent or dependents concerned in accordance with the current transfer of such entitlement under section 3020 of this title.

“(d) **POST-9/11 EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE.**—

“(1) **IN GENERAL.**—Subject to paragraph (2) and except as provided in subsection (e), an individual making an election under subsection (a) shall be entitled to educational assistance under this chapter in accordance with the provisions of this chapter, instead of basic educational assistance under chapter 30 this title, or educational assistance under chapter 107, 1606, or 1607 of title 10, as applicable.

“(2) **LIMITATION ON ENTITLEMENT FOR CERTAIN INDIVIDUALS.**—In the case of an individual making an election under subsection (a) who is described by paragraph (1)(A) of that subsection, the number of months of entitlement of the individual to educational assistance under this chapter 33 shall be the number of months equal to—

“(A) the number of months of unused entitlement of the individual under chapter 30 of this title, as of the date of the election, plus

“(B) the number of months, if any, of entitlement revoked by the individual under subsection (c)(1).

“(e) **CONTINUING ENTITLEMENT TO EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE NOT AVAILABLE UNDER 9/11 ASSISTANCE PROGRAM.**—

“(1) **IN GENERAL.**—In the event educational assistance to which an individual making an election under subsection (a) would be entitled under chapter 30 of this title, or chapter 107, 1606, or 1607 of title 10, as applicable, is not authorized to be available to the individual under the provisions of this chapter the individual shall remain entitled to such educational assistance in accordance with the provisions of the applicable chapter.

“(2) **CHARGE FOR USE OF ENTITLEMENT.**—The utilization by an individual of entitlement under paragraph (1) shall be chargeable against the entitlement of the individual to educational assistance under this chapter at the rate of one month of entitlement under this chapter for each month of entitlement utilized by the individual under paragraph (1) (as determined as if such entitlement were utilized under the provisions of chapter 30 of this title, or chapter 107, 1606, or 1607 of title 10, as applicable).

“(f) **ADDITIONAL POST-9/11 ASSISTANCE FOR MEMBERS HAVING MADE CONTRIBUTIONS TOWARD GI BILL.**—

“(1) **ADDITIONAL ASSISTANCE.**—In the case of an individual making an election under subsection (a) who is described by subparagraph (A), (C), or (E) of paragraph (1) of that subsection, the amount of educational assistance payable to the individual under this chapter 33 as a monthly stipend payable under paragraph (1)(B) of section 3313(c) of

this title, or under paragraphs (2) through (7) of that section (as applicable), shall be the amount otherwise payable as a monthly stipend under the applicable paragraph increased by the amount equal to—

“(A) the total amount of contributions toward basic educational assistance made by the individual under section 3011(b) or 3012(c) of this title, as of the date of the election, multiplied by

“(B) the fraction—

“(i) the numerator of which is—

“(I) the number of months of entitlement to basic educational assistance under chapter 30 of this title remaining to the individual at the time of the election; plus

“(II) the number of months, if any, of entitlement under such chapter 30 revoked by the individual under subsection (c)(1); and

“(ii) the denominator of which is 36 months.

“(2) MONTHS OF REMAINING ENTITLEMENT FOR CERTAIN INDIVIDUALS.—In the case of an individual covered by paragraph (1) who is described by subsection (a)(1)(E), the number of months of entitlement to basic educational assistance remaining to the individual for purposes of paragraph (1)(B)(i)(II) shall be 36 months.

“(3) TIMING OF PAYMENT.—The amount payable with respect to an individual under paragraph (1) shall be paid to the individual together with the last payment of the monthly stipend payable to the individual under paragraph (1)(B) of section 3313(c) of this title, or under subsections (b) through (g) of that section (as applicable), before the exhaustion of the individual's entitlement to educational assistance under this chapter.

“(g) CONTINUING ENTITLEMENT TO ADDITIONAL ASSISTANCE FOR CRITICAL SKILLS OR SPECIALTY AND ADDITIONAL SERVICE.—An individual making an election under subsection (a)(1) who, at the time of the election, is entitled to increased educational assistance under section 3015(d) of this title, or section 16131(i) of title 10, or supplemental educational assistance under subchapter III of chapter 30 of this title, shall remain entitled to such increased educational assistance or supplemental educational assistance in the utilization of entitlement to educational assistance under this chapter, in an amount equal to the quarter, semester, or term, as applicable, equivalent of the monthly amount of such increased educational assistance or supplemental educational assistance payable with respect to the individual at the time of the election.

“(h) ALTERNATIVE ELECTION BY SECRETARY.—

“(1) IN GENERAL.—In the case of an individual who, on or after January 1, 2016, submits to the Secretary an election under this section that the Secretary determines is clearly against the interests of the individual, or who fails to make an election under this section, the Secretary may make an alternative election on behalf of the individual that the Secretary determines is in the best interests of the individual.

“(2) NOTICE.—If the Secretary makes an election on behalf of an individual under this subsection, the Secretary shall notify the individual by not later than seven days after making such election and shall provide the individual with a 30-day period, beginning on the date of the individual's receipt of such notice, during which the individual may modify or revoke the election made by the Secretary on the individual's behalf. The Secretary shall include, as part of such notice, a clear statement of why the alternative election made by the Secretary is in the best interests of the individual as compared to the election submitted by the individual. The Secretary shall provide the no-

tice required under this paragraph by electronic means whenever possible.

“(i) IRREVOCABILITY OF ELECTIONS.—An election under subsection (a) or (c)(1) is irrevocable.”

(b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections at the beginning of such chapter is amended by adding at the end the following new item:

“3326. Election to receive educational assistance.”

(c) CONFORMING REPEAL.—Subsection (c) of section 5003 of the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008 (Public Law 110-252; 38 U.S.C. 3301 note) is hereby repealed.

**SEC. 306. CLARIFICATION OF ASSISTANCE PROVIDED FOR CERTAIN FLIGHT TRAINING AND OTHER PROGRAMS OF EDUCATION.**

(a) FLIGHT TRAINING.—Subsection (c)(1)(A) of section 3313 of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) in clause (i)—

(A) by redesignating subclauses (I) and (II) as items (aa) and (bb), respectively;

(B) by striking “In the case of a program of education pursued at a public institution of higher learning” and inserting “(I) Subject to subclause (II), in the case of a program of education pursued at a public institution of higher learning not described in clause (ii)(II)(bb)”; and

(C) by adding at the end the following new subclause:

“(II) In determining the actual net cost for in-State tuition and fees pursuant to subclause (I), the Secretary may not pay for tuition and fees relating to flight training.”; and

(2) in clause (ii)—

(A) in subclause (I), by redesignating items (aa) and (bb) as subitems (AA) and (BB), respectively;

(B) in subclause (II), by redesignating items (aa) and (bb) as subitems (AA) and (BB), respectively;

(C) by redesignating subclauses (I) and (II) as items (aa) and (bb), respectively;

(D) by striking “In the case of a program of education pursued at a non-public or foreign institution of higher learning” and inserting “(I) In the case of a program of education described in subclause (II)”; and

(E) by adding at the end the following new subclause:

“(II) A program of education described in this subclause is any of the following:

“(aa) A program of education pursued at a non-public or foreign institution of higher learning.

“(bb) A program of education pursued at a public institution of higher learning in which flight training is required to earn the degree being pursued (including with respect to a dual major, concentration, or other element of such a degree).”

(b) CERTAIN PROGRAMS OF EDUCATION CARRIED OUT UNDER CONTRACT.—Section 3313(c)(1)(A)(ii)(II) of title 38, United States Code, as added by subsection (a)(2)(E), is amended by adding at the end the following new item:

“(cc) A program of education pursued at a public institution of higher learning in which the public institution of higher learning enters into a contract or agreement with an entity (other than another public institution of higher learning) to provide such program of education or a portion of such program of education.”

(c) APPLICATION.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Except as provided by paragraph (2), the amendments made by subsection (a) and (b) shall apply with respect to a quarter, semester, or term, as applicable, commencing on or after the date of the enactment of this Act.

(2) SPECIAL RULE FOR CURRENT STUDENTS.—In the case of an individual who, as of the date of the enactment of this Act, is using educational assistance under chapter 33 of title 38, United States Code, to pursue a course of education that includes a program of education described in item (bb) or (cc) of section 3313(c)(1)(A)(ii)(II) of title 38, United States Code, as added by subsections (a) and (b), respectively, the amendment made by such subsection shall apply with respect to a quarter, semester, or term, as applicable, commencing on or after the date that is two years after the date of the enactment of this Act.

**SEC. 307. CONSIDERATION OF CERTAIN TIME SPENT RECEIVING MEDICAL CARE FROM SECRETARY OF DEFENSE AS ACTIVE DUTY FOR PURPOSES OF ELIGIBILITY FOR POST-9/11 EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE.**

(a) IN GENERAL.—Section 3301(1)(B) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by inserting “12301(h),” after “12301(g).”

(b) APPLICATION.—The amendment made by subsection (a) shall apply with respect to active duty service by a member of a reserve component covered by section 12301(h) of title 10, United States, beginning on or after the date that is 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act.

**SEC. 308. WORK-STUDY ALLOWANCE.**

Section 3485(a)(4) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by striking “June 30, 2013” each place it appears and inserting “June 30, 2013, or the period beginning on June 30, 2016, and ending on June 30, 2021”.

**SEC. 309. VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION AND EDUCATION ACTION PLAN.**

Not later than 270 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall develop and publish an action plan for improving the services and assistance provided under chapter 31 of title 38, United States Code. Such plan shall include each of the following:

(1) A comprehensive analysis of, and recommendations and a proposed implementation plan for remedying workload management challenges at regional offices of the Department of Veterans Affairs, including steps to reduce counselor caseloads of veterans participating in a rehabilitation program under such chapter, particularly for counselors who are assisting veterans with traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress disorder and counselors with educational and vocational counseling workloads.

(2) A comprehensive analysis of the reasons for the disproportionately low percentage of veterans with service-connected disabilities who served in the Armed Forces after September 11, 2001, who opt to participate in a rehabilitation program under such chapter relative to the percentage of such veterans who use their entitlement to educational assistance under chapter 33 of title 38, United States Code, including an analysis of barriers to timely enrollment in rehabilitation programs under chapter 31 of such title and of any barriers to a veteran enrolling in the program of that veteran's choice.

(3) Recommendations and a proposed implementation plan for encouraging more veterans with service-connected disabilities who served in the Armed Forces after September 11, 2001, to participate in rehabilitation programs under chapter 31 of such title.

(4) A national staff training program for vocational rehabilitation counselors of the Department that includes the provision of—

(A) training to assist counselors in understanding the very profound disorientation experienced by warriors whose lives and life-plans have been upended and out of their control because of their injury;

(B) training to assist counselors in working in partnership with veterans on individual rehabilitation plans; and

(C) training on post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental health conditions and on moderate to severe traumatic brain injury that is designed to improve the ability of such counselors to assist veterans with these conditions, including by providing information on the broad spectrum of such conditions and the effect of such conditions on an individual's abilities and functional limitations.

**SEC. 310. REDUCTION IN REDUNDANCY AND INEFFICIENCIES IN VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION CLAIMS PROCESSING.**

(a) VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION CLAIMS.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall reduce redundancy and inefficiencies in the use of information technology to process claims for rehabilitation programs under chapter 31 of title 38, United States Code, by—

(1) ensuring that all payments for and on behalf of veterans participating in a rehabilitation program under such chapter are only processed and paid out of one corporate information technology system, in order to eliminate the redundancy of multiple information technology payment systems; and

(2) enhancing the information technology system supporting veterans participating in such a program to support more accurate accounting of services and outcomes for such veterans.

(b) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is authorized to be appropriated to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs for fiscal year 2016 \$10,000,000 to carry out this section.

(c) REPORT.—Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to Congress a report on the changes made pursuant to subsection (a).

**TITLE IV—ADMINISTRATION OF EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE**

**SEC. 401. CENTRALIZED REPORTING OF VETERAN ENROLLMENT BY CERTAIN GROUPS, DISTRICTS, AND CONSORTIUMS OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS.**

(a) IN GENERAL.—Section 3684(a) of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) in paragraph (1), by inserting “32, 33,” after “31.”; and

(2) by adding at the end the following new paragraph:

“(4) For purposes of this subsection, the term ‘educational institution’ may include a group, district, or consortium of separately accredited educational institutions located in the same State that are organized in a manner that facilitates the centralized reporting of the enrollments in such group, district, or consortium of institutions.”

(b) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendments made by subsection (a) shall apply with respect to reports submitted on or after the date of the enactment of this Act.

**SEC. 402. PROVISION OF INFORMATION REGARDING VETERAN ENTITLEMENT TO EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE.**

(a) IN GENERAL.—Subchapter II of chapter 36 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new section:

**“§ 3699. Provision of certain information to educational institutions**

“For each veteran or other individual pursuing a course of education that has been approved under this chapter using educational assistance to which the veteran or other individual is entitled under chapter 30, 32, 33, or 35 of this title, the Secretary shall make available to the educational institution offering the course information about the amount of such educational assistance to which the veteran or other individual is enti-

led. Such information shall be provided to such educational institution through a secure information technology system accessible by the educational institution and shall be regularly updated to reflect any amounts used by the veteran or other individual.”

(b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections at the beginning of such chapter is amended by inserting after the item relating to section 3698 the following new item:

“3699. Provision of certain information to educational institutions.”

**SEC. 403. ROLE OF STATE APPROVING AGENCIES.**

(a) APPROVAL OF CERTAIN COURSES.—Section 3672(b)(2)(A) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by striking “the following” and all that follows through the colon and inserting the following: “a program of education is deemed to be approved for purposes of this chapter if a State approving agency determines that the program is one of the following programs:”

(b) APPROVAL OF OTHER COURSES.—Section 3675 of such title is amended—

(1) in subsection (a)(1)—

(A) by striking “The Secretary or a State approving agency” and inserting “A State approving agency, or the Secretary when acting in the role of a State approving agency.”; and

(B) by striking “offered by proprietary for-profit educational institutions” and inserting “not covered by section 3672 of this title”; and

(2) in subsection (b), by striking “the Secretary or the State approving agency” each place it appears and inserting “the State approving agency, or the Secretary when acting in the role of a State approving agency.”

**SEC. 404. CRITERIA USED TO APPROVE COURSES.**

(a) NONACCREDITED COURSES.—Section 3676(c)(14) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by inserting before the period the following: “if the Secretary, in consultation with the State approving agency and pursuant to regulations prescribed to carry out this paragraph, determines such criteria are necessary and treat public, private, and proprietary for-profit educational institutions equitably”

(b) ACCREDITED COURSES.—Section 3675(b)(3) of such title is amended by striking “and (3)” and inserting “(3), and (14)”.

(c) APPLICATION.—The amendment made by subsection (a) shall apply with respect to—

(1) criteria developed pursuant to paragraph (14) of subsection (c) of section 3676 of title 38, United States Code, on or after January 1, 2013; and

(2) an investigation conducted under such subsection that is covered by a reimbursement of expenses paid by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to a State pursuant to section 3674 of such title on or after October 1, 2015.

**SEC. 405. COMPLIANCE SURVEYS.**

(a) IN GENERAL.—Section 3693 of such title is amended—

(1) by striking subsection (a) and inserting the following new subsection (a):

“(a)(1) Except as provided in subsection (b), the Secretary shall conduct an annual compliance survey of educational institutions and training establishments offering one or more courses approved for the enrollment of eligible veterans or persons if at least 20 such veterans or persons are enrolled in any such course. The Secretary shall—

“(A) design the compliance surveys to ensure that such institutions or establishments, as the case may be, and approved courses are in compliance with all applicable provisions of chapters 30 through 36 of this title;

“(B) survey each such educational institution and training establishment not less than once during every two-year period; and

“(C) assign not fewer than one education compliance specialist to work on compliance surveys in any year for each 40 compliance surveys required to be made under this section for such year.

“(2) The Secretary, in consultation with the State approving agencies, shall—

“(A) annually determine the parameters of the surveys required under paragraph (1); and

“(B) not later than September 1 of each year, make available to the State approving agencies a list of the educational institutions and training establishments that will be surveyed during the fiscal year following the date of making such list available.”; and

(2) by adding at the end the following new subsection:

“(c) In this section, the terms ‘educational institution’ and ‘training establishment’ have the meaning given such terms in section 3452 of this title.”

(b) CONFORMING AMENDMENTS.—Subsection (b) of such section is amended—

(1) by striking “subsection (a) of this section for an annual compliance survey” and inserting “subsection (a)(1) for a compliance survey”; and

(2) by striking “institution” and inserting “educational institution or training establishment”; and

(3) by striking “institution’s demonstrated record of compliance” and inserting “record of compliance of such institution or establishment”.

**SEC. 406. SURVEY OF INDIVIDUALS USING THEIR ENTITLEMENT TO EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE UNDER THE EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS ADMINISTERED BY THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.**

(a) SURVEY REQUIRED.—By not later than 270 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall enter into a contract with a non-government entity for the conduct of a survey of a statistically valid sample of individuals who have used or are using their entitlement to educational assistance under chapters 30, 32, 33, and 35 of title 38, United States Code, to pursue a program of education or training. The contract shall provide that—

(1) not later than one month before the collection of data under the survey begins, the survey shall be submitted to the Committees on Veterans’ Affairs of the Senate and House of Representatives;

(2) the non-government entity shall complete the survey and submit to the Secretary the results of the survey by not later than 180 days after entering into the contract; and

(3) the survey shall be conducted by electronic means and by any other means the non-government entity determines appropriate.

(b) INFORMATION TO BE COLLECTED.—The contract under subsection (a) shall provide that the survey shall be designed to collect the following types of information about each individual surveyed, where applicable:

(1) Demographic information, including the highest level of education completed by the individual, the military occupational specialty or specialties of the individual while serving on active duty as a member of the Armed Forces or as a member of the National Guard or of a Reserve Component of the Armed Forces, and whether the individual has a service-connected disability.

(2) The opinion of the individual regarding participation in the transition assistance program under section 1144 of title 10, United States Code, and the effectiveness of the program, including instruction on the use of the benefits under laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

(3) The resources the individual used to help the individual—

(A) decide to use the individual's entitlement to educational assistance to enroll in a program of education or training; and

(B) choose the program of education or training the individual pursued.

(4) The individual's goal when the individual enrolled in the program of education or training.

(5) The nature of the individual's experience with the education benefits processing system of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

(6) The nature of the individual's experience with the school certifying official of the educational institution where the individual pursued the program of education or training who processed the individual's claim.

(7) Any services or benefits the educational institution or program of education or training provided to veterans while the individual pursued the program of education or training.

(8) The type of educational institution at which the individual pursued the program of education or training.

(9) Whether the individual completed the program of education or training or the number of credit hours completed by the individual as of the time of the survey, and, if applicable, any degree or certificate obtained by the individual for completing the program.

(10) The employment status of the individual and whether such employment status differs from the employment status of the individual prior to enrolling in the program of education or training.

(11) Whether the individual is or was enrolled in a program of education on a full-time or part-time basis.

(12) The opinion of the individual on the effectiveness of the educational assistance program of the Department of Veterans Affairs under which the individual was entitled to educational assistance.

(13) Whether the individual was ever entitled to a rehabilitation under chapter 31 of title 38, United States Code, and whether the individual participated in such a program.

(14) A description of any circumstances that prevented the individual from using the individual's entitlement to educational assistance to pursue a desired career path or degree.

(15) Whether the individual is using the individual's entitlement to educational assistance to pursue a program of education or training or has transferred such an entitlement to a dependent.

(16) Such other matters as the Secretary determines appropriate.

(c) REPORT.—Not later than 90 days after receiving the results of the survey required under this section, the Secretary shall submit to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and House of Representatives a report on the results of the survey and any recommendations of the Secretary relating to such results. Such report shall also include an unedited version of the results of the survey submitted by the non-government entity that conducted the study.

**SEC. 407. IMPROVEMENT OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY OF THE VETERANS BENEFITS ADMINISTRATION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.**

(a) PROCESSING OF CERTAIN EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE CLAIMS.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall, to the maximum extent possible, make such changes and improvements to the information technology system of the Veterans Benefits Administration of the Department of Veterans Affairs to ensure that—

(1) to the maximum extent possible, all original and supplemental claims for educational assistance under chapter 33 of title

38, United States Code, are adjudicated electronically; and

(2) rules-based processing is used to make decisions with respect to such claims with little human intervention.

(b) IMPLEMENTATION PLAN.—Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to Congress a plan to implement the changes and improvements described in subsection (a).

(c) REPORT.—Not later than one year after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to Congress a report on the implementation of the changes and improvements described in subsection (a).

(d) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is authorized to be appropriated to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs \$30,000,000 to carry out this section during fiscal years 2016 and 2017.

**SEC. 408. TECHNICAL AMENDMENT RELATING TO IN-STATE TUITION RATE FOR INDIVIDUALS TO WHOM ENTITLEMENT IS TRANSFERRED UNDER ALL-VOLUNTEER FORCE EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM AND POST-9/11 EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE.**

(a) TECHNICAL AMENDMENT.—Section 3679(c)(2)(B) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by striking “or 3319 of this title” and all that follows and inserting “of this title or to whom educational assistance is transferred under section 3319 of this title.”.

(b) APPLICABILITY.—The amendment made by subsection (a) shall apply with respect to a course, semester, or term that begins after July 1, 2016.

**TITLE V—OTHER MATTERS**

**SEC. 501. AMOUNT OF LOAN GUARANTEED UNDER HOME LOAN PROGRAM OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.**

(a) ADJUSTMENT OF LOAN LIMIT.—Section 3703(a)(1) of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) in subparagraph (A)(i)(IV)—  
(A) by striking “the lesser of”; and  
(B) by striking “or 25 percent of the loan”; and

(2) in subparagraph (C), by striking “Freddie Mac” and all that follows through the period at the end and inserting “amount of the loan.”.

(b) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendments made by this section shall apply with respect to a loan guaranteed under section 3710 of title 38, United States Code, on or after the date that is 30 days after the date of the enactment of this Act.

**SEC. 502. LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF JOB COUNSELING, TRAINING, AND PLACEMENT SERVICE FOR VETERANS.**

(a) IN GENERAL.—Chapter 41 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new section:

**“§4115. Longitudinal study of job counseling, training, and placement service for veterans**

“(a) STUDY REQUIRED.—(1) The Secretary shall enter into a contract with a non-government entity to conduct a longitudinal study of a statistically valid sample of each of the groups of individuals described in paragraph (2). The contract shall provide for the study of each such group over a period of at least five years.

“(2) The groups of individuals described in this paragraph are the following:

“(A) Veterans who have received intensive services.

“(B) Veterans who did not receive intensive services but who otherwise received services under this chapter.

“(C) Veterans who did not seek or receive services under this chapter.

“(3) The study required by this subsection shall include the collection of the following information for each individual who participates in the study:

“(A) The average number of months such individual served on active duty.

“(B) The distribution of disability ratings of such individual.

“(C) Any unemployment benefits received by such individual.

“(D) The average number of months such individual was employed during the year covered by the report.

“(E) The average annual starting and ending salaries of any such individual who was employed during the year covered by the report.

“(F) The average annual income of such individual.

“(G) The average total household income of such individual for the year covered by the report.

“(H) The percentage of such individuals who own their principal residences.

“(I) The employment status of such individual.

“(J) In the case of such an individual who received services under this chapter, whether the individual believes that any service provided by a disabled veterans' outreach specialist or local veterans' employment representative helped the individual to become employed.

“(K) In the case of such an individual who believes such a service helped the individual to become employed, whether—

“(i) the individual retained the position of employment for a period of one year or longer; and

“(ii) the individual believes such a service helped the individual to secure a higher wage or salary.

“(L) The conditions under which such individual was discharged or released from the Armed Forces.

“(M) Whether such individual has used any educational assistance to which the individual is entitled under this title.

“(N) Whether such individual has participated in a rehabilitation program under chapter 31 of this title.

“(O) Demographic information about such individual.

“(P) Such other information as the Secretary determines appropriate.

“(b) ANNUAL REPORTS.—(1) By not later than July 1 of each year covered by the study required under subsection (a), the Secretary shall submit to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and House of Representatives a report on the outcomes of the study during the preceding year.

“(2) The Secretary shall include in each annual report submitted under paragraph (1) any information the Secretary determines is necessary to determine the long-term outcomes of the individuals in the groups described in subsection (a)(2).”.

(b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections at the beginning of such chapter is amended by adding at the end the following new item:

“4115. Longitudinal study of job counseling, training, and placement service for veterans.”.

**SEC. 503. LIMITATIONS ON SUBCONTRACTS UNDER CONTRACTS WITH SMALL BUSINESS CONCERNS OWNED AND CONTROLLED BY VETERANS.**

(a) IN GENERAL.—Section 8127 of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) by redesignating subsection (l) as subsection (m); and

(2) by inserting after subsection (k) the following new subsection (l):

“(l) LIMITATIONS ON SUBCONTRACTING.—(1)(A) The requirements applicable to a covered small business concern under section 46

of the Small Business Act (15 U.S.C. 657s) shall apply with respect to a small business concern owned and controlled by a veteran with a service-connected disability or a small business concern owned and controlled by a veteran that is awarded a contract that is counted for purposes of meeting the goals under subsection (a).

“(B) For purposes of applying the requirements of section 46 of the Small Business Act (15 U.S.C. 657s) pursuant to subparagraph (A), the term ‘similarly situated entity’ used in such section 46 includes a subcontractor for a small business concern owned and controlled by a veteran with a service-connected disability or a small business concern owned and controlled by a veteran described in such subparagraph (A).

“(2) Before awarding a contract that is counted for purposes of meeting the goals under subsection (a), the Secretary shall obtain from an offeror a certification that the offeror will comply with the requirements described in paragraph (1)(A) if awarded the contract. Such certification shall—

“(A) specify the exact performance requirements applicable under such paragraph; and

“(B) explicitly acknowledge that the certification is subject to section 1001 of title 18.

“(3) If the Secretary determines that a small business concern that is awarded a contract that is counted for purposes of meeting the goals under subsection (a) did not act in good faith with respect to the requirements described in paragraph (1)(A), the small business concern shall be subject to the penalties specified in—

“(A) section 16(g)(1) of the Small Business Act (15 U.S.C. 645(g)(1)); and

“(B) section 1001 of title 18.

“(4)(A) The Director of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization for the Department, established pursuant to section 15(k) of the Small Business Act (15 U.S.C. 644(k)), and the Chief Acquisition Officer of the Department, established pursuant to section 1702 of title 41, shall jointly implement a process using the systems described in section 16(g)(2) of the Small Business Act (15 U.S.C. 645(g)(2)), or any other systems available, to monitor compliance with this subsection. The Chief Acquisition Officer shall refer any violations of this subsection to the Inspector General of the Department.

“(B) Not later than November 30 of each year, the Inspector General shall submit to the Committees on Veterans’ Affairs of the Senate and House of Representatives a report for the fiscal year preceding the fiscal year during which the report is submitted that includes, for the fiscal year covered by the report—

“(i) the number of referred violations received under subparagraph (A); and

“(ii) the disposition of such referred violations, including the number of small business concerns suspended or debarred from Federal contracting or referred to the Attorney General for prosecution.”

(b) EFFECTIVE DATE.—Subsection (l) of section 8127 of title 38, United States Code, as added by subsection (a) shall apply with respect to a contract entered into after the date of the enactment of this Act.

**SEC. 504. PROCEDURES FOR PROVISION OF CERTAIN INFORMATION TO STATE VETERANS AGENCIES TO FACILITATE THE FURNISHING OF ASSISTANCE AND BENEFITS TO VETERANS.**

(a) PROCEDURES REQUIRED.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall develop procedures to share the information described in subsection (b) regarding veterans with State veterans agencies in electronic data format as a means of facilitating the furnishing of assistance and benefits to veterans.

(b) COVERED INFORMATION.—The information shared with State veterans agencies

under subsection (a) regarding a veteran shall include the following:

(1) Military service and separation data.

(2) A personal email address.

(3) A personal telephone number.

(4) A mailing address.

(c) OPT-OUT ELECTION.—A veteran may elect to prevent their information from being shared with State veterans agencies under subsection (a) pursuant to a process that the Secretary shall establish for purposes of this subsection.

(d) USE OF INFORMATION.—The Secretary shall ensure that the information shared with State veterans agencies in accordance with the procedures developed under subsection (a) is only shared by such agencies with county government veterans service offices for such purposes as the Secretary shall specify for the administration and delivery of assistance and benefits.

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

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Florida.

**GENERAL LEAVE**

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and to add any extraneous materials on H.R. 3016, as amended.

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

There was no objection?

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I rise in support of H.R. 3016, as amended, the Veterans Employment, Education, and Healthcare Improvement Act.

This bill, which was introduced by the chairman of our Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity, Congressman WENSTRUP of Ohio, includes a number of provisions relating to veterans’ health care, education, and employment benefits.

One provision of the bill would authorize the Department of Veterans Affairs to create a new fourth administration to streamline the oversight of the many VA programs and benefits that assist veterans with transition and that promote their economic welfare. These benefits include vocational rehabilitation and employment, GI Bill education benefits, the verification of veteran-owned small businesses, the VA’s portion of the Transition Assistance Program, and the home loan guaranty program.

Another provision of the bill would make needed improvements to education and vocational rehabilitation and employment benefits by, among other things, closing a costly loophole that has allowed some contracted-out flight schools to charge the VA hundreds of thousands of dollars in excessive tuition and fee payments.

Still other provisions would improve the administration of benefits and expand opportunities for the use of the home loan benefit by eliminating the

loan limit that caps the amount of money the VA will guarantee under the home loan program. This would help tens of thousands of veterans who are living in high-cost areas to realize the dream that many Americans strive for.

Health-related provisions of the bill would elevate the role of podiatrists in the VA medical facilities, improve care for the newborn children of female veterans, create a pilot program on service dog training for veterans with post-traumatic stress, and require the Government Accountability Office to conduct period audits of the VA’s budget.

I am grateful to Dr. WENSTRUP, to Dr. ROE, and to the many other sponsors of these provisions for their hard work and leadership in crafting and in developing this legislation, and I urge all of my colleagues to support it.

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

Ms. BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I rise in support of H.R. 3016, as amended, the VA Provider Equity Act.

The provisions of title I directly affect the health of veterans by making podiatrists equal to other doctors in the VA, by making Medal of Honor recipients a top priority in receiving health care at the VA, and by making the newborn babies of servicemembers eligible for VA health care in the first 6 weeks of life, to follow their mothers’ eligibility at the VA.

The legislation authorizes a GAO audit of the Veterans Health Administration’s budget. I feel that the Veterans Health Administration has been more responsive under the leadership of Dr. David Shulkin, but I agree that everyone would be better informed of how the VHA is working if we are all starting on the same page. I am also pleased that a successful dog training program will be expanded to other parts of the country to help veterans who are recovering from TBI and PTSD.

I am particularly pleased to support provisions in H.R. 3016 which improve the veterans’ education and rehabilitation program and which increase limits on the veterans’ home loan program while maintaining the VA’s strict lending requirements.

H.R. 3016 also contains several important improvements in education and employment programs for veterans. Representative TAKANO will have more to say because he has taken the lead on these as the ranking member of the Economic Opportunity Subcommittee.

I also want to thank Chairman MILLER for compromising on the establishment of a new administration within the VA, called the Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration.

While I appreciate the chairman’s attempt to compromise on another key provision, I want to make it clear that I oppose the policy to cut in half the living stipend for the children of servicemembers who have received their

parents' transferred GI Bill benefits. We promised the men and women who signed up to serve in our Nation's military that they would be able to transfer their entire GI Bill benefits to a dependent spouse or child. It is unfair that we are now breaking part of that promise. While I understand that this change pays for the other essential provisions in this bill, I would have preferred that we would have kept the promise we made to servicemembers while finding other ways to pay for this package.

As this legislation moves forward, I will continue to work with my colleagues to find a different way to pay for these provisions that does not violate the promise we made to our veterans.

I had hoped our Republican colleagues would have brought this bill to the floor under an open rule so as to have given us the opportunity to propose amendments and to debate ways to improve the more controversial provisions of this bill. I am disappointed that we are not able to offer amendments to improve the bill today. Yet I will support this bill overall due to the number of positive improvements.

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

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from the Second District of Ohio (Mr. WENSTRUP), the chairman of the Economic Opportunity Subcommittee and a combat veteran, himself.

Mr. WENSTRUP. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 3016, the Veterans Employment, Education, and Healthcare Improvement Act, as amended.

I am proud to sponsor this bill and am glad to be joined by veteran service organizations in their support, like the VFW and the DAV. It will help ensure that the veterans receive the benefits they have earned.

This veterans' legislation contains over 30 provisions from over a dozen Members of Congress and is the result of countless hours of work amongst the members of the committee. I want to highlight three specific provisions in the bill that improve the benefits our veterans receive.

First is the VA Provider Equity Act, which would strengthen access to the comprehensive, first-class health care that veterans deserve. We all know wait times for health care at the VA remain somewhat unacceptable in many places. This is true, in part, because the VA struggles to employ enough healthcare specialists to meet the needs of veterans.

The VA Provider Equity Act responds to this issue by aligning outdated VA standards more closely with the private sector practices of today. When introduced, every doctor on the Committee on Veterans' Affairs joined as an original cosponsor, understanding that we need to make it easier for the VA to recruit and retain the specialists our veterans so desperately need.

The bill also includes H.R. 2344, the Veterans Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Improvement Act of 2015, which I introduced earlier this year. The VA's Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment program helps disabled veterans to prepare for employment or to live as independently as possible. If a veteran chooses to pursue education or training through this program, current law does not require the courses to be approved for GI benefits. My provision would tighten this requirement to provide additional oversight and protections for our veterans.

We also include the GI Bill Quality Enhancement Act. By giving State Approving Agencies the increased oversight of GI Bill programs, this provision would provide veterans with the information they need to make good choices about education and training programs that offer the best quality.

The Veterans Employment, Education, and Healthcare Improvement Act would make important progress in streamlining veterans' access to their earned benefits. It is one simple step we can take to ensure that our veterans receive the benefits they have earned.

I thank Representative TAKANO for his help in moving this forward, and I urge my colleagues to support it.

Ms. BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I yield 4 minutes to the gentleman from California (Mr. TAKANO).

Mr. TAKANO. I thank Ranking Member CORRINE BROWN for yielding time.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 3016.

While there are parts of this bill that I hope to see changed as it moves forward, it includes numerous provisions that will have a positive impact on our Nation's veteran population, including several provisions I authored.

Section 307 of this bill is the language from my GI Bill Fairness Act, bipartisan legislation to close a gap faced by our National Guardsmen and Reservists who have been repeatedly called to war throughout operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Currently, members of the Guard and Reserve who are wounded in combat are sometimes placed on Active Duty for their recovery, treatment, and rehabilitation. Unfortunately, current Federal law does not recognize such Active Duty orders as eligible for Post-9/11 GI Bill education assistance, meaning that, unlike other members of the military, those who serve in the Guard and Reserve may actually lose benefits for being injured in the line of duty. This provision in H.R. 3016 would end unequal treatment and ensure these guardsmen and reservists are able to accrue GI Bill benefits, when ordered to Active Duty, for the purposes of receiving medical care.

H.R. 3016 also includes my Work-Study for Student Veterans Act, which would reinstate certain VA work-study activities that expired on June 30, 2013. The VA's Student Work-Study Allowance Program allows qualifying stu-

dent veterans who are in college degree programs or in vocational or professional programs to be paid for working in a variety of capacities on campus, at VA facilities, or at other veteran-centered organizations to assist fellow veterans. The work-study program achieves two important goals: offering student veterans a way to earn a little extra money and providing transitioning veterans with the guidance and assistance of fellow veterans who know firsthand what that transition is like.

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I also strongly support section 306 of the bill, which caps the amount of post-9/11 GI Bill funds available to flight schools—private flight schools—that contract with community colleges at the same amount that the GI Bill caps funds available to private universities.

Due to a current loophole in the GI Bill, student veterans have been able to take pilot training classes with questionable job placement prospects at exorbitant cost to the taxpayers. According to the Los Angeles Times, one flight company charged 12 student veterans over \$500,000 each in GI Bill funds.

While it is true that flight training can be more expensive than other vocational or academic programs, VA data shows that while the number of student veterans taking flight training increased by only 9 percent between fiscal years '13 and '14, the total cost to taxpayers for this program grew by 87 percent during this same period, costing \$37 million in taxpayer dollars.

The drafters of the GI Bill never intended to create this windfall for the flight school industry. What's more, VFW and the American Legion support the cap, agreeing that this loophole is a disservice to student veterans who would be better served by one of the many flight school programs that cost well under the cap.

I do have serious reservations about section 301 of this legislation, which would cut by half the monthly housing allowance provided to children of servicemembers who will have post-9/11 GI Bill benefits transferred to them. I don't believe that we should be paying for the great provisions in this bill by cutting benefits.

Furthermore, the bill on the House floor today does not include a grandfather clause. That means that some current servicemembers will see the terms that they agreed to when they signed up changed. As this bill advances, I strongly urge the chairman and ranking member to find another pay-for and eliminate section 301.

With that being said, I believe overall, with some tweaks, this legislation will provide valuable support for our veterans, and I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 3016.

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1½ minutes to the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. ABRAHAM), who is

from the Fifth District of Louisiana and is a fine member of our Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

Mr. ABRAHAM. Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank Chairman MILLER, Ranking Member BROWN, Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs Ranking Member TITUS, and all Members who worked so hard to bring this bill to the floor.

There are many provisions in H.R. 677, as amended, that would help improve services for veterans and their families, but I want to focus my remarks on a section that I am proud to have authored.

First, the bill would authorize an automatic COLA for beneficiaries who receive the VA disability compensation. Although the Congress generally approves COLA legislation every year, veterans have to wait until Congress actually acts.

Ms. BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I yield 4 minutes to the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. WALZ).

Mr. WALZ. Mr. Speaker, as you have heard, I associate myself with the remarks of the positive nature of the provisions in this bill. It has been the House Veterans' Affairs Committee that has been in the forefront of improving veterans care, from the post-9/11 GI Bill, to healthcare changes, to job placements. We have been at the forefront of VA improvements, accountability, and reform.

While this bill continues in that vein, as you have heard here, there is one provision in it that, for me personally, I cannot cross. To pay for these programs, an offset has to be found. That is a noble and correct principle; meaning, if we add anything, we need to find the pay-for somewhere else to not add to the debt.

In the case of this, to pay for these absolutely wonderful programs, many which I helped write, we went back and we took a benefit. I am not going to debate whether that benefit was overly generous. I am not going to debate how many are using it.

If one veteran signed up, served this Nation, went overseas and fought for our defense and they were promised a benefit, to pull it back at this time is an egregious breach of trust. At a time when the VA is hurting, at a time when the faith in government is hurting, the faith in the media, our soldiers need to know there are some things that will not be crossed.

So I want to be very clear on this. The motives of the people who worked on this should never be questioned. I have never seen people with more integrity and more care for our veterans. Thought goes into this. Improvements try to be made. And when the American people are frustrated and they see nothing gets done, this committee and the bipartisanship of the care of our veterans is absolutely paramount.

This is a devilish situation. How do we find the pay-for? My question is—and, yes, perhaps it is a chip on my shoulder of an enlisted soldier—why

come to the soldiers first? There is nowhere else in the Federal Government that we can find this.

The chairman rightfully pointed out today another egregious waste of money in decorating and bonuses to VA officials who are not fulfilling their duty. My question is: can't we find some way to at least get the people through who were there and, if we want to make the changes, do so? I know every effort in good faith has been made to do that. Yes, it can be argued that this was overly generous and should not have been there in the first place, but it was. It was signed up for and people went. I have stood in front of troops who said: You promised it to me, and I am counting on using it.

It seems to me that as Representatives of the American people, I can go back and ask my constituents, and they will agree on almost nothing. If I ask them, "Should we do everything necessary to care for our veterans," the answer is "yes." If we can't find the offset, then let's have the courage to go back and ask them what would they be willing to do.

I myself will be voting "no" on this piece of legislation, but I just urge my colleagues to have to weigh this. I hope over the years that I have proven I am not a person who would get in the way of having the perfect get in the way of the good or not trying to work for compromises. It is a line that I feel, if we cross, the trust gets breached, and it is very difficult to gain it back.

I thank all Members who worked on this.

Ms. BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I have no other speakers at this time.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. MILLER of Florida. I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, to my good friend from Minnesota (Mr. WALZ), who is a stalwart supporter of veterans on our committee and brings many, many good issues to the forefront for both sides of the aisle to be able to work on together, I do not question his motives in his negative vote against this bill.

I would say that any child who has already had their parents' post-9/11 child benefits transferred to them will not be affected by this change. They would still receive 100 percent of their current living stipend.

It also gives 180 days after enactment before it begins to take effect. So any servicemembers who are eligible to transfer their benefits but have not done so would have 180 days to do so, so their child would still receive 100 percent of their monthly stipend.

I yield 1 minute to the gentleman from the 15th Congressional District of Ohio (Mr. STIVERS).

Mr. STIVERS. Mr. Speaker, I thank the chairman and the folks on the committee for their great work on this bill. I stand today to support the bill and also to recognize one of the sections is the Veterans Dog Therapy Act, which was rolled into H.R. 3016.

We lose 22 of our former servicemembers every day to suicide. This legisla-

tion will create a pilot program at three to five of our VA facilities, which is modeled on the Warrior Canine Connection program for getting access to service dogs for our veterans.

Veterans enrolled in this program with service dogs have seen improvements in their PTSD and TBI-related symptoms. Additionally, it is shown that veterans who own service dogs have fewer symptoms of depression, better interpersonal skills, a lowered risk of substance abuse, and better overall mental health. While no one thing can help cure our suicide epidemic among veterans, this is a good start.

I want to thank TIM WALZ for being my cosponsor on this bill. I am glad it is rolled in.

I urge my colleagues to support this provision as well as the entire bill.

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from the Ninth Congressional District of Georgia (Mr. COLLINS).

Mr. COLLINS of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, today I rise in support of H.R. 3016, the Veterans Employment, Education, and Healthcare Improvement Act.

I want to thank the chairman for yielding and his leadership. As we have heard today, this is something that truly does bring us together. As someone who continues to serve in the Air Force and looking at my brothers and sisters in arms, this is something we should be about.

I want to thank my colleague from Ohio (Mr. WENSTRUP) for bringing this important legislation to the floor, including language from my legislation, H.R. 423, concerning VA post-delivery care services.

I also want to thank Dr. ROE from Tennessee for his amendment that would extend the coverage for a female veteran's post-delivery care to 42 days.

Female veterans face unique challenges, especially when many of the services available to them are designed for males. One of the most significant problems female veterans face is access to health care.

Currently, the VA is authorized to provide up to 7 days of post-delivery care for a female veteran's newborn baby. Mr. ROE's amendment will expand coverage to 42 days, the length that the VA currently provides for mothers.

Females represent the fastest growing group of veterans who are enrolling in VA health care, and many of them are mothers or soon will be. It is past time for the VA to expand its care and services to meet the needs of the female veteran. These women have risked their lives to protect our Nation, and our responsibility to them doesn't end when they are no longer serving on Active Duty. In fact, their service to our country may jeopardize the very lives of their future children, meaning our responsibility to them is even greater.

Research shows that having PTSD in the year before delivery increases a

woman's risk of premature delivery by 35 percent. Premature infants typically need longer hospitalizations after they are born. I know what it is like to be the parent of a little baby who needed intensive medical care for an extended period of time from the moment she was born. By the way, she is getting ready to turn 24 right now.

Any new mother who has given selflessly to her country shouldn't have to worry about Congress standing in her way as she tries to give selflessly to her own child.

I thank my colleague and Chairman MILLER for their leadership on this issue, and I would urge the passage of this bill.

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I have no more speakers at this time.

I would encourage all my colleagues to support H.R. 3016, as amended.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of H.R. 3016, "Veterans Employment, Education, and Healthcare Improvement."

I support this bill because it will benefit our veterans who have suffered debilitating injuries to their lower extremities as a result of their service to the United States.

Specifically, this bill clarifies the role of podiatrists in the Department of Veteran Affairs and increases their pay grade to match other VA physician compensation.

There is a need in the Department of Veteran Affairs to classify podiatrists as physicians.

Our veterans continue to suffer from a variety of foot and lower leg conditions as a direct result of their honorable service which can result from both traumatic and progressive etiologies.

A growing number of our veterans have diabetes, which puts them at risk for other disorders and even amputation.

The VA Podiatry Program Office spends a great deal of its time collaborating with a number of other programs developing and implementing initiatives relative to the prevention and treatment of diabetes and disorders related to diabetes.

Houston, Texas is home to the Michael E. DeBakey Veterans Affairs Medical Center, in one of the nation's greatest medical centers; the MEDMC has 837 medical providers, but no board certified podiatrists.

Our veterans need and deserve specialized treatment and assistance for foot injuries.

My congressional district is home to over 25,000 veterans and as an avid supporter of Veteran Affairs I strongly support this bill.

As a supporter and co-sponsor of numerous bills to assist veterans, such as H.R. 90, the Healthcare Improvement Act, I strongly believe it is our duty to give our veterans the best care when they return home.

It is important we recognize podiatrists, who change the lives of our veterans, to be defined as physicians by the Department of Veteran Affairs, and increase their pay grade to reflect other VA physician compensation.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MILLER) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 3016, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

The title of the bill was amended so as to read: "A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to make certain improvements in the laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs relating to health care, educational assistance, and vocational rehabilitation, to establish the Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration, and for other purposes."

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

#### CAREER-READY STUDENT VETERANS ACT

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 2360) to amend title 38, United States Code, to improve the approval of certain programs of education for purposes of educational assistance provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 2360

*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 "Career-Ready Student Veterans Act".*

#### SEC. 2. APPROVAL OF COURSES FOR PURPOSES OF EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS ADMINISTERED BY SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

(a) APPROVAL OF NON-ACCREDITED COURSES.—Subsection (c) of section 3676 of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) by redesignating paragraph (14) as paragraph (16); and

(2) by inserting after paragraph (13) the following new paragraphs:

"(14) In the case of a program designed to prepare an individual for licensure or certification in a State, the program meets any instructional curriculum licensure or certification requirements of such State.

"(15) In the case of a program designed to prepare an individual for employment pursuant to standards developed by a board or agency of a State in an occupation that requires approval or licensure, the program is approved or licensed by such board or agency of the State."

(b) EXCEPTIONS.—Such section is further amended by adding at the end the following new subsection:

"(f)(1) The Secretary may waive the requirements of paragraph (14) or (15) of subsection (c) in the case of a program of education offered by an educational institution if the Secretary determines all of the following:

"(A) The educational institution is not accredited by an agency or association recognized by the Secretary of Education.

"(B) The program did not meet the requirements of such paragraph at any time during the two-year period preceding the date of the waiver.

"(C) The waiver furthers the purposes of the educational assistance programs administered by the Secretary or would further the education interests of individuals eligible for assistance under such programs.

"(D) The educational institution does not provide any commission, bonus, or other incentive payment based directly or indirectly on success in securing enrollments or financial aid to any

persons or entities engaged in any student recruiting or admission activities or in making decisions regarding the award of student financial assistance, except for the recruitment of foreign students residing in foreign countries who are not eligible to receive Federal student assistance.

"(2) Not later than 30 days after the Secretary issues a waiver under paragraph (1), the Secretary shall submit to Congress notice of the waiver and the justification of the Secretary for issuing the waiver."

(c) APPROVAL OF ACCREDITED PROGRAMS.—Section 3675(b)(3) of such title is amended—

(1) by striking "and (3)" and inserting "(3), (14), and (15)"; and

(2) by inserting before the period at the end the following: "(or, with respect to such paragraphs (14) and (15), the requirements under such paragraphs are waived pursuant to subsection (f) of section 3676)".

(d) DISAPPROVAL OF COURSES.—Section 3679 of such title is amended by adding at the end the following new subsection:

"(d) Notwithstanding any other provision of this chapter, the Secretary shall disapprove a course of education described in section 3676(c)(14) or (15) unless the educational institution providing the course of education publicly discloses any conditions or additional requirements, including training, experience, or exams, required to obtain the license, certification, or approval for which the course of education is designed to provide preparation."

(e) CONFORMING AMENDMENT.—Section 3672(b)(2)(A)(i) of such title is amended by striking "An accredited" and inserting "Except as provided in paragraphs (14) and (15) of section 3676(c) of this title, an accredited".

(f) APPLICABILITY.—If after enrollment in a course of education that is subject to disapproval by reason of an amendment made by this Act, an individual pursues one or more courses of education at the same educational institution while remaining continuously enrolled (other than during regularly scheduled breaks between courses, semesters or terms) at that institution, any course so pursued by the individual at that institution while so continuously enrolled shall not be subject to disapproval by reason of such amendment.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MILLER) and the gentleman from Florida (Ms. BROWN) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Florida.

#### GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and to include any extraneous material they may have on H.R. 2360, as amended, in the RECORD.

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

There was no objection.

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

The post-9/11 GI Bill provides student veterans with a wonderful opportunity to educate themselves for a job in the new economy. Thousands of training programs and schools have been approved for use of this program, which has benefited millions of veterans.

Unfortunately, there are some schools that are not simply providing quality education or training that sufficiently prepares students for jobs in their field of study.

The committee has found that, in some cases, students have been caught in a situation where the school they attended is properly accredited, but the program they are using at the school is not. This has led to situations where students have completed a training or a degree program only to find out that this training does not qualify them to receive the necessary credentials or take the necessary tests to practice in the career field for which they used their benefits.

This was clearly not the intention of the GI Bill, and I am glad that this bill would ensure that in order to be eligible for GI Bill benefits, an accredited or nonaccredited program must meet State accreditation, licensure, or certification standards. This requirement would not only protect student veterans but would also protect the integrity of the GI Bill for future generations.

I want to thank Chairman WENSTRUP of our Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity and the author of the bill, Ranking Member TAKANO, for their work on this legislation, which has my full support.

I urge all of my colleagues to support H.R. 2306, as amended.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I rise today in support of H.R. 2360, the Career-Ready Student Veterans Act. Mr. Speaker, I do so for two important reasons.

□ 1545

The first is that it protects veterans using their GI Bill benefits by requiring that all career education programs meet proper accreditation, licensure, and certification requirements in order to be eligible for the GI Bill.

The second reason I am so happy to support H.R. 2360 is that it represents the very best of the legislative process. It is the product of collaboration between the majority and the minority, but it is also a collaboration between Congress and the VSO and academic communities.

I want to give due credit to the bill's original author, Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity Ranking Member MARK TAKANO, and Chairman WENSTRUP and his staff for working so hard to ensure that the bill meets its goal of preparing student veterans for their chosen fields of study.

The Career-Ready Student Veterans Act puts in place a protection for student veterans which already exists for servicemen who use the Department of Defense tuition assistance benefits.

I am pleased that the bill creates this basic fairness and ensures that the GI Bill benefits help veterans earn credit that will lead to meaningful employment.

In addition to ensuring that career-education programs meet proper accreditation requirements, the bill also requires that they publicly disclose

any additional steps that the student veteran needs to take to prepare them for entry into their chosen profession.

I understand this legislation has passed out of committee in the Senate and enjoys bipartisan support there. Again, I want to congratulate the bill's original authors on this side and offer my strong support.

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

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Phoenixville, Pennsylvania (Mr. COSTELLO).

Mr. COSTELLO of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to support H.R. 2360, the Career-Ready Student Veterans Act, a straightforward solution that will ensure that career education programs set our veterans on the proper path to their desired employment.

As a proud member of the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity and a cosponsor of this legislation, H.R. 2360 would ensure that GI Bill-eligible career education programs provide our veterans with the accreditation and credentials they need to build a career in the professional field or specialty of their choosing.

This bill requires that career-education programs that accept GI Bill tuition payments must have programmatic accreditation if accreditation is required for employment in the career for which the program is designed to prepare its students.

The bill also requires that career-education programs designed to prepare an individual for licensure or certification in a State must meet the curriculum and instructional requirements set by the State for licensure or certification.

Mr. Speaker, if our veterans invest their time and effort to learn a skill set, they will have the peace of mind to know they are on the right career-education path and the confidence to know that, if they work hard, they will receive the appropriate certification they need to start their desired employment.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to thank Mr. TAKANO for his leadership on this legislation.

I urge my colleagues to support this bipartisan bill.

Ms. BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I yield 4 minutes to the gentleman from California (Mr. TAKANO).

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of my bipartisan legislation, H.R. 2360, the Career-Ready Student Veterans Act. This bill will ensure that our veterans are using their post-9/11 GI benefits at career-education programs that actually do what they say they do: prepare students for entry into a specific career field.

My legislation would require that, in order to be eligible to receive GI Bill benefits, programs have programmatic accreditation, if required by the State for employment in a specific field.

Programs also must prepare students for licensure or certification in a field,

if required by the State, and they must meet any State-mandated curricular or instructional requirements.

This closely mirrors language included in the fiscal year 2014 National Defense Authorization Act in relation to military tuition assistance.

We all know the importance of a good job in helping veterans successfully transition out of service and into civilian life. Education and training is often a necessary part of finding that job.

Unfortunately, too many veterans waste their time and hard-earned education benefits at career-education programs that don't actually prepare them for that career field. For example, most States require prospective lawyers to have graduated from a law program accredited by the American Bar Association in order to sit for the bar exam.

As we all know, you must pass the bar to practice law. When veterans unwittingly spend their GI Bill benefits at law programs not accredited by the ABA, they graduate with no prospects of becoming a lawyer in most States. My legislation will make sure that this no longer happens.

I thank Chairman MILLER and Ranking Member BROWN as well as Chairman WENSTRUP and my friend from Pennsylvania (Mr. COSTELLO) for their support.

I urge all my colleagues to vote in favor of the Career-Ready Student Veterans Act.

Ms. BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 2360.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I have no additional speakers at this time. I, too, urge a "yea" vote on H.R. 2360, as amended.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Speaker, as a senior member of the House Committee on Homeland Security and the Ranking Member of the Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, Homeland Security, and Investigations, I rise in support of H.R. 2360, the "Career-Ready Student Veterans Act of 2015."

This bill encourages new criteria for state approval of applications by educational institutions providing veterans with non-accredited courses.

H.R. 2360 respects the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) educational assistance, provides specific instructions for when the VA can waive requirements by the bill, and instructs the VA to submit to Congress notice of, and justification for, a waiver within 30 days of issuance.

The bill clarifies specific circumstances for when the VA shall disapprove a course of education and when a course shall not be subject to disapproval by reason of this Act.

Specifically, H.R. 2360 achieves these goals by:

1. Requiring programs designed to prepare individuals for state licensure or certification to fulfill any state instructional curriculum licensure or certification requirements

2. Providing conditions for the Department of Veterans Affairs to refer to when waiving requirements or disapproving a course of education

Finally, H.R. 2360 facilitates the approval of certain programs of education for the purposes of enhancing educational assistance provided by the Department of Veteran Affairs.

I am pleased that H.R. 2360 aligns with the significance of legislation I have introduced in the past.

I introduced H.R. 76, Helping to Encourage Real Opportunity for Veterans Transitioning from Battlespace to Workplace Act Of 2015. This bill also enhanced the educational options for veterans by focusing on the necessity to establish opportunities that facilitate the transition for veterans from the hostile armed force environment to school or workplace.

I introduced H.R. 78, New Chance for a New Start in Life Act of 2015. This bill addresses financial awareness pertaining to grants, and employment training programs to assist long-term unemployed persons to re-enter the workforce in areas projected to have the highest rates of demand.

Pertaining to educational institutions providing veterans with non-accredited courses, enforcement of the criteria for state approval of applications allows veterans to benefit from the improvement of the approval process.

H.R. 2360 is the first step toward enforcing this implementation strategy and I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting the "Career-Ready Student Veterans Act of 2015."

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MILLER) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 2360, 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.

#### LAKE BALDWIN VETERANS AFFAIRS OUTPATIENT CLINIC PROPERTY CONVEYANCE

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 4056) to authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to convey to the Florida Department of Veterans Affairs all right, title, and interest of the United States to the property known as "The Community Living Center" at the Lake Baldwin Veterans Affairs Outpatient Clinic, Orlando, Florida, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 4056

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

#### SECTION 1. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS LAND CONVEYANCE, LAKE BALDWIN VETERANS AFFAIRS OUTPATIENT CLINIC, ORLANDO, FLORIDA.

(a) CONVEYANCE AUTHORIZED.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall convey to the Florida Department of Veterans Affairs all right, title, and interest of the United States in and to the property known as "The Community Living Center", including any

improvements thereon, which is part of the Lake Baldwin Veterans Affairs Outpatient Clinic, Orlando, Florida, located at 5201 Raymond Street, Orlando, Florida.

(b) CONDITIONS OF CONVEYANCE.—The conveyance under subsection (a) shall be subject to the following conditions:

(1) The recipient shall agree to accept the conveyed real property in its condition at the time of the conveyance.

(2) The recipient shall agree not to apply the small house design model of the Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Construction and Facilities Management Design Guide for Community Living Centers to the conveyed real property.

(c) USE OF PROPERTY.—The deed of conveyance for the parcels of real property conveyed under subsection (a) shall provide that all of the property be used and maintained for the sole purpose of providing nursing home, domiciliary, or adult day health care to veterans.

(d) DESCRIPTION OF PROPERTY.—The exact acreage and legal description of the parcels of real property conveyed under subsection (a) shall be determined by surveys satisfactory to the Secretary.

(e) ADDITIONAL TERMS AND CONDITIONS.—The Secretary may require such additional terms and conditions in connection with the conveyances under subsection (a) as the Secretary considers appropriate to protect the interests of the United States.

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

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Florida.

#### GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and to add any extraneous material they may have on H.R. 4056, as amended.

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

There was no objection.

Mr. MILLER of Florida. I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 4056, as amended, which was introduced by my colleague and fellow Floridian, Congressman MICA.

This bill would authorize the Florida Department of Veterans Affairs to convey The Community Living Center on the Lake Baldwin campus in Orlando to the Florida Department of Veterans Affairs.

This conveyance is in line with the VA's plans to repurpose the Lake Baldwin campus and would save VA from expending money, maintaining the property that the Department has no further use for while allowing this parcel of land to continue to be used in the service of our veterans.

I am grateful to Congressman MICA for sponsoring this legislation.

I would urge my colleagues to support it.

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

Ms. BROWN of Florida. I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation, H.R. 4056, introduced by my colleague from Florida, Mr. JOHN MICA, will authorize the VA to convey to the Florida Department of Veterans Affairs The Community Living Center at the Lake Baldwin Veterans Affairs Outpatient Clinic in Orlando, Florida.

When the Orlando VA center is fully completed, it will include 134 inpatient beds, an outpatient clinic, parking garage, chapel, and central energy plant.

One of the first buildings opened at the Orlando VA Medical Center was the 120-bed Community Living Center and the 60-bed domiciliary. Both are now open and accepting veterans. With the new facilities, it is not necessary for the VA to keep two facilities open in close proximity.

I am pleased that Mr. MICA was able to work with the Florida Department of Veterans Affairs to take over this facility and continue to serve the veterans of central Florida.

Let me just say one other thing. I am just very impressed with the opening of this facility, the domiciliary, and also the clinic. We were able to get that facility open before the hospital opened, and it was taking veterans.

In addition to that, the Department of Defense gave that facility to the Department of Veterans Affairs—institutional memory is very important—and I am just very pleased that we will continue to use this facility for veterans.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank Mr. MICA for bringing this before the House.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I yield 5 minutes to the gentleman from the Seventh District of Florida (Mr. MICA), who authored this piece of legislation.

Mr. MICA. Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to thank Chairman MILLER and also thank Ranking Member BROWN for their strong support in helping to expedite this legislation.

This is a simple measure. It does transfer a vacant 120-bed VA nursing care building in Orlando's VA veteran Baldwin Park facility to the Florida Department of Veterans Affairs, as the chairman described.

As the ranking member mentioned, we actually have opened a 120-bed new facility to the south of Orlando and a 60-bed domiciliary unit also open now for nearly 2 years. Adjacent to that is a new hospital at Lake Nona.

I think Ms. BROWN was with me back in 1999 when this 120-bed nursing care facility was dedicated. The facility is not that old. It was closed 2 years ago when we opened the new facility, and the VA used that building and some of the rooms for transition for training for employment.

Now the new hospital is open. The new 120-bed facility is open to the south and domiciliary unit. We have agreement from the State of Florida to take that facility. You might be interested to know why central Florida would want another veterans facility.

In some areas, there is a declining population. The chief financial officer of the State just announced that we had 1,000 new people come to Florida every day last year. We have now exceeded 20 million. Many of those are veterans, and they are settling in central Florida.

We do have an agreement with the State of Florida to assume this facility. They can open it quicker. They can do it in a cost-effective manner for VA. They can take some of the burden off of the Federal VA, which we know has a full set of challenges right now.

I want to thank VA Secretary McDonald. I also want to thank my colleagues in 2014, the ranking member, Ms. BROWN; Mr. WEBSTER; Mr. GRAYSON; and myself.

We all wrote to Secretary Shinseki, the Secretary at that time, and asked that this be done. It has taken a little bit of time, but we are getting there.

Again, I ask concurrence in passing H.R. 4056. It will expedite and make available the needed nursing homes with our aging veterans population and many thousands of veterans moving to the State of Florida and, particularly, central Florida.

I thank you again for expediting this, and I ask for the House to concur in passing H.R. 4056.

Ms. BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I again thank Mr. MICA for his leadership in this area.

I urge all my colleagues to support H.R. 4056.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I, too, urge my colleagues to support H.R. 4056, as amended.

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. MILLER) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 4056, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

The title of the bill was amended so as to read: "A bill to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to convey to the Florida Department of Veterans Affairs all right, title, and interest of the United States to the property known as 'The Community Living Center' at the Lake Baldwin Veterans Affairs Outpatient Clinic, Orlando, Florida."

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

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#### AMERICAN HEROES COLA ACT OF 2015

Mr. ABRAHAM. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 677) to amend title 38, United States Code, to provide for annual cost-of-living adjustments to be made automatically by law each year in the rates

of disability compensation for veterans with service-connected disabilities and the rates of dependency and indemnity compensation for survivors of certain service-connected disabled veterans, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 677

*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 "American Heroes COLA Act of 2015".

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

Sec. 1. Short title; table of contents.

Sec. 2. Expansion of eligibility for medals.

Sec. 3. Definitions relating to claims for benefits under laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

Sec. 4. Quarterly reports on formal and informal claims for benefits under laws administered by Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

Sec. 5. Expedited payment of survivor's benefits.

Sec. 6. Priority for processing claims of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Sec. 7. Treatment of medical evidence provided by non-Department of Veterans Affairs medical professionals in support of claims for disability compensation.

Sec. 8. Automatic annual increase in rates of disability compensation and dependency and indemnity compensation.

Sec. 9. Improvement of fiduciaries for veterans.

Sec. 10. Board of Veterans' Appeals video hearings.

Sec. 11. Improvements to authority for performance of medical disabilities examinations by contract physicians.

Sec. 12. Pilot program on fully developed appeals.

Sec. 13. Deadline for certification of appeals forms by regional offices of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Sec. 14. Evaluation of backlog of disability claims and appeals of claims of Department of Veterans Affairs.

Sec. 15. Methods for validating certain World War II Merchant Mariner service considered to be active service by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

Sec. 16. Designation of American World War II Cities.

Sec. 17. Sense of Congress regarding American veterans disabled for life.

Sec. 18. Extension of pilot program on counseling in retreat settings for women veterans newly separated from service in the Armed Forces.

#### SEC. 2. EXPANSION OF ELIGIBILITY FOR MEDALS.

Section 2306(d)(4) of title 38, United States Code, is amended to read as follows:

"(4)(A) In lieu of furnishing a headstone or marker under this subsection to a deceased individual described in subparagraph (B), the Secretary may furnish, upon request, a medallion or other device of a design determined by the Secretary to signify the deceased individual's status as a veteran, to be attached to a headstone or marker furnished at private expense.

"(B) A deceased individual described in this subsection is an individual who—

"(i) served in the Armed Forces on or after April 6, 1917; and

"(ii) is eligible for a headstone or marker furnished under paragraph (1) (or would be so eligible but for the date of the death of the individual)."

#### SEC. 3. DEFINITIONS RELATING TO CLAIMS FOR BENEFITS UNDER LAWS ADMINISTERED BY THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

(a) DEFINITIONS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Section 5100 of title 38, United States Code, is amended to read as follows:

##### "§ 5100. Definitions

"In this chapter:

"(1) The term 'claimant' means any individual applying for, or submitting a claim for, any benefit under the laws administered by the Secretary.

"(2) The term 'claim' means a communication in writing requesting a determination of entitlement or evidencing a belief in entitlement to a benefit under the laws administered by the Secretary.

"(3) The term 'formal claim' means a claim submitted on an application form prescribed by the Secretary."

(2) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections at the beginning of chapter 51 of such title is further amended by striking the item relating to section 5100 and inserting the following new item:

"5100. Definitions."

(b) EFFECTIVE DATE.—Section 5100 of title 38, United States Code, as amended by subsection (a), shall take effect on the date of the enactment of this Act and shall apply with respect to a claim submitted on or after such date.

#### SEC. 4. QUARTERLY REPORTS ON FORMAL AND INFORMAL CLAIMS FOR BENEFITS UNDER LAWS ADMINISTERED BY SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

(a) QUARTERLY REPORTS.—During the five-year period beginning on the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall submit to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and House of Representatives quarterly reports on formal and informal claims submitted to the Secretary. Each such report shall include, for the three-month period covered by the report—

(1) the total number of claims submitted to the Secretary;

(2) the total number of informal claims submitted to the Secretary;

(3) the total number of formal claims submitted to the Secretary;

(4) the total number of forms indicating an intent to file a claim for benefits submitted to the Secretary;

(5) the total number of claims notification letters that included an invitation to the claimant to submit an additional formal claim that was reasonably raised during the adjudication of the claim for which the notification letter is sent;

(6) of the claimants who received notification letters described in paragraph (5), the total number who submitted a formal claim in response to the invitation included in the letter;

(7) the total number of electronically filed claims submitted to the Secretary; and

(8) the total number of fully-developed claims submitted to the Secretary.

(b) SENSE OF CONGRESS.—It is the sense of Congress that the Secretary of Veterans Affairs should develop a designated form for an increase or reopening of a claim that does not require the resubmittal of information previously submitted on a formal claim form.

(c) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

(1) The terms "claim", "claimant", and "formal claim" have the meanings given such terms in section 5100 of title 38, United States Code, as amended by section 4.

(2) The term "informal claim" means a communication in writing requesting a determination of entitlement or evidencing a belief in entitlement, to a benefit under the laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs that—

(A) is submitted in a format other than on an application form prescribed by the Secretary;

(B) indicates an intent to apply for one or more benefits under the laws administered by the Secretary;

(C) identifies the benefit sought;

(D) is made or submitted by a claimant, his or her duly authorized representative, a Member of Congress, or another person acting on behalf of a claimant who meets the requirements established by the Secretary for such purpose; and

(E) may include a report of examination or hospitalization, if the report relates to a disability which may establish such an entitlement.

(3) The term "reasonably raised" with respect to a claim means that evidence of an entitlement to a benefit under the laws administered by the Secretary is inferred or logically placed at issue upon a sympathetic reading of another claim and the record developed with respect to that claim.

#### SEC. 5. EXPEDITED PAYMENT OF SURVIVOR'S BENEFITS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Section 5101(a)(1) of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) by striking "A specific" and inserting "(A) Except as provided in subparagraph (B), a specific"; and

(2) by adding at the end the following new subparagraph:

"(B)(i) The Secretary may pay benefits under chapters 13 and 15 and sections 2302, 2307, and 5121 of this title to a survivor of a veteran who has not filed a formal claim if the Secretary determines that the record contains sufficient evidence to establish the entitlement of the survivor to such benefits.

"(ii) For purposes of this subparagraph and section 5110 of this title, the earlier of the following dates shall be treated as the date of the receipt of the survivor's application for benefits described in clause (1):

"(I) The date on which the survivor of a veteran (or the representative of such a survivor) notifies the Secretary of the death of the veteran through a death certificate or other relevant medical evidence indicating that the death was due to a service-connected or compensable disability.

"(II) The head of any other department or agency of the Federal Government notifies the Secretary of the death of the veteran.

"(iii) In notifying the Secretary of the death of a veteran as described in clause (ii)(I), the survivor (or the representative of such a survivor) may submit to the Secretary additional documents relating to such death without being required to file a formal claim."

(b) REPORT.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one year after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs 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 benefits paid pursuant to covered claims.

(2) CONTENTS.—The report under paragraph (1) shall include the following:

(A) The number of covered claims adjudicated during the one-year period preceding the date of the report, disaggregated by the following:

(i) Claims in which the claimant claimed entitlement to compensation on the basis of the claimant's status as the spouse of a deceased veteran.

(ii) Claims in which the claimant claimed entitlement to compensation on the basis of the claimant's status as the child of a deceased veteran.

(iii) Claims in which the claimant claimed entitlement to compensation on the basis of the claimant's status as the parent of a deceased veteran.

(B) The number of covered claims that were adjudicated during such period and for which compensation was not awarded, disaggregated by clauses (i) through (iii) of subparagraph (A).

(C) A comparison of the accuracy and timeliness of covered claims adjudicated during such period with non-covered claims filed by survivors of a veteran.

(D) The findings of the Secretary with respect to adjudicating covered claims.

(E) Such recommendations as the Secretary may have for legislative or administrative action to improve the adjudication of claims submitted to the Secretary for benefits under chapters 13 and 15 and sections 2302, 2307, and 5121 of title 38, United States Code.

(3) COVERED CLAIM DEFINED.—In this subsection, the term "covered claim" means a claim covered by section 5101(a)(1)(B) of title 38, United States Code, as added by subsection (a).

(c) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendments made by subsection (a) shall apply with respect to claims for benefits based on a death occurring on or after the date of the enactment of this Act.

#### SEC. 6. PRIORITY FOR PROCESSING CLAIMS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Subchapter I of chapter 51 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new section:

##### "§ 5109C. Priority for processing claims

"(a) PRIORITY.—In processing claims for compensation under this chapter, the Secretary shall provide the following claimants with priority over other claimants:

"(1) Veterans who have attained the age of 70.

"(2) Veterans who are terminally ill.

"(3) Veterans with life-threatening illnesses.

"(4) Homeless veterans (as defined in section 2002 of this title).

"(5) Veterans who were awarded the Medal of Honor.

"(6) Veterans who are former prisoners of war.

"(7) Veterans whose claims are being reviewed again in relation to a previously denied claim relating to military sexual trauma.

"(8) Veterans whom the Secretary determines, on a case-by-case basis, are seriously or very seriously injured.

"(9) Veterans whom the Secretary determines, on a case-by-case basis, should be given priority under this section based on an application for good cause established by the Secretary.

"(b) REGULATIONS.—The Secretary shall prescribe regulations to carry out subsection (a)."

(b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections at the beginning of such chapter is amended by inserting after the item relating to section 5109B the following new item:

"5109C. Priority for processing claims."

#### SEC. 7. TREATMENT OF MEDICAL EVIDENCE PROVIDED BY NON-DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS IN SUPPORT OF CLAIMS FOR DISABILITY COMPENSATION.

(a) ACCEPTANCE OF REPORTS OF PRIVATE PHYSICIAN EXAMINATIONS.—Section 5125 of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) by striking "For purposes" and inserting "(a) IN GENERAL.—For purposes"; and

(2) by adding at the end the following new subsections:

"(b) SUFFICIENCY OF EVIDENCE.—If a veteran has submitted a medical opinion or report of a medical examination administered by a private physician in support of the veteran's claim, the Secretary may not order a medical examination to be administered by a Department physician unless the Secretary provides the veteran with a thorough explanation of why the medical opinion or report submitted by the veteran was not sufficiently complete and the reason why additional medical evidence is necessary.

"(c) SUFFICIENTLY COMPLETE DEFINED.—For purposes of a medical opinion or report described in subsection (a), the term 'sufficiently complete' means competent, credible, probative, and containing such information as may be required to make a decision on the claim for which the medical opinion or report is provided."

(b) APPLICATION.—The amendment made by subsection (a) shall apply with respect to medical evidence submitted after the date that is one year after the date of the enactment of this Act by veterans who have not submitted any claim for disability compensation to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs before such date.

(c) ANNUAL REPORTS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—During the three-year period beginning three years after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Representatives and the Senate an annual report on the implementation of section 5125(b) of title 38, United States Code, as added by subsection (a).

(2) MATTERS INCLUDED.—Each report under paragraph (1) shall include, with respect to the year covered by the report, the following:

(A) The number of veterans who submitted a medical opinion or report of a medical examination administered by a private physician in support of the veteran's claim for disability compensation as described in section 5125(b) of title 38, United States Code, as added by subsection (a).

(B) Of the number of veterans described in subparagraph (A), the number of veterans whose medical opinion or report of a medical examination administered by a private physician was determined by the Secretary to not be sufficiently complete pursuant to such section 5125(b), including the five most frequent reasons for such a determination.

(C) A comparison of the approval rate of claims for disability compensation with respect to—

(i) veterans who submitted medical opinions or reports of a medical examination administered by a private physician in support of the veteran's claim; and

(ii)(I) veterans who did submit such opinions or reports but such opinions or reports were determined by the Secretary to not be sufficiently complete pursuant to such section 5125(b); and

(II) veterans who did not submit such opinions or reports.

#### SEC. 8. AUTOMATIC ANNUAL INCREASE IN RATES OF DISABILITY COMPENSATION AND DEPENDENCY AND INDEMNITY COMPENSATION.

(a) INDEXING TO SOCIAL SECURITY INCREASES.—Section 5312 of title 38, United

States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new subsection:

“(d)(1) During the nine-year period beginning on December 1, 2016, whenever there is an increase in benefit amounts payable under title II of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 401 et seq.) as a result of a determination made under section 215(i) of such Act (42 U.S.C. 415(i)), the Secretary shall, effective on the date of such increase in benefit amounts, increase the dollar amounts in effect for the payment of disability compensation and dependency and indemnity compensation by the Secretary, as specified in paragraph (2), as such amounts were in effect immediately before the date of such increase in benefit amounts payable under title II of the Social Security Act, by the same percentage as the percentage by which such benefit amounts are increased.

“(2) The dollar amounts to be increased pursuant to paragraph (1) are the following:

“(A) WARTIME DISABILITY COMPENSATION.—Each of the dollar amounts in effect under section 1114 of this title.

“(B) ADDITIONAL COMPENSATION FOR DEPENDENTS.—Each of the dollar amounts in effect under section 1115(1) of this title.

“(C) CLOTHING ALLOWANCE.—The dollar amount in effect under section 1162 of this title.

“(D) DEPENDENCY AND INDEMNITY COMPENSATION TO SURVIVING SPOUSE.—Each of the dollar amounts in effect under subsections (a) through (d) of section 1311 of such title.

“(E) DEPENDENCY AND INDEMNITY COMPENSATION TO CHILDREN.—Each of the dollar amounts in effect under sections 1313(a) and 1314 of such title.

“(3) Whenever there is an increase under paragraph (1) in amounts in effect for the payment of disability compensation and dependency and indemnity compensation, the Secretary shall publish such amounts, as increased pursuant to such paragraph, in the Federal Register at the same time as the material required by section 215(i)(2)(D) of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 415(i)(2)(D)) is published by reason of a determination under section 215(i) of such Act (42 U.S.C. 415(i)).

“(4) Each dollar amount increased under paragraph (1), if not a whole dollar amount, shall be rounded to the next lower whole dollar amount.

“(5) The Secretary of Veterans Affairs may adjust administratively, consistent with the increases made under subsection (a), the rates of disability compensation payable to persons under section 10 of Public Law 85–857 (72 Stat. 1263) who have not received compensation under chapter 11 of this title.”.

(b) EFFECTIVE DATE.—Subsection (d) of section 5312 of title 38, United States Code, as added by subsection (a) of this section, shall take effect on December 1, 2016.

#### SEC. 9. IMPROVEMENT OF FIDUCIARIES FOR VETERANS.

(a) APPOINTMENT AND SUPERVISION.—

(1) Section 5502 of title 38, United States Code, is amended to read as follows:

##### “§ 5502. Appointment of fiduciaries

“(a) APPOINTMENT.—Where it appears to the Secretary that the interest of the beneficiary would be served thereby, payment of benefits under any law administered by the Secretary may be made directly to the beneficiary or to a relative or some other fiduciary for the use and benefit of the beneficiary, regardless of any legal disability on the part of the beneficiary.

“(b) APPEALS.—(1) If the Secretary determines a beneficiary to be mentally incompetent for purposes of appointing a fiduciary under this chapter, the Secretary shall provide such beneficiary with a written statement detailing the reasons for such determination.

“(2) A beneficiary whom the Secretary has determined to be mentally incompetent for purposes of appointing a fiduciary under this chapter may appeal such determination.

“(c) MODIFICATION.—(1) A beneficiary for whom the Secretary appoints a fiduciary under this chapter may, at any time, request the Secretary to—

“(A) remove the fiduciary so appointed; and

“(B) have a new fiduciary appointed.

“(2) The Secretary shall comply with a request under paragraph (1) if the Secretary determines that the request is made in good faith and—

“(A) the fiduciary requested to be removed receives a fee from the beneficiary and a suitable volunteer fiduciary is available to assist the beneficiary; or

“(B) the beneficiary provides credible information that the fiduciary requested to be removed is—

“(i) not acting in the interest of the beneficiary; or

“(ii) unable to effectively serve the beneficiary because of an irreconcilable personality conflict or disagreement.

“(3) The Secretary shall ensure that any removal or new appointment of a fiduciary under paragraph (1) does not delay or interrupt the beneficiary's receipt of benefits administered by the Secretary.

“(d) INDEPENDENCE.—A fiduciary appointed by the Secretary shall operate independently of the Department to determine the actions that are in the interest of the beneficiary.

“(e) PREDESIGNATION.—A veteran may pre-designate a fiduciary by—

“(1) submitting written notice to the Secretary of the pre-designated fiduciary; or

“(2) submitting a form provided by the Secretary for such purpose.

“(f) APPOINTMENT OF NON-PREDESIGNATED FIDUCIARY.—If a beneficiary designates an individual to serve as a fiduciary under subsection (e) and the Secretary appoints an individual not so designated as the fiduciary for such beneficiary, the Secretary shall notify such beneficiary of—

“(1) the reason why such designated individual was not appointed; and

“(2) the ability of the beneficiary to modify the appointed fiduciary under subsection (c).

“(g) PRIORITY OF APPOINTMENT.—In appointing a fiduciary under this chapter, if a beneficiary does not designate a fiduciary pursuant to subsection (e), to the extent possible the Secretary shall appoint a person who is—

“(1) a relative of the beneficiary;

“(2) appointed as guardian of the beneficiary by a court of competent jurisdiction; or

“(3) authorized to act on behalf of the beneficiary under a durable power of attorney.”.

(2) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections at the beginning of chapter 55 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by striking the item relating to section 5502 and inserting the following:

“5502. Appointment of fiduciaries.”.

(b) SUPERVISION.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Chapter 55 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by inserting after section 5502, as amended by subsection (a)(1), the following new section:

##### “§ 5502A. Supervision of fiduciaries

“(a) COMMISSION.—(1)(A) In a case in which the Secretary determines that a commission is necessary in order to obtain the services of a fiduciary in the best interests of a beneficiary, the Secretary may authorize a fiduciary appointed by the Secretary to obtain from the monthly benefits provided to the beneficiary a reasonable commission for fiduciary services rendered, but the commis-

sion for any month may not exceed the lesser of the following amounts:

“(i) The amount that equals three percent of the monthly monetary benefits under laws administered by the Secretary paid on behalf of the beneficiary to the fiduciary.

“(ii) \$35.

“(B) A commission paid under this paragraph may not be derived from any award to a beneficiary regarding back pay or retroactive benefits payments.

“(C) A commission may not be authorized for a fiduciary who receives any other form of remuneration or payment in connection with rendering fiduciary services for benefits under this title on behalf of the beneficiary.

“(D) In accordance with section 6106 of this title, a commission may not be paid to a fiduciary if the Secretary determines that the fiduciary misused any benefit payments of a beneficiary.

“(E) If the Secretary determines that the fiduciary has misused any benefit or payments of a beneficiary, the Secretary may revoke the fiduciary status of the fiduciary.

“(2) Where, in the opinion of the Secretary, any fiduciary receiving funds on behalf of a Department beneficiary is acting in such a number of cases as to make it impracticable to conserve properly the estates or to supervise the persons of the beneficiaries, the Secretary may refuse to make future payments in such cases as the Secretary may deem proper.

“(b) COURT.—Whenever it appears that any fiduciary, in the opinion of the Secretary, is not properly executing or has not properly executed the duties of the trust of such fiduciary or has collected or paid, or is attempting to collect or pay, fees, commissions, or allowances that are inequitable or in excess of those allowed by law for the duties performed or expenses incurred, or has failed to make such payments as may be necessary for the benefit of the ward or the dependents of the ward, then the Secretary may appear, by the Secretary's authorized attorney, in the court which has appointed such fiduciary, or in any court having original, concurrent, or appellate jurisdiction over said cause, and make proper presentation of such matters. The Secretary, in the Secretary's discretion, may suspend payments to any such fiduciary who shall neglect or refuse, after reasonable notice, to render an account to the Secretary from time to time showing the application of such payments for the benefit of such incompetent or minor beneficiary, or who shall neglect or refuse to administer the estate according to law. The Secretary may require the fiduciary, as part of such account, to disclose any additional financial information concerning the beneficiary (except for information that is not available to the fiduciary). The Secretary may appear or intervene by the Secretary's duly authorized attorney in any court as an interested party in any litigation instituted by the Secretary or otherwise, directly affecting money paid to such fiduciary under this section.

“(c) PAYMENT OF CERTAIN EXPENSES.—Authority is hereby granted for the payment of any court or other expenses incident to any investigation or court proceeding for the appointment of any fiduciary or other person for the purpose of payment of benefits payable under laws administered by the Secretary or the removal of such fiduciary and appointment of another, and of expenses in connection with the administration of such benefits by such fiduciaries, or in connection with any other court proceeding hereby authorized, when such payment is authorized by the Secretary.

“(d) TEMPORARY PAYMENT OF BENEFITS.—All or any part of any benefits the payment of which is suspended or withheld under this section may, in the discretion of the Secretary, be paid temporarily to the person

having custody and control of the incompetent or minor beneficiary, to be used solely for the benefit of such beneficiary, or, in the case of an incompetent veteran, may be apportioned to the dependent or dependents, if any, of such veteran. Any part not so paid and any funds of a mentally incompetent or insane veteran not paid to the chief officer of the institution in which such veteran is a patient nor apportioned to the veteran's dependent or dependents may be ordered held in the Treasury to the credit of such beneficiary. All funds so held shall be disbursed under the order and in the discretion of the Secretary for the benefit of such beneficiary or the beneficiary's dependents. Any balance remaining in such fund to the credit of any beneficiary may be paid to the beneficiary if the beneficiary recovers and is found competent, or if a minor, attains majority, or otherwise to the beneficiary's fiduciary, or, in the event of the beneficiary's death, to the beneficiary's personal representative, except as otherwise provided by law; however, payment will not be made to the beneficiary's personal representative if, under the law of the beneficiary's last legal residence, the beneficiary's estate would escheat to the State. In the event of the death of a mentally incompetent or insane veteran, all gratuitous benefits under laws administered by the Secretary deposited before or after August 7, 1959, in the personal funds of patient's trust fund on account of such veteran shall not be paid to the personal representative of such veteran, but shall be paid to the following persons living at the time of settlement, and in the order named: The surviving spouse, the children (without regard to age or marital status) in equal parts, and the dependent parents of such veteran, in equal parts. If any balance remains, such balance shall be deposited to the credit of the applicable current appropriation; except that there may be paid only so much of such balance as may be necessary to reimburse a person (other than a political subdivision of the United States) who bore the expenses of last sickness or burial of the veteran for such expenses. No payment shall be made under the two preceding sentences of this subsection unless claim therefor is filed with the Secretary within five years after the death of the veteran, except that, if any person so entitled under said two sentences is under legal disability at the time of death of the veteran, such five-year period of limitation shall run from the termination or removal of the legal disability.

“(e) ESCHEATMENT.—Any funds in the hands of a fiduciary appointed by a State court or the Secretary derived from benefits payable under laws administered by the Secretary, which under the law of the State wherein the beneficiary had last legal residence would escheat to the State, shall escheat to the United States and shall be returned by such fiduciary, or by the personal representative of the deceased beneficiary, less legal expenses of any administration necessary to determine that an escheat is in order, to the Department, and shall be deposited to the credit of the applicable revolving fund, trust fund, or appropriation.

“(f) ASSISTANCE.—The Secretary shall provide to a fiduciary appointed under section 5502 of this title materials and tools to assist the fiduciary in carrying out the responsibilities of the fiduciary under this chapter, including—

“(1) handbooks, brochures, or other written material that explain the responsibilities of a fiduciary under this chapter;

“(2) tools located on an Internet website, including forms to submit to the Secretary required information; and

“(3) assistance provided by telephone.”.

(2) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections at the beginning of chapter 55 of

title 38, United States Code, is amended by inserting after the item relating to section 5502 the following new item:

“5502A. Supervision of fiduciaries.”.

(c) DEFINITION OF FIDUCIARY.—Section 5506 of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) by striking “For purposes” and inserting “(a) For purposes”; and

(2) by adding at the end the following new subsection:

“(b)(1) For purposes of subsection (a), the term ‘person’ includes any—

“(A) State or local government agency whose mission is to carry out income maintenance, social service, or health care-related activities;

“(B) any State or local government agency with fiduciary responsibilities; or

“(C) any nonprofit social service agency that the Secretary determines—

“(i) regularly provides services as a fiduciary concurrently to five or more individuals; and

“(ii) is not a creditor of any such individual.

“(2) The Secretary shall maintain a list of State or local agencies and nonprofit social service agencies under paragraph (1) that are qualified to act as a fiduciary under this chapter. In maintaining such list, the Secretary may consult the lists maintained under section 807(h) of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 1007(h)).”.

(d) QUALIFICATIONS.—Section 5507 of title 38, United States Code, is amended to read as follows:

“§ 5507. Inquiry, investigations, and qualification of fiduciaries

“(a) INVESTIGATION.—Any certification of a person for payment of benefits of a beneficiary to that person as such beneficiary's fiduciary under section 5502 of this title shall be made on the basis of—

“(1) an inquiry or investigation by the Secretary of the fitness of that person to serve as fiduciary for that beneficiary to be conducted in advance of such certification and in accordance with subsection (b);

“(2) adequate evidence that certification of that person as fiduciary for that beneficiary is in the interest of such beneficiary (as determined by the Secretary under regulations);

“(3) adequate evidence that the person to serve as fiduciary protects the private information of a beneficiary in accordance with subsection (d)(1); and

“(4) the furnishing of any bond that may be required by the Secretary in accordance with subsection (f).

“(b) ELEMENTS OF INVESTIGATION.—(1) In conducting an inquiry or investigation of a proposed fiduciary under subsection (a)(1), the Secretary shall conduct—

“(A) a face-to-face interview with the proposed fiduciary by not later than 30 days after the date on which such inquiry or investigation begins; and

“(B) a background check of the proposed fiduciary to—

“(i) in accordance with paragraph (2), determine whether the proposed fiduciary has been convicted of a crime; and

“(ii) determine whether the proposed fiduciary will serve the best interest of the beneficiary, including by conducting a credit check of the proposed fiduciary and checking the records under paragraph (5).

“(2) The Secretary shall request information concerning whether that person has been convicted of any offense under Federal or State law. If that person has been convicted of such an offense, the Secretary may certify the person as a fiduciary only if the Secretary finds that the person is an appropriate person to act as fiduciary for the beneficiary concerned under the circumstances.

“(3) The Secretary shall conduct the background check described in paragraph (1)(B)—

“(A) each time a person is proposed to be a fiduciary, regardless of whether the person is serving or has served as a fiduciary; and

“(B) at no expense to the beneficiary.

“(4) Each proposed fiduciary shall disclose to the Secretary the number of beneficiaries that the fiduciary acts on behalf of.

“(5) The Secretary shall maintain records of any person who has—

“(A) previously served as a fiduciary; and

“(B) had such fiduciary status revoked by the Secretary.

“(6)(A) If a fiduciary appointed by the Secretary is convicted of a crime described in subparagraph (B), the Secretary shall notify the beneficiary of such conviction by not later than 14 days after the date on which the Secretary learns of such conviction.

“(B) A crime described in this subparagraph is a crime—

“(i) for which the fiduciary is convicted while serving as a fiduciary for any person;

“(ii) that is not included in a report submitted by the fiduciary under section 5509(a) of this title; and

“(iii) that the Secretary determines could affect the ability of the fiduciary to act on behalf of the beneficiary.

“(c) INVESTIGATION OF CERTAIN PERSONS.—

(1) In the case of a proposed fiduciary described in paragraph (2), the Secretary, in conducting an inquiry or investigation under subsection (a)(1), may carry out such inquiry or investigation on an expedited basis that may include giving priority to conducting such inquiry or investigation. Any such inquiry or investigation carried out on such an expedited basis shall be carried out under regulations prescribed for purposes of this section.

“(2) Paragraph (1) applies with respect to a proposed fiduciary who is—

“(A) the parent (natural, adopted, or step-parent) of a beneficiary who is a minor;

“(B) the spouse or parent of an incompetent beneficiary;

“(C) a person who has been appointed a fiduciary of the beneficiary by a court of competent jurisdiction;

“(D) being appointed to manage an estate where the annual amount of veterans benefits to be managed by the proposed fiduciary does not exceed \$3,600, as adjusted pursuant to section 5312 of this title; or

“(E) a person who is authorized to act on behalf of the beneficiary under a durable power of attorney.

“(d) PROTECTION OF PRIVATE INFORMATION.—(1) A fiduciary shall take all reasonable precautions to—

“(A) protect the private information of a beneficiary, including personally identifiable information; and

“(B) securely conducts financial transactions.

“(2) A fiduciary shall notify the Secretary of any action of the fiduciary that compromises or potentially compromises the private information of a beneficiary.

“(e) POTENTIAL MISUSE OF FUNDS.—(1) If the Secretary has reason to believe that a fiduciary may be misusing all or part of the benefit of a beneficiary, the Secretary shall—

“(A) conduct a thorough investigation to determine the veracity of such belief; and

“(B) if such veracity is established, transmit to the officials described in paragraph (2) a report of such investigation.

“(2) The officials described in this paragraph are the following:

“(A) The Attorney General.

“(B) Each head of a Federal department or agency that pays to a fiduciary or other person benefits under any law administered by such department of agency for the use and

benefit of a minor, incompetent, or other beneficiary.

“(f) BOND.—In determining whether a proposed fiduciary is required to furnish a bond under subsection (a)(4), the Secretary shall consider—

“(1) the existence of any familial or other personal relationship between the proposed fiduciary and the beneficiary; and

“(2) the care the proposed fiduciary has taken to protect the interests of the beneficiary.

“(g) LIST OF FIDUCIARIES.—Each regional office of the Veterans Benefits Administration shall maintain a list of the following:

“(1) The name and contact information of each fiduciary, including address, telephone number, and email address.

“(2) With respect to each fiduciary described in paragraph (1)—

“(A) the date of the most recent background check and credit check performed by the Secretary under this section;

“(B) the date that any bond was paid under this section;

“(C) the name, address, and telephone number of each beneficiary the fiduciary acts on behalf of; and

“(D) the amount that the fiduciary controls with respect to each beneficiary described in subparagraph (C).”

(e) ANNUAL RECEIPT OF PAYMENTS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Section 5509 of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(A) in subsection (a)—

(i) by striking “may require a fiduciary to file a” and inserting “shall require a fiduciary to file an annual”; and

(ii) by adding at the end the following new sentence: “The Secretary shall transmit such annual report or accounting to the beneficiary and any legal guardian of such beneficiary.”;

(B) by adding at the end the following new subsections:

“(c) MATTERS INCLUDED.—Except as provided by subsection (f), an annual report or accounting under subsection (a) shall include the following:

“(1) For each beneficiary that a fiduciary acts on behalf of—

“(A) the amount of the benefits of the beneficiary provided under any law administered by the Secretary accrued during the year, the amount spent, and the amount remaining; and

“(B) if the fiduciary serves the beneficiary with respect to benefits not administered by the Secretary, an accounting of all sources of benefits or other income the fiduciary oversees for the beneficiary.

“(2) A list of events that occurred during the year covered by the report that could affect the ability of the fiduciary to act on behalf of the beneficiary, including—

“(A) the fiduciary being convicted of any crime;

“(B) the fiduciary declaring bankruptcy; and

“(C) any judgments entered against the fiduciary.

“(d) RANDOM AUDITS.—The Secretary shall annually conduct random audits of fiduciaries who receive a commission pursuant to subsection 5502A(a)(1) of this title.

“(e) STATUS OF FIDUCIARY.—If a fiduciary includes in the annual report events described in subsection (c)(2), the Secretary may take appropriate action to adjust the status of the fiduciary as the Secretary determines appropriate, including by revoking the fiduciary status of the fiduciary.

“(f) CAREGIVERS AND CERTAIN OTHER FIDUCIARIES.—(1)(A) In carrying out this section, the Secretary shall ensure that a caregiver fiduciary is required only to file an annual report or accounting under subsection (a) with respect to the amount of the benefits of

the beneficiary provided under any law administered by the Secretary—

“(i) spent on—

“(I) food and housing for the beneficiary; and

“(II) clothing, health-related expenses, recreation, and other personal items for the beneficiary; and

“(ii) saved for the beneficiary.

“(B) The Secretary shall coordinate with the Under Secretary for Benefits and the Under Secretary for Health to—

“(i) minimize the frequency with which employees of the Department visit the home of a caregiver fiduciary and beneficiary; and

“(ii) limit the extent of supervision by such Under Secretaries with respect to such a fiduciary and beneficiary.

“(C) In this paragraph, the term ‘caregiver fiduciary’ means a fiduciary who—

“(i) in addition to acting as a fiduciary for a beneficiary, is approved by the Secretary to be a provider of personal care services for the beneficiary under paragraph (3)(A)(i) of section 1720G(a) of this title;

“(ii) in carrying out such care services to such beneficiary, has undergone not less than four home visits under paragraph (9)(A) of such section; and

“(iii) has not been required by the Secretary to take corrective action pursuant to paragraph (9)(C) of such section.

“(2) In carrying out this section, the Secretary may adjust the matters required under an annual report or accounting under subsection (a) with respect to a fiduciary whom the Secretary determines to have effectively protected the interests of the beneficiary over a sustained period.”; and

(C) by striking the section heading and inserting the following: “**Annual reports and accountings of fiduciaries**”.

(2) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections at the beginning of chapter 55 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by striking the item relating to section 5509 and inserting the following new item:

“5509. Annual reports and accountings of fiduciaries.”.

(f) REPAYMENT OF MISUSED BENEFITS.—Section 6107(a)(2)(C) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by inserting before the period the following: “, including by the Secretary not acting in accordance with section 5507 of this title”.

(g) ANNUAL REPORTS.—Section 5510 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by striking “The Secretary shall include in the Annual Benefits Report of the Veterans Benefits Administration or the Secretary’s Annual Performance and Accountability Report” and inserting “Not later than July 1 of each year, the Secretary shall submit to the Committees on Veterans’ Affairs of the House of Representatives and the Senate a separate report containing”.

(h) REPORT.—Not later than two years after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs of the Senate and the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs of the House of Representatives a comprehensive report on the implementation of the amendments made by this Act, including—

(1) detailed information on the establishment of new policies and procedures pursuant to such amendments and training provided on such policies and procedures; and

(2) a discussion of whether the Secretary should provide fiduciaries with standardized financial software to simplify reporting requirements.

(i) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendments made by this section shall take effect on the date that is one year after the date of the enactment of this Act.

## SEC. 10. BOARD OF VETERANS’ APPEALS VIDEO HEARINGS.

Section 7107 of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) in subsection (d), by amending paragraph (1) to read as follows:

“(1)(A) Upon request for a hearing, the Board shall determine, for purposes of scheduling the hearing for the earliest possible date, whether a hearing before the Board will be held at its principal location or at a facility of the Department or other appropriate Federal facility located within the area served by a regional office of the Department. The Board shall also determine whether to provide a hearing through the use of the facilities and equipment described in subsection (e)(1) or by the appellant personally appearing before a Board member or panel.

“(B) The Board shall notify the appellant of the determinations of the location and type of hearing made under subparagraph (A). Upon notification, the appellant may request a different location or type of hearing as described in such subparagraph. If so requested, the Board shall grant such request and ensure that the hearing is scheduled at the earliest possible date without any undue delay or other prejudice to the appellant.”; and

(2) in subsection (e), by amending paragraph (2) to read as follows:

“(2) Any hearing provided through the use of the facilities and equipment described in paragraph (1) shall be conducted in the same manner as, and shall be considered the equivalent of, a personal hearing.”.

## SEC. 11. IMPROVEMENTS TO AUTHORITY FOR PERFORMANCE OF MEDICAL DISABILITIES EXAMINATIONS BY CONTRACT PHYSICIANS.

(a) EXTENSION OF TEMPORARY AUTHORITY.—Subsection (c) of section 704 of the Veterans Benefits Act of 2003 (38 U.S.C. 5101 note) is amended by striking “December 31, 2015” and inserting “December 31, 2017”.

(b) LICENSURE OF CONTRACT PHYSICIANS.—

(1) TEMPORARY AUTHORITY.—Such section 704 is further amended—

(A) by redesignating subsection (d) as subsection (e); and

(B) by inserting after subsection (c) the following new subsection (d):

“(d) LICENSURE OF CONTRACT PHYSICIANS.—

“(1) IN GENERAL.—Notwithstanding any law regarding the licensure of physicians, a physician described in paragraph (2) may conduct an examination pursuant to a contract entered into under subsection (b) at any location in any State, the District of Columbia, or a Commonwealth, territory, or possession of the United States, so long as the examination is within the scope of the authorized duties under such contract.

“(2) PHYSICIAN DESCRIBED.—A physician described in this paragraph is a physician who—

“(A) has a current unrestricted license to practice the health care profession of the physician;

“(B) is not barred from practicing such health care profession in any State, the District of Columbia, or a Commonwealth, territory, or possession of the United States; and

“(C) is performing authorized duties for the Department of Veterans Affairs pursuant to a contract entered into under subsection (b).”.

(2) PILOT PROGRAM.—Section 504 of the Veterans’ Benefits Improvement Act of 1996 (38 U.S.C. 5101 note) is amended—

(A) by redesignating subsections (c) and (d) as subsections (d) and (e), respectively; and

(B) by inserting after subsection (b) the following new subsection (c):

“(c) LICENSURE OF CONTRACT PHYSICIANS.—

“(1) IN GENERAL.—Notwithstanding any law regarding the licensure of physicians, a physician described in paragraph (2) may conduct an examination pursuant to a contract entered into under subsection (a) at any location in any State, the District of Columbia, or a Commonwealth, territory, or possession of the United States, so long as the examination is within the scope of the authorized duties under such contract.

“(2) PHYSICIAN DESCRIBED.—A physician described in this paragraph is a physician who—

“(A) has a current unrestricted license to practice the health care profession of the physician;

“(B) is not barred from practicing such health care profession in any State, the District of Columbia, or a Commonwealth, territory, or possession of the United States; and

“(C) is performing authorized duties for the Department of Veterans Affairs pursuant to a contract entered into under subsection (a).”.

#### SEC. 12. PILOT PROGRAM ON FULLY DEVELOPED APPEALS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall carry out a pilot program to provide the option of an alternative appeals process that shall more quickly determine such appeals in accordance with this section.

(b) ELECTION.—

(1) FILING.—In accordance with paragraph (2), a claimant may elect to file a fully developed appeal under the pilot program under subsection (a) by filing with the Secretary the following:

(A) The notice of disagreement under chapter 71 of title 38, United States Code, along with the written election of the claimant to have the appeal determined under the pilot program.

(B) All evidence that the claimant believes is needed for the appeal as of the date of the filing.

(C) A statement of the argument in support of the claim, if any.

(2) TIMING.—A claimant shall make an election under paragraph (1) as part of the notice of disagreement filed by the claimant in accordance with paragraph (1)(A).

(3) REVERSION.—

(A) At any time, a claimant who makes an election under paragraph (1) may elect to revert to the standard appeals process. Such a reversion shall be final.

(B) A claimant described in subparagraph (A), or a claimant who makes an election under paragraph (1) but is later determined to be ineligible for the pilot program under subsection (a), shall revert to the standard appeals process without any penalty to the claimant other than the loss of the docket number associated with the fully developed appeal.

(4) OUTREACH.—In providing claimants with notices of the determination of a claim during the period in which the pilot program under subsection (a) is carried out, the Secretary shall conduct outreach as follows:

(A) The Secretary shall provide to the claimant (and to the representative of record of the claimant, if any) information regarding—

(i) the pilot program, including the advantages and disadvantages of the program;

(ii) how to make an election under paragraph (1);

(iii) the limitation on the use of new evidence described in paragraph (3) of subsection (c) and the development of information under paragraph (4) of such subsection; and

(iv) the ability of the claimant to seek advice and education regarding such process from veterans service organizations, attor-

neys, and claims agents recognized under chapter 59 of title 38, United States Code.

(B) The Secretary shall collaborate, partner with, and give weight to the advice of the three veterans service organizations with the most members to publish on the Internet website of the Department of Veterans Affairs an online tutorial explaining the advantages and disadvantages of the pilot program.

(c) TREATMENT BY DEPARTMENT AND BOARD.—

(1) PROCESS.—Upon the election of a claimant to file a fully developed appeal pursuant to subsection (b)(1), the Secretary shall—

(A) not provide the claimant with a statement of the case nor require the claimant to file a substantive appeal; and

(B) transfer jurisdiction over the fully developed appeal directly to the Board of Veterans' Appeals.

(2) DOCKET.—

(A) The Board of Veterans' Appeals shall—

(i) maintain fully developed appeals on a separate docket than standard appeals;

(ii) decide fully developed appeals in the order that the fully developed appeals are received on the fully developed appeal docket;

(iii) except as provided by subparagraph (B), decide not more than one fully developed appeal for each four standard appeals decided; and

(iv) to the extent practicable, decide each fully developed appeal by the date that is one year following the date on which the claimant files the notice of disagreement.

(B) Beginning one year after the date on which the pilot program under subsection (a) commences, the Board may adjust the number of standard appeals decided for each fully developed appeal under subparagraph (A)(iii) if the Board determines that such adjustment is fair for both standard appeals and fully developed appeals.

(3) LIMITATION ON USE OF NEW EVIDENCE.—

(A) Except as provided by subparagraphs (B) and (C)—

(i) a claimant may not submit or identify to the Board of Veterans' Appeals any new evidence relating to a fully developed appeal after filing such appeal unless the claimant reverts to the standard appeals process pursuant to subsection (b)(3); and

(ii) if a claimant submits or identifies any such new evidence, such submission or identification shall be deemed to be an election to make such a reversion pursuant to subsection (b)(3).

(B) Subparagraph (A) shall not apply to evidence developed pursuant to paragraphs (4) and (5). The Board shall consider such evidence in the first instance without consideration by the Veterans Benefits Administration.

(C) The representative of record of a claimant for appeals purposes, if any, shall be provided an opportunity to review the fully developed appeal of the claimant and submit any additional arguments or evidence that the representative determines necessary during a period specified by the Board for purposes of this subparagraph.

(4) PROHIBITION ON REMAND FOR ADDITIONAL DEVELOPMENT.—If the Board of Veterans' Appeals determines that a fully developed appeal requires Federal records, independent medical opinions, or new medical examinations, the Board shall—

(A) in accordance with paragraph (5), take such actions as may be necessary to develop such records, opinions, or examinations in accordance with section 5103A of title 38, United States Code;

(B) retain jurisdiction of the fully developed appeal without requiring a determination by the Veterans Benefits Administration based on such records, opinions, or examinations;

(C) ensure the claimant, and the representative of record of a claimant, if any, receives a copy of such records, opinions, or examinations; and

(D) provide the claimant a period of 90 days after the date of mailing such records, opinions, or examinations during which the claimant may provide the Board any additional evidence without requiring the claimant to make a reversion pursuant to subsection (b)(3).

(5) DEVELOPMENT UNIT.—

(A) The Board of Veterans' Appeals shall establish an office to develop Federal records, independent medical opinions, and new medical examinations pursuant to paragraph (4)(A) that the Board determines necessary to decide a fully developed appeal.

(B) The Secretary shall—

(i) ensure that the Veterans Benefits Administration cooperates with the Board of Veterans' Appeals in carrying out subparagraph (A); and

(ii) transfer employees of the Veterans Benefits Administration who, prior to the enactment of this Act, were responsible for processing claims remanded by the Board of Veterans' Appeals to positions within the office of the Board established under subparagraph (A) in a number the Secretary determines sufficient to carry out such subparagraph.

(6) HEARINGS.—Notwithstanding section 7107 of title 38, United States Code, the Secretary may not provide hearings with respect to fully developed appeals. If a claimant requests to hold a hearing pursuant to such section 7107, such request shall be deemed to be an election to revert to the standard appeals process pursuant to subsection (b)(3).

(d) DURATION; APPLICATION.—The Secretary shall carry out the pilot program under subsection (a) for a five-year period beginning one year after the date of the enactment of this Act. This section shall apply only to fully developed appeals that are filed during such period.

(e) REPORTS.—During each year in which the pilot program under subsection (a) is carried out, the Secretary shall submit to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Representatives and the Senate a report on the pilot program. The first such report shall be submitted by not later than 180 days after the date on which the pilot program commences. Each report shall include the following:

(1) For the period covered by the report—

(A) the number of claimants who filed a fully developed appeal under the pilot program;

(B) the average processing time for each such appeal, measured by each phase of the appeal, and, if the processing time for appeals exceed one year, the reasons for such processing time;

(C) a summary of reasons for which the development of evidence was required under subsection (c)(5);

(D) the number of issues decided, listed by the disposition of the issue;

(E) of the number identified in subparagraph (D), the number of issues for which evidence was not so developed, listed by the disposition of the issue;

(F) of the number of fully developed appeals decided by the Board of Veterans' Appeals, the number of cases from each agency of original jurisdiction, listed by the disposition of the issue;

(G) the number of fully developed appeals appealed to the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims, listed by the disposition of the case;

(H) the number of reversions made under subsection (b)(3); and

(I) any reasons for why a claimant was determined to be ineligible to participate in the pilot program.

(2) A review, made in conjunction with veterans service organizations, of the efforts of the Secretary to provide clear rating decisions and improve disability rating notification letters, including with respect to—

(A) the opinions of veterans service organizations regarding such efforts; and

(B) how the pilot program improves such efforts.

(3) A recommendation for any changes to improve the pilot program.

(4) An assessment of the feasibility and advisability of expanding the pilot program.

(f) REGULATIONS.—Not later than one day after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall publish interim guidance on the pilot program under subsection (a). Not later than 90 days after such date of enactment, the Secretary shall prescribe regulations to carry out such pilot program.

(g) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

(1) The term “claimant” has the meaning given that term in section 5100 of title 38, United States Code.

(2) The term “compensation” has the meaning given that term in section 101 of title 38, United States Code.

(3) The term “fully developed appeal” means an appeal of a claim for disability compensation that is—

(A) filed by a claimant in accordance with subsection (b)(1); and

(B) considered in accordance with this section.

(4) The term “standard appeal” means an appeal of a claim for disability compensation that is not a fully developed appeal.

**SEC. 13. DEADLINE FOR CERTIFICATION OF APPEALS FORMS BY REGIONAL OFFICES OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.**

The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall take such steps as may be necessary to ensure that when a regional office of the Department of Veterans Affairs receives a form known as “VA Form 9, Appeal to Board of Veterans’ Appeals”, or any successor form, submitted by a veteran to appeal a decision relating to a claim, the regional office certifies such form by not later than one year after the date of the receipt of the form.

**SEC. 14. EVALUATION OF BACKLOG OF DISABILITY CLAIMS AND APPEALS OF CLAIMS OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.**

(a) IN GENERAL.—There is established a commission or task force to evaluate the backlog of claims within the Department of Veterans Affairs and the appeals process of claims.

(b) STUDIES.—

(1) BACKLOG STUDY.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—The Commission or Task Force, acting through the subcommittee described in subsection (d)(2)(A), shall carry out a study on the backlog of claims, including the current process the Secretary of Veterans Affairs uses to evaluate claims and appeals and the laws and regulations applicable to such claims and appeals. Such study shall be a comprehensive evaluation and assessment of the backlog of claims, an analysis of possible improvements to the procedures used to process such claims, and any related issues that the Commission or Task Force considers relevant.

(B) MATTERS INCLUDED.—In carrying out the study under subparagraph (A), the Commission or Task Force shall examine the following:

(i) The backlog of claims, including an analysis of—

(I) the most effective means to quickly and accurately resolve all claims pending as of the date of the study; and

(II) with respect to the Department, the annual funding, number of full-time employees, workload management practices, and the progress, as of the date of the study, of the strategic plan.

(ii) Possible improvements to the claims process, including an evaluation and recommendations with respect to whether substantive and structural changes to the overall claims process are required.

(iii) In carrying out the evaluation and recommendations under subparagraph (B), an examination of—

(I) options that make no major substantive changes to the claims process;

(II) options that maintain the process but make minor changes; and

(III) options that make broad changes to the process.

(2) APPEALS PROCESS STUDY.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—The Commission or Task Force, acting through the subcommittee described in subsection (d)(2)(B), shall carry out a study on the anticipated increase of appeals of claims, including the current appeals process and the laws and regulations applicable to such appeals. Such study shall be a comprehensive evaluation and assessment of such anticipated increase of appeals claims, an analysis of possible improvements to the procedures used to process such appeals, and any related issues that the Commission or Task Force considers relevant.

(B) MATTERS INCLUDED.—In carrying out the study under subparagraph (A), the Commission or Task Force shall examine the following:

(i) The anticipated surge in appeals of claims, including an analysis of—

(I) the most effective means to quickly and accurately resolve pending appeals and future appeals;

(II) with respect to both the Board and the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims, the annual funding, number of full-time employees, workload management practices, and the progress, as of the date of the study, of the strategic plan; and

(III) the efficiency, effectiveness, and utility of the Veterans Benefits Management System with respect to appeals operations, including an identification of key changes that may need to be implemented to such system.

(ii) Possible improvements to the appeals process, including an evaluation and recommendations with respect to whether substantive and structural changes to the overall appeals process are required.

(iii) In carrying out the evaluation and recommendations under clause (ii), an examination of—

(I) options that make no major substantive changes to the appeals process;

(II) options that maintain the process but make minor changes;

(III) options that make broad changes to the process;

(IV) the necessity of the multi-tiered levels of appeals at the regional office level, including filing a notice of disagreement, receipt of a statement of the case, supplemental statement of the case (if applicable), and substantive appeal (VA Form 9);

(V) the role of the Board and the Appeals Management Center, including—

(aa) the effectiveness of the workload management of the Board and the Center;

(bb) whether the Board and Center should be regionalized or maintain the centralized structure in the District of Columbia;

(cc) whether Board members should be required to pass the administrative law judges certification examination; and

(dd) whether the Board should continue to require de novo review of appeals; and

(VI) the role of the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims and the United States Court

of Appeals for the Federal Circuit, including—

(aa) the continued effectiveness and necessity of a multi-tiered structure of judicial review;

(bb) whether the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims should have Article I or Article III status;

(cc) expansion of either the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims or the United States Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit jurisdiction, including by allowing such courts to hear class action lawsuits with respect to claims; and

(dd) the possibility of expanding judicial review of claims to all Federal circuit courts of appeals or allowing judicial review beyond the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims only by the Supreme Court.

(3) CONSIDERATION.—In carrying out the studies under paragraph (1)(A) and (2)(A) and making any recommendations under this section, the Commission or Task Force shall consider the following:

(A) The interests of veterans, including with respect to accuracy, fairness, and transparency in the claims process of the Department.

(B) The values and requirements of the Constitution, including with respect to compliance with procedural and substantive due process.

(C) The public interest, including with respect to the responsible use of available resources.

(D) With respect to the study conducted under paragraph (1)(A), the importance of the claimant friendly, nonadversarial nature of the claims process.

(E) With respect to the study conducted under paragraph (2)(A), the importance of an appeals process that is efficient and easily understandable by a claimant.

(4) ROLE OF SECRETARY, CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD, AND CHIEF JUDGE.—

(A) INFORMATION.—In carrying out each study under paragraph (1)(A) and (2)(A), at times that the Commission or Task Force determines appropriate, the Commission or Task Force shall submit to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, the Chairman of the Board, and the Chief Judge of the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims, as the case may be, information with respect to remedies and solutions that the Commission or Task Force identifies pursuant to such a study.

(B) IMPLEMENTATION.—The Secretary, the Chairman of the Board, and the Chief Judge shall each—

(i) fully consider the remedies and solutions submitted to the Secretary, the Chairman, or the Chief Judge, as the case may be, under subparagraph (A);

(ii) implement such remedies and solutions as the Secretary, the Chairman, or the Chief Judge, respectively, determines appropriate; and

(iii) submit to Congress justification for failing to implement any such remedy or solution.

(C) PLAN.—The Commission or Task Force shall submit to the Secretary, the Chairman of the Board, and the Chief Judge a feasible, timely, and cost-effective plan to eliminate the backlog of appeals of claims based on the remedies and solutions identified pursuant to the study under paragraph (2)(A) and the information submitted under subparagraph (A).

(c) COMPREHENSIVE REPORTS.—

(1) INITIAL COMPREHENSIVE REPORT.—Not later than 60 days after the date on which the Commission or Task Force first meets, the Commission or Task Force shall submit to the President and Congress an initial comprehensive report on the studies conducted under paragraphs (1)(A) and (2)(A) of subsection (b), including—

(A) the findings of the causes of the backlog of claims;

(B) a proposed plan to handle the anticipated surge in appeals of claims; and

(C) the level of cooperation the Commission or Task Force has received from the Secretary and the heads of other departments or agencies of the Federal Government.

(2) INTERIM COMPREHENSIVE REPORTS.—Not later than 90 days after the date on which the Commission or Task Force first meets, and each 30-day period thereafter ending on the date on which the Commission or Task Force submits the final comprehensive report under paragraph (3), the Commission or Task Force shall submit to the President and Congress a comprehensive report on—

(A) the progress of the Secretary with respect to implementing solutions to expedite the elimination of the backlog of claims pursuant to subsection (b)(4)(B)(i);

(B) the progress of the Secretary, the Chairman of the Board, and the Chief Judge of the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims with respect to implementing solutions to complete appeals of claims in a timely manner in a timely manner pursuant to such subsection; and

(C) the level of cooperation the Commission or Task Force has received from the Secretary and the heads of other departments or agencies of the Federal Government.

(3) FINAL COMPREHENSIVE REPORT.—Not later than 180 days after the date on which the Commission or Task Force first meets, the Commission or Task Force shall submit to the President and Congress a comprehensive report on the following:

(A) With respect to the study conducted under subsection (b)(1)(A)—

(i) The findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the Commission or Task Force with respect to the matters referred to in such subsection.

(ii) The recommendations of the Commission or Task Force for revising and improving the backlog of claims and the procedures used to process claims.

(iii) The progress of the Secretary with respect to implementing solutions to expedite the elimination of the backlog of claims pursuant to subsection (b)(4)(B)(ii).

(iv) Other information and recommendations with respect to claims as the Commission or Task Force considers appropriate.

(B) With respect to the study conducted under subsection (b)(2)(A)—

(i) The findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the Commission or Task Force with respect to the matters referred to in such subsection.

(ii) The recommendations of the Commission or Task Force for revising and improving the appeals process;

(iii) The information described in subsection (b)(4)(A).

(iv) The feasible, timely, and cost effective plan described in subsection (b)(4)(C).

(v) The progress of the Secretary, the Chairman of the Board, and the Chief Judge of the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims with respect to implementing solutions to provide timely appeals of claims.

(vi) Other information and recommendations with respect to the appeals process as the Commission or Task Force considers appropriate.

(d) MEMBERSHIP.—

(1) NUMBER AND APPOINTMENT.—The Commission or Task Force shall be composed of 15 members, appointed as follows:

(A) Two members appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives, one of whom shall be designated to serve upon the Subcommittee on the Backlog of Claims and

one of whom shall be designated to serve upon the Subcommittee on Appeals.

(B) Two members appointed by the minority leader of the House of Representatives, one of whom shall be designated to serve upon the Subcommittee on the Backlog of Claims and one of whom shall be designated to serve upon the Subcommittee on Appeals.

(C) Two members appointed by the majority leader of the Senate, one of whom shall be designated to serve upon the Subcommittee on the Backlog of Claims and one of whom shall be designated to serve upon the Subcommittee on Appeals.

(D) Two members appointed by the minority leader of the Senate, one of whom shall be designated to serve upon the Subcommittee on the Backlog of Claims and one of whom shall be designated to serve upon the Subcommittee on Appeals.

(E) Three members appointed by the President, two of whom shall be designated to serve upon the Subcommittee on the Backlog of Claims and one of whom shall be designated to serve upon the Subcommittee on Appeals.

(F) One member appointed by the Secretary of Defense, whom shall be designated to serve upon the Subcommittee on the Backlog of Claims.

(G) Two members appointed by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, one of whom shall be designated to serve upon the Subcommittee on the Backlog of Claims and one of whom shall be designated to serve upon the Subcommittee on Appeals.

(H) One member appointed by the Chief Judge of the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims, whom shall be designated to serve upon the Subcommittee on Appeals.

(2) SUBCOMMITTEES.—The Commission or Task Force shall have two subcommittees as follows:

(A) A Subcommittee on the Backlog of Claims consisting of the eight members designated in accordance with paragraph (1).

(B) A Subcommittee on Appeals consisting of the seven members designated in accordance with paragraph (1).

(3) QUALIFICATIONS.—Each member appointed under paragraph (1) shall be appointed based on the experience of the member as a veteran or on the subject matter expertise or other relevant experience of the member.

(4) ADVISORS.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—In addition to the 15 members appointed under paragraph (1), the Commission or Task Force shall—

(i) have five nonvoting, nonmember advisors, appointed by a majority of the Commission or Task Force, each from a different organization that represents the interests of veterans; and

(ii) seek advice from experts from non-governmental organizations (including veterans service organizations and military organizations), the Internet technology industry, and the insurance industry.

(B) ADVICE.—Individuals described in clause (i) and (ii) of subparagraph (A) shall provide advice to both subcommittees described in paragraph (2).

(5) CHAIRMAN.—The President shall designate a member of the Commission or Task Force who is appointed by the President and designated to serve upon the Subcommittee on the Backlog of Claims to serve as the chairman of the Commission or Task Force. The chairman may designate a member to serve as the chairman of the Subcommittee on the Backlog of Claims and a member to serve as the chairman of the Subcommittee on Appeals to chair such subcommittees as the designee of the chairman of the Commission or Task Force.

(6) PERIOD OF APPOINTMENT.—Members of the Commission or Task Force shall be ap-

pointed for the life of the Commission or Task Force. A vacancy shall not affect its powers.

(7) VACANCY.—A vacancy on the Commission or Task Force shall be filled in the manner in which the original appointment was made.

(8) APPOINTMENT DEADLINE.—The appointment of members of the Commission or Task Force established in this section shall be made not later than 15 days after the date of the enactment of this Act.

(e) MEETINGS.—

(1) INITIAL MEETING.—The Commission or Task Force shall hold its first meeting not later than 15 days after the date on which a majority of the members are appointed.

(2) MEETINGS.—The Commission or Task Force shall meet at the call of the chairman.

(3) QUORUM.—A majority of the members of the Commission or Task Force shall constitute a quorum, but a lesser number may hold hearings.

(f) POWERS OF THE COMMISSION OR TASK FORCE.—

(1) HEARINGS.—The Commission or Task Force may hold such hearings, sit and act at such times and places, take such testimony, and receive such evidence as the Commission or Task Force considers advisable to carry out the purposes of this section.

(2) INFORMATION FROM FEDERAL AGENCIES.—The Commission or Task Force may secure directly from any department or agency of the Federal Government such information as the Commission or Task Force considers necessary to carry out the provisions of this section. Upon request of the chairman, the head of such department or agency shall furnish such information to the Commission or Task Force.

(3) POSTAL SERVICES.—The Commission or Task Force may use the United States mails in the same manner and under the same conditions as other departments and agencies of the Federal Government.

(4) GIFTS.—The Commission or Task Force may accept, use, and dispose of gifts or donations of service or property.

(g) PERSONNEL MATTERS.—

(1) COMPENSATION OF MEMBERS.—Each member of the Commission or Task Force who is not an officer or employee of the United States shall be compensated at a rate equal to the daily equivalent of the annual rate of basic pay prescribed for level IV of the Executive Schedule under section 5315 of title 5, United States Code, for each day (including travel time) during which the member is engaged in the performance of the duties of the Commission or Task Force. All members of the Commission or Task Force who are officers or employees of the United States shall serve without compensation in addition to that received for their services as officers or employees of the United States.

(2) TRAVEL EXPENSES.—The members of the Commission or Task Force shall be allowed travel expenses, including per diem in lieu of subsistence, at rates authorized for employees of agencies under subchapter I of chapter 57 of title 5, United States Code, while away from their homes or regular places of business in the performance of service of the Commission or Task Force.

(3) STAFF.—

(A) APPOINTMENT.—The chairman of the Commission or Task Force may, without regard to the civil service laws and regulations, appoint an executive director and such other personnel as may be necessary to enable the Commission or Task Force to perform its duties. The appointment of an executive director shall be subject to the approval of the Commission or Task Force.

(B) COMPENSATION.—The chairman of the Commission or Task Force may fix the compensation of the executive director and other

personnel without regard to the provisions of chapter 51 and subchapter III of chapter 53 of title 5, United States Code, relating to classification of positions and General Schedule pay rates, except that the rate of pay for the executive director and other personnel may not exceed the rate payable for level V of the Executive Schedule under section 5316 of such title.

(4) **DETAIL OF GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES.**—Upon request of the chairman of the Commission or Task Force, the head of any department or agency of the Federal Government may detail, on a nonreimbursable basis, any personnel of that department or agency to the Commission or Task Force to assist in carrying out its duties.

(5) **PROCUREMENT OF TEMPORARY AND INTERMITTENT SERVICES.**—The chairman of the Commission or Task Force may procure temporary and intermittent services under section 3109(b) of title 5, United States Code, at rates for individuals which do not exceed the daily equivalent of the annual rate of basic pay prescribed for level V of the Executive Schedule under section 5316 of such title.

(h) **TERMINATION OF COMMISSION OR TASK FORCE.**—The Commission or Task Force shall terminate 60 days after the date on which the Commission or Task Force submits the final comprehensive report under subsection (c)(3).

(i) **FUNDING.**—

(1) **IN GENERAL.**—The Secretary shall, upon the request of the chairman of the Commission or Task Force, make available to the Commission or Task Force such amounts as the Commission or Task Force may require to carry out the duties of the Commission or Task Force under this section.

(2) **AVAILABILITY.**—Any sums made available to the Commission or Task Force shall remain available, without fiscal year limitation, until the termination of the Commission or Task Force.

(j) **DEFINITIONS.**—In this section:

(1) The term “appeals process” means the process to appeal the determination by the Secretary of a claim beginning with the notice of disagreement filed pursuant to section 7105 of title 38, United States Code, and ending with the review of a decision by the Supreme Court pursuant to section 7292(c) of such title.

(2) The term “Board” means the Board of Veterans’ Appeals.

(3) The term “strategic plan” means the Strategic Plan to Eliminate the Compensation Claims Backlog, published by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs on January 25, 2013.

(k) **EFFECTIVE DATE.**—This section shall take effect on the date that is one year after the date of the enactment of this Act.

**SEC. 15. METHODS FOR VALIDATING CERTAIN WORLD WAR II MERCHANT MARINER SERVICE CONSIDERED TO BE ACTIVE SERVICE BY THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.**

(a) **IN GENERAL.**—For the purposes of verifying that an individual performed service under honorable conditions that satisfies the requirements of a coastwise merchant seaman who is recognized pursuant to section 401 of the GI Bill Improvement Act of 1977 (Public Law 95–202; 38 U.S.C. 106 note) as having performed active duty service for the purposes described in subsection (c)(1), the Secretary of Defense shall accept the following:

(1) In the case of an individual who served on a coastwise merchant vessel seeking such recognition for whom no applicable Coast Guard shipping or discharge form, ship logbook, merchant mariner’s document or Z-card, or other official employment record is available, the Secretary shall provide such recognition on the basis of applicable Social

Security Administration records submitted for or by the individual, together with validated testimony given by the individual or the primary next of kin of the individual that the individual performed such service during the period beginning on December 7, 1941, and ending on December 31, 1946.

(2) In the case of an individual who served on a coastwise merchant vessel seeking such recognition for whom the applicable Coast Guard shipping or discharge form, ship logbook, merchant mariner’s document or Z-card, or other official employment record has been destroyed or otherwise become unavailable by reason of any action committed by a person responsible for the control and maintenance of such form, logbook, or record, the Secretary shall accept other official documentation demonstrating that the individual performed such service during period beginning on December 7, 1941, and ending on December 31, 1946.

(3) For the purpose of determining whether to recognize service allegedly performed during the period beginning on December 7, 1941, and ending on December 31, 1946, the Secretary shall recognize masters of seagoing vessels or other officers in command of similarly organized groups as agents of the United States who were authorized to document any individual for purposes of hiring the individual to perform service in the merchant marine or discharging an individual from such service.

(b) **TREATMENT OF OTHER DOCUMENTATION.**—Other documentation accepted by the Secretary of Defense pursuant to subsection (a)(2) shall satisfy all requirements for eligibility of service during the period beginning on December 7, 1941, and ending on December 31, 1946.

(c) **BENEFITS ALLOWED.**—

(1) **BURIAL BENEFITS ELIGIBILITY.**—Service of an individual that is considered active duty pursuant to subsection (a) shall be considered as active duty service with respect to providing burial benefits under chapters 23 and 24 of title 38, United States Code, to the individual.

(2) **MEDALS, RIBBONS, AND DECORATIONS.**—An individual whose service is recognized as active duty pursuant to subsection (a) may be awarded an appropriate medal, ribbon, or other military decoration based on such service.

(3) **STATUS OF VETERAN.**—An individual whose service is recognized as active duty pursuant to subsection (a) shall be honored as a veteran but shall not be entitled by reason of such recognized service to any benefit that is not described in this subsection.

(d) **DETERMINATION OF COASTWISE MERCHANT SEAMAN.**—The Secretary of Defense shall verify that an individual performed service under honorable conditions that satisfies the requirements of a coastwise merchant seaman pursuant to this section without regard to the sex, age, or disability of the individual during the period in which the individual served as such a coastwise merchant seaman.

(e) **DEFINITION OF PRIMARY NEXT OF KIN.**—In this section, the term “primary next of kin” with respect to an individual seeking recognition for service under this section means the closest living relative of the individual who was alive during the period of such service.

(f) **EFFECTIVE DATE.**—This section shall take effect 90 days after the date of the enactment of this Act.

**SEC. 16. DESIGNATION OF AMERICAN WORLD WAR II CITIES.**

(a) **IN GENERAL.**—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall designate at least one city in the United States each year as an “American World War II City”.

(b) **CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION.**—After the designation made under subsection (c), the

Secretary, in consultation with the Secretary of Defense, shall make each designation under subsection (a) based on the following criteria:

(1) Contributions by a city to the war effort during World War II, including those related to defense manufacturing, bond drives, service in the Armed Forces, and the presence of military facilities within the city.

(2) Efforts by a city to preserve the history of the city’s contributions during World War II, including through the establishment of preservation organizations or museums, restoration of World War II facilities, and recognition of World War II veterans.

(c) **FIRST AMERICAN WORLD WAR II CITY.**—The city of Wilmington, North Carolina, is designated as an “American World War II City”.

**SEC. 17. SENSE OF CONGRESS REGARDING AMERICAN VETERANS DISABLED FOR LIFE.**

(a) **FINDINGS.**—Congress makes the following findings:

(1) There are at least 3,600,000 veterans currently living with service-connected disabilities.

(2) As a result of their service, many veterans are permanently disabled throughout their lives and in many cases must rely on the support of their families and friends when these visible and invisible burdens become too much to bear alone.

(3) October 5, which is the anniversary of the dedication of the American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial, has been recognized as an appropriate day on which to honor American veterans disabled for life each year.

(b) **SENSE OF CONGRESS.**—Congress—

(1) expresses its appreciation to the men and women left permanently wounded, ill, or injured as a result of their service in the Armed Forces;

(2) supports the annual recognition of American veterans disabled for life each year; and

(3) encourages the American people to honor American veterans disabled for life each year with appropriate programs and activities.

**SEC. 18. EXTENSION OF PILOT PROGRAM ON COUNSELING IN RETREAT SETTINGS FOR WOMEN VETERANS NEWLY SEPARATED FROM SERVICE IN THE ARMED FORCES.**

Section 203(d) of the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010 (Public Law 111–163; 38 U.S.C. 1712A note) is amended by striking “December 31, 2016” and inserting “December 31, 2021”.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. ABRAHAM) and the gentleman from California (Mr. TAKANO) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Louisiana.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. ABRAHAM. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and add extraneous materials to H.R. 677, as amended.

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

There was no objection.

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 677, as amended.

H.R. 677, as amended, contains many important provisions that would help

our Nation's veterans, including provisions to provide an automatic annual COLA, cost-of-living adjustment, for veterans' benefits; expedite the processing of veterans' claims and appeals; improve VA's fiduciary program; expand the official documentation accepted by the Secretary of Defense to grant veteran status with limited benefits to World War II Merchant Marine and Coastwise Merchant Seamen; designate certain cities as American World War II cities; and express the sense of Congress honoring American veterans disabled for life.

I want to recognize the hard work of the Members whose proposals have been incorporated into H.R. 677, as amended. I particularly want to thank my colleagues on the Veterans' Affairs Committee: Chairman MILLER, Ranking Member BROWN, Ms. TITUS, Dr. RUIZ, Mr. WALZ, and Mr. O'ROURKE. In addition, I want to acknowledge the contributions of Representatives JOHNSON, BUTTERFIELD, LATTA, ROUZER, and FRANKEL.

H.R. 677, as amended, incorporates legislation that Chairman MILLER introduced that would expand the eligibility for a medallion provided by VA for private headstones that identify the deceased as a veteran.

These medallions may be attached to privately purchased headstones of veterans who are buried in private cemeteries. They are inscribed with the word "veteran" across the top, and the branch of service is inscribed along the bottom. The medallions have proven to be very popular, with many families choosing to use it to honor the service of their loved one.

Unfortunately, current law only authorizes medallions for veterans who died before November 1, 1990. During a Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs Subcommittee hearing, the VA testified that it has been forced to deny 91 percent of applications for medallions because the requests were made by families of veterans who died before November 1, 1990.

H.R. 677, as amended, would allow the VA to provide these medallions to individuals who served in the Armed Forces after April 6, 1917, which is the date the United States entered World War I.

The reason that this proposal limits eligibility to those who served after April 6, 1917, is due to the possibility that attaching a medallion to an older headstone may cause damage. There are also concerns that placing medallions on antique headstones in older cemeteries may alter the appearance of historic cemeteries.

H.R. 677, as amended, would protect historic gravestones and cemeteries, but also recognizes the importance in honoring the service and sacrifice of those who have served our Nation in the Armed Forces.

These medallions ensure that veterans who are buried in private cemeteries and whose graves are marked by privately purchased headstones can

easily be distinguished. I hope that when people visit these cemeteries and see these medallions they take a few moments to remember that we all owe our freedom to our Nation's veterans. These patriotic heroes deserve nothing less.

This bill also includes the text of H.R. 1575, a bill that was introduced by Ranking Member BROWN to extend a pilot program on counseling in retreat settings for women veterans who are newly separated from service. This pilot was originally authorized in 2010, and pilot participants have reported unanimously positive experiences and a significant improvement in well-being, stress, and positive coping skills following their participation in the retreats.

I am grateful to the ranking member for sponsoring this provision in recognition of the good work being done in this pilot program and the need to ensure that women veterans continue to have access to it.

There are many provisions in H.R. 677, as amended, that would help improve services for veterans and their families, but I want to focus my remarks on the section that I am proud to have authored.

First, the bill would authorize an automatic annual COLA for beneficiaries who receive VA disability compensation. Although Congress generally approves COLA legislation every year, veterans have to wait until Congress actually acts. This can be very stressful for our veterans and their families who depend on their payments to make ends meet. Our Nation's heroes should not have to wait to know whether they are going to be able to pay their bills or not.

H.R. 677, as amended, would ensure that our Nation's veterans automatically receive the same annual COLA as Social Security recipients. This critical provision will help our Nation's veterans better plan for their financial future, and I urge all Members to support it.

Second, this legislation would help make it more convenient for veterans to schedule disability examinations by extending the temporary authorization that allows the VA to use contract physicians to conduct disability examinations through 2017.

Veterans in rural areas, like the Fifth District which I represent, may have to travel long distances to see a VA examiner for a disability examination. My proposal would make it easier to schedule disability examinations by permitting the VA to contract with any physician with a current, unrestricted license to conduct these examinations in the United States.

Additionally, H.R. 677, as amended, would require the VA to provide Congress with regular types of claims veterans file. This information will help better inform our efforts to reform the VA and ensure veterans receive timely, accurate claims decisions.

Section 4 of H.R. 677, as amended, would also express the sense of Con-

gress that the VA should develop a designated form for an increased rating claim or reopening of a claim that does not require the resubmittal of information previously submitted to the Department.

I am grateful for the ranking member's response in this provision in recognition of the good work being done in this pilot program, and we need to ensure that it is passed. I urge my colleagues to support the legislation.

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

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

I would like to express my appreciation to all the members of our committee who have worked to address these issues in a bipartisan manner, and I truly hope we can stay focused on what is important here, which is helping veterans.

This bill extends a pilot counseling program for women veterans separating from the military and coping with PTSD and other combat-related stress issues. These specialized programs are helping women transition from the military and start the next phase of their lives.

I would also like to highlight an important piece of this legislation that was originally introduced by my friend and colleague, Mr. O'ROURKE, the Express Appeals Act.

As highlighted by my friend and colleague, Representative TITUS, other members of the committee, and even the VA Secretary just 2 weeks ago, the appeals process is in crisis. We in the House have heard the cry for help and have responded.

After passing this bill, we will wait for our friends in the Senate to take action. We encourage them to remember our veterans suffer for our inaction. This action provides a critical and widely supported alternative appeals process.

I applaud Representatives O'ROURKE and COOK, Chairman MILLER, the VA, the Board of Appeals, the DAV, the VFW, PVA, AMVETS, IAVA, and MOAA in working together for almost 2 years to reach broad consensus on an alternative path forward.

The Express Appeals Act, similar to the VA's Fully Developed Claim program, offers veterans an alternative option to do more of the work on their own, with the promise of an expedited decision from the Board of Veterans Appeals.

My friend and colleague, Representative RUIZ's bill, H.R. 2691, the Veterans' Survivors Claims Processing and Automation Act of 2015, is also included in this legislation. This provision would automate claims for the surviving family members of veterans.

I truly believe how we treat our veterans plays a major role in who is willing to fight our wars and defend our Nation.

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

Mr. ABRAHAM. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. COSTELLO).

Mr. COSTELLO of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to support H.R. 677, the American Heroes COLA Act.

There are a lot of very excellent provisions to this bill, not the least of which is the automatic COLA, but I actually want to speak to part of this bill that deals with the claims processing.

The legislation offered by my colleague from Louisiana (Mr. ABRAHAM) would set out to improve the claims processing through several steps. I want to highlight them.

First, it would require the VA to accept medical evidence from medical professionals in the community to support veterans' disability claims. Second, it would establish a commission to independently evaluate the VA's disability claims and appealed claims backlog. Last, it would develop an alternative program to determine appeals for disability claims more quickly.

Each of these steps offers solutions to the current backlog. This bill is a smart, proactive, bipartisan bill that will help reduce the daunting piles of paperwork and delays that many veterans continue to face.

I am very proud to be in support of this bill. It is another step in doing our best to reduce the claims backlog, and I thank Mr. ABRAHAM for his leadership on this.

Mr. ABRAHAM. Mr. Speaker, once again, I encourage all Members to support H.R. 677, as amended.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. BUTTERFIELD).

Mr. BUTTERFIELD. Let me first thank Mr. TAKANO for yielding, and I thank all of you for your advocacy on this bill. This is a very, very important piece of legislation for our veterans.

Mr. Speaker, we are running out of time to finally recognize the critical contributions of a forgotten but critical segment of brave men and women who served our country during World War II. Because we are running out of time, I urge my colleagues to pass H.R. 677, which contains provisions from my bill, H.R. 1288, that would create a pathway for these forgotten individuals to finally be recognized for their service to our country.

I am referring to an overlooked segment of the World War II Merchant Marine, known as Coastwise Merchant Seamen. These men and women, Mr. Speaker, served the vital role of transporting raw materials and supplies between our domestic military installations and production facilities during the war. Their jobs were absolutely essential to the war effort.

To this day, many of these mariners have never been recognized for their service, largely at no fault of their own, but rather because of decisions made by the Federal Government. It has been virtually impossible for many of these mariners to obtain the required documents needed to prove their World War II service due to govern-

ment orders that either had these documents destroyed or never kept at all.

Even today, government inaction and delay on transferring the surviving documents to the National Archives and Records Administration makes searching for and obtaining the required documents practically impossible. As each day passes, this issue grows more acute due to the advanced age of these mariners.

We must make it possible for these great Americans to receive their due recognition while we still have the chance.

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More importantly, we have to do this now, while these mariners still have the chance to know that their sacrifices were not in vain, and their Nation and government are appreciative of their service.

Mr. Speaker, these mariners are national treasures, and we are here today because of their sacrifices. They deserve, each of them, to be recognized for their service, and I ask my colleagues to join me in this effort by voting "yes" on this bill.

I want to thank Chairman MILLER, Ranking Member BROWN, subcommittee Chairman ABRAHAM, and Ranking Member TITUS for working with me and my staff on this issue, and including provisions of my bill in the base text.

I want to thank the committee staff for all of their hard work. I am appreciative of their efforts. This has been a true team effort, and we are now one step closer to finally doing the right thing.

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. FRANKEL).

Ms. FRANKEL of Florida. I thank Mr. TAKANO for yielding.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 677, a bill that honors American veterans disabled for life. I thank my friend from Florida, Chairman JEFF MILLER, for cosponsoring this bill with me and shepherding its passage.

As the mother of a United States Marine veteran, I want to first start by thanking all our veterans who have served us. Thankfully for my family, my son returned safely from two wars.

But, sadly, there are many for whom leaving the battlefield does not mark the end of a conflict, for them or their family. Jeff Colaiacovo is one of those people. I am proud to say he is a constituent and one of my heroes.

On his 18th birthday, unlike many young men of his generation, he volunteered for the Army to go to the Vietnam War, and it would be brutal.

A few months into his tour, in 1967, Jeff's tank hit a mine, and shrapnel exploded into his eyes, blinding him. Miraculously, the doctors were able to recover his vision, and soon after, he was back on the battlefield.

Then, on August 30, 1967, Jeff's tank was hit by a rocket-propelled grenade, trapping him inside, his body engulfed

in flames. He spent 5 months in burn units around the world.

He left the Army with an honorable discharge. And, again, he was not to be deterred. He got married. He raised children. He started a small business.

The thing is, Mr. Speaker, the injuries he sustained during his service left him disabled for life. And to this day, Jeff is under heavy medication for PTSD. He bears the scars of duty that remind us all of what he and many others gave in serving us.

Now, this bill recognizes that October 5 is the anniversary of the dedication of the Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial, a magnificent memorial that sits just steps away from the Capitol.

On one of its walls reads a quote from Dwight D. Eisenhower: "Each of you bears upon his body the permanent, honorable scars of dangerous service: service rendered in order that our great nation might continue to live according to the expressed will of its own citizens."

In honor of Jeff, and so many others, let's pass this bill.

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

As I conclude, I would like to speak about a provision in this bill. Included here is language extending the very successful pilot program run by the Department of Veterans Affairs which provides psychiatric and psychological counseling and support in retreat settings for newly returned women veterans.

A Veterans Health Administration report showed that this limited, 2-year pilot program, run by the Readjustment Counseling Service, produced positive, measurable results helping returning women veterans experiencing post-traumatic stress, depression, sleep disturbances and isolation, many having been evaluated as service-connected for severe PTSD.

In surveys, participants have consistently reported experiencing a marked decrease in stress symptoms and an increase in coping skills, including understanding better how to develop support systems and to access available resources at the VA and in their communities as they reenter civilian life.

Post-9/11 women veterans, often combat veterans, are brought together in groups of about 20, in outdoor settings. These veterans, most of whom are coping with the effects of severe PTSD, some as a result of sexual trauma while in the military, participated in trust-building exercises and worked with counselors and psychological educators to build peer support.

Financial and occupational counseling and conflict resolution training were also offered on an as-needed basis.

I urge support of this provision and the underlying legislation.

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

Mr. ABRAHAM. Mr. Speaker, I continue to urge support of H.R. 677.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of H.R. 677, the "American Heroes COLA Act."

This bill requires that, whenever there is an increase in benefit amounts payable under title II (Old Age, Survivors and Disability Insurance) of the Social Security Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall increase by the same percentage the amounts payable as veterans' disability compensation.

H.R. 677 does the following:

1. compensates for dependents
2. a clothing allowance for certain disabled adults
3. compensation for surviving spouses and children

This bill requires that veterans are given the correct percentage and benefit amounts from the Social Security Act.

Retired military veterans, VA rates for compensation and pension for disabled veterans and surviving families will be effective December 1, 2015 and will be reflected on the first check to be paid on December 31, 2015.

Congress enacted the COLA provision as part of the 1972 Social Security Amendments, and automatic annual COLAs began in 1975. Before that, benefits were increased only when Congress enacted special legislation.

COLA impacts benefits to about 59 social security recipients, 1.96 million military retirees and 4 million disabled veterans.

This increase in benefit amounts will help alleviate financial stress that millions of our disabled veterans have.

As the sponsor of H.R. 76 "the HERO Transition from Battlespace to Workplace Act," I strongly support our veterans and any bill that helps mitigate soldier to citizen transition.

As Abraham Lincoln stated, "Honor to the soldier and sailor everywhere, who bravely bears his country's cause. Honor, also, to the citizen who cares for his brother in the field and serves, as he best can, the same cause."

H.R. 677 is a positive step forward in increasing in benefit amounts payable as veterans' disability compensation.

I strongly support this bill and urge my colleagues to join me and do the same.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. ABRAHAM) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 677, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

The title of the bill was amended so as to read: "A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to provide for annual cost-of-living adjustments to be made automatically by law each year in the rates of disability compensation for veterans with service-connected disabilities and the rates of dependency and indemnity compensation for survivors of certain service-connected disabled veterans, and for other purposes."

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

#### VA MEDICAL CENTER RECOVERY ACT

Mr. ABRAHAM. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill

(H.R. 3234) to amend title 38, United States Code, to establish within the Department of Veterans Affairs an Office of Failing Medical Center Recovery, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 3234

*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 "VA Medical Center Recovery Act".

#### SEC. 2. EVALUATION AND IMPROVEMENT OF MEDICAL CENTERS.

(a) UNDERPERFORMING MEDICAL CENTERS.—(1) IN GENERAL.—Chapter 73 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by inserting after section 7311A the following new section:

##### "§ 7311B. Evaluation and improvement of medical centers

"(a) IDENTIFICATION OF UNDERPERFORMING MEDICAL CENTERS.—(1) Not later than 15 days after the end of each fiscal quarter, the Secretary shall publish in the Federal Register and on a publically available, searchable Internet website of the Department a compilation of key health metrics for each medical center of the Department.

"(2) On a semiannual basis, the Secretary shall determine, under the key health metrics, whether each medical center of the Department is satisfactory or underperforming.

"(b) RAPID DEPLOYMENT TEAMS.—(1) Not later than 30 days after the date on which the Secretary identifies a medical center as an underperforming medical center under subsection (a)(2), the Secretary shall deploy a rapid deployment team to the medical center to ensure that the medical center achieves satisfactory performance as quickly as practicable.

"(2) Each rapid deployment team deployed to an underperforming medical center under paragraph (1) shall—

"(A) identify the areas of the medical center that require improvement, including with respect to the procedures of the medical center, inefficiencies of the medical center, and whether the medical center follows directives and best practices;

"(B) establish a remediation plan to improve the performance of the medical center;

"(C) review and assesses the status of any—

"(i) disciplinary actions taken at the medical center;

"(ii) recommendations made by the Inspector General of the Department applicable to the medical center; and

"(iii) findings made by the Comptroller General of the United States applicable to the medical center; and

"(D) provide training to the director and staff of the medical center with respect to carrying out such improvements.

"(3) The Secretary shall ensure that—

"(A) the director of each underperforming medical center carries out the remediation plan under paragraph (2)(B); and

"(B) the rapid deployment team has access to all facilities and all electronic systems, records, reports, audits, reviews, documents, papers, or other materials the rapid deployment team determines necessary to carry out this subsection.

"(4) Each rapid deployment team deployed to an underperforming medical center under paragraph (1) shall consist of—

"(A) subject matter experts with experience in—

"(i) customer service training;

"(ii) increasing the efficiency of organizations;

"(iii) clinical care specific to the areas in which the underperforming medical center requires improvement; and

"(iv) any other areas that the Secretary determines appropriate to improve the underperforming medical center; and

"(B) an employee of the Office of the Inspector General of the Department.

"(5) To the extent practicable, each rapid deployment team shall include process improvement subject matter experts from the Veterans Experience Office of the Department.

"(6) The Secretary shall determine the duration of the deployment of a rapid deployment team under paragraph (1).

"(c) INVESTIGATIONS AND WHISTLEBLOWER PROTECTIONS.—(1) The Inspector General of the Department shall prioritize investigations relating to underperforming medical centers.

"(2) The Office of Accountability Review shall prioritize investigations of whistleblower retaliation relating to underperforming medical centers.

"(d) QUARTERLY REPORTS.—On a quarterly basis, the Secretary shall submit to Congress a report that includes, with respect to the quarter covered by the report—

"(1) each identification of an underperforming medical center made by the Secretary;

"(2) the actions taken by the Secretary and rapid deployment teams with respect to improving underperforming medical centers; and

"(3) an update on any progress made by each underperforming medical center, including whether the underperforming medical center is carrying out the remediation plan pursuant to subsection (b)(3)(A).

"(e) RELATIONSHIP TO QUALITY ASSURANCE AND NATIONAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT OFFICER.—The requirements of this section are in addition to any requirements under sections 7311 and 7311A of this title.

"(f) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

"(1) The term 'underperforming medical center' means a medical center of the Department that the Secretary determines is underperforming under subsection (a)(2).

"(2) The term 'key health metrics' means the following:

"(A) The Strategic Analytics Improvement and Learning (commonly referred to as 'SAIL') data used by the Department (or such successor data metric).

"(B) An evaluation system established by the Secretary based on the total data described in subparagraph (A) to determine whether the performance of a medical center is satisfactory or underperforming and requires remediation pursuant to this section."

(2) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections at the beginning of chapter 73 of such title is amended by adding after the item relating to section 7311A the following new item:

"7311B. Evaluation and improvement of medical centers".

(b) INITIAL KEY HEALTH METRICS PUBLICATION.—The Secretary shall publish the initial key health metrics under section 7311B(a)(1) of title 38, United States Code, as added by subsection (a)(1), by not later than 90 days after the date of the enactment of this Act.

(c) INITIAL IDENTIFICATION OF AN UNDERPERFORMING MEDICAL CENTER.—The Secretary shall make the initial identifications under section 7311B(a)(2) of title 38, United States Code, as added by subsection (a)(1), by not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act.

**SEC. 3. STANDARDIZED TRAINING FOR NURSES.**

(a) TRAINING.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall seek to enter into partnerships with recognized schools of nursing to provide undergraduate nursing students enrolled in such schools with standardized training with respect to the following:

- (1) The culture of the military and veterans.
- (2) Post-traumatic stress disorder.
- (3) Traumatic brain injury.
- (4) Amputation and assistive devices.
- (5) Environmental, chemical, and toxic exposure.
- (6) Substance use disorders.
- (7) Military sexual trauma.
- (8) Suicide.
- (9) Homelessness.
- (10) Serious illness at the end of life.

(1) Benefits, services, and resources for veterans that are administered by the Federal Government.

(b) DEVELOPMENT.—In developing the training under subsection (a), the Secretary shall consult with appropriate accrediting bodies, schools of nursing, and industry leaders.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. ABRAHAM) and the gentleman from California (Mr. TAKANO) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Louisiana.

**GENERAL LEAVE**

Mr. ABRAHAM. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and add extraneous material on H.R. 3234, as amended.

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

There was no objection.

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 3234, as amended, the Department of Veterans Affairs VA Medical Center Recovery Act.

This bill would require the VA to publish key health metrics and use these metrics to determine semiannually which VA medical centers are performing satisfactorily and which are underperforming.

If a VA medical center is determined to be underperforming, VA would be required to send a rapid deployment team to the facility within 30 days to establish a remediation plan and provide needed help in problem areas.

The VA would also be required to send regular reports to Congress on which facilities are underperforming and what actions have been taken to improve their performance.

In addition, the bill would require the VA inspector general to prioritize investigations related to underperforming medical centers and the Office of Accountability Review to prioritize investigations of whistleblower retaliation relating to underperforming medical centers.

This bill would also include a provision to strengthen training for undergraduate nurses on veterans unique issues, needs, and benefits.

H.R. 3234, as amended, is sponsored by Congresswoman MARTHA ROBY from Alabama, and I am grateful for her leadership in introducing this legislation.

I yield 2 minutes to the gentlewoman from Alabama (Mrs. ROBY).

Mrs. ROBY. Mr. Speaker, I rise to ask my colleagues to support H.R. 3234, the VA Medical Center Recovery Act.

This bill puts the responsibility for identifying and improving the worst performing VA medical centers squarely on the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, requiring him to deploy teams of experts to turn around failing facilities.

The bill would, for the first time, require the VA to publish key metrics known as SAIL data on the Federal Register and would require the Secretary to report to Congress any medical centers determined to be failing.

Some of my colleagues might wonder why such a bill is necessary, given the VA reform law that we passed more than a year ago. That was a good bill, but it wasn't a silver bullet. Many problems still exist in the VA, and it is our responsibility to address them.

Mr. Speaker, the Central Alabama VA in my district became known as one of the worst in the country. My staff and I worked with whistleblowers and the press to uncover major instances of misconduct, negligence, and mismanagement inside the Central Alabama VA, including:

Widespread manipulation of scheduling data. A nation-leading 57 percent of employees reported that managers instructed them to change appointment times to hide long waits.

More than 1,000 patient X-rays, some showing malignancies, went missing for months and even years.

A pulmonologist was caught twice falsifying more than 1,200 patient records but somehow given a satisfactory review.

An employee took a recovering veteran to a crackhouse, bought him drugs, and paid for prostitutes, all to extort his benefits. When caught, the employee wasn't fired, not until a year later, after our office exposed it publicly.

In the wake of these exposures, the Central Alabama VA Director became the first senior VA manager fired under the new law.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The time of the gentlewoman has expired.

Mr. ABRAHAM. I yield the gentlewoman an additional 3 minutes.

Mrs. ROBY. But even after leadership changes, data showed that the Central Alabama VA's two medical centers in Montgomery and Tuskegee were ranked the worst and the second worst in the Nation for delays in patient care.

By any measure, the Central Alabama VA was the definition of a failing VA system. We had a severe problem, and it required immediate attention.

But, Mr. Speaker, getting the attention of the top VA leaders proved difficult. Once our problems left the front

page, there wasn't a whole lot of followup.

My veterans in Alabama were subject to some of the worst healthcare service in the country, and no one wanted to take responsibility.

Mr. Speaker, I began to think maybe it was because we were depending on a broken bureaucracy to fix itself, that maybe it was because we were asking VA leaders, rather than requiring them, to intervene.

Mr. Speaker, I decided that it was time that we changed that. So, in July, I filed that legislation and began working with the Veterans' Affairs Committee to get a hearing and a vote.

I don't sit on the Veterans' Affairs Committee, so I want to thank the chairman, JEFF MILLER; the subcommittee chairman, DAN BENISHEK; and all the members of the committee for being receptive and working with me on this bill.

I also want to thank all the committee staff for their hard work.

There is no question this bill represents a major step forward and a foundation to build upon.

It should be noted that almost 2 years after the scandal first broke, we are making progress in central Alabama at the VA. Staffing is up, wait times are down. We are building a Community Veterans Health Network that I believe one day can be an example for the entire Nation. We have a long way to go, and I am truly optimistic about the future.

But, Mr. Speaker, it shouldn't have taken this long and it shouldn't have taken a Member of Congress breathing down the necks of top VA officials to get the attention that our veterans deserve.

You know, sometimes I wonder what would have happened if our courageous whistleblowers hadn't stepped up or if the reporters we worked with didn't think it was a story?

What if the truth about the missing X-rays, the manipulated pulmonology records, and the crackhouse never came out? What if we want exposed all of that?

Would our veterans in central Alabama still be subject to the worst health care in the country? Would we even know?

I don't want what happened in central Alabama to ever happen again anywhere. This bill helps to ensure that by requiring key VA health metrics to be published for everyone to see and making sure that the VA officials at the very top cannot hide behind the layers of bureaucracy when it comes to severely failing centers.

Again, I ask my colleagues to support this bill.

□ 1630

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

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

Mr. Speaker, this legislation, H.R. 3234, as amended, is designed to establish criteria for the evaluation and improvement of VA medical centers. The

bill requires the VA to create key health metrics to measure whether each medical center is satisfactory or underperforming.

The metrics will be published on the VA Web site, and an underperforming medical center will be subject to a rapid deployment team being sent to the facility to create a remediation plan and bring them up to standards. The VA will issue quarterly reports on the underperforming facilities and their progress in the following remediation plan.

Additionally, the bill seeks to require the VA to enter into partnerships with recognized schools of nursing to provide undergraduate nursing students enrolled in such schools with standardized training. The bill lists the 11 areas the training should involve, including PTSD, TBI, and military sexual trauma.

Mr. Speaker, this bill addresses issues the committee has expressed concerns about in the past. I support its passage.

Mr. Speaker, I urge the passage of H.R. 3234, as amended.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. ABRAHAM. Mr. Speaker, I also once again encourage all Members to support H.R. 3234, as amended.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 3234, the Failing VA Medical Center Recovery Act.

I support this legislation because it would establish in the Department of Veterans Affairs an Office of Failing Medical Center Recovery, and the position of Under Secretary for Failing Medical Center Recovery to head the Office.

The Office shall carry out the managerial and day-to-day operational control of each VA failing medical center.

The bill directs that the VA shall: publish in the Federal Register and on a publicly available VA website a compilation of key health metrics for each VA medical center; certify semiannually that each VA medical center ranked as “failing” is subject to managerial and day-to-day operational control by the Office; revoke the certification of a VA medical center as a failing medical center if it achieves a ranking of “satisfactory” or better for three consecutive fiscal quarters; submit to Congress a quarterly report on the Office, including actions taken by the Under Secretary regarding covered failing medical centers; and transfer each covered failing medical center from the direct control of the relevant Veterans Integrated Service Network to the direct control of the Under Secretary.

The bill also ensures that the Inspector General of the VA will prioritize investigations relating to covered failing medical centers, and the Office of Accountability Review will prioritize investigations of whistle blower retaliation relating to such centers.

Mr. Speaker, the reason this important legislation is needed is illustrated by the tragic and heart breaking cases of thousands of veterans who were left waiting for care for serious medical conditions.

In the State of Texas we have 1,099,141 Veterans under the age of 65 and 590,618 who are over the age of 65. There are over 1,689,759 veterans living in our state.

The 18th Congressional District has 20,607 under age 65 and 9,844 Veterans over the age of 65.

The Michael E. DeBakey Veterans Hospital Center, located in Houston Texas serves the health care needs of thousands of veterans and their families.

The DeBakey Veterans Hospital Center provides support to veterans and their families who are amputees, cancer, spinal cord injuries, traumatic brain injury, and have visual impairments.

The Medical center provides family support services through its Fisher House that provides living suites at no cost to family members of hospitalized Veterans and military members.

Today, with our vote on H.R. 3234, we can renew our commitment to our nation's more than 2 million troops and reservists, their families, and the 22 million veterans who served our nation.

I urge all Members to join me in voting to pass H.R. 3234.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. ABRAHAM) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 3234, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

The title of the bill was amended so as to read: “A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to evaluate the ability of each medical center of the Department to provide quality health care to veterans, to ensure that the Secretary improves such medical centers that are underperforming, and for other purposes.”.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

#### FEMALE VETERAN SUICIDE PREVENTION ACT

Mr. ABRAHAM. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 2915) to amend title 38, United States Code, to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to identify mental health care and suicide prevention programs and metrics that are effective in treating women veterans as part of the evaluation of such programs by the Secretary, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 2915

*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 “Female Veteran Suicide Prevention Act”.*

#### SEC. 2. SPECIFIC CONSIDERATION OF WOMEN VETERANS IN EVALUATION OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS MENTAL HEALTH CARE AND SUICIDE PREVENTION PROGRAMS.

*Section 1709B(a)(2) of title 38, United States Code, is amended—*

*(1) in subparagraph (A), by inserting before the semicolon the following: “, including specific metrics applicable to women”;*

*(2) in subparagraph (D), by striking “and” at the end;*

*(3) in subparagraph (E), by striking the period at the end and inserting “; and”;* and

*(4) by adding at the end the following new subparagraph:*

*“(F) identify the mental health care and suicide prevention programs conducted by the Secretary that are most effective for women veterans and such programs with the highest satisfaction rates among women veterans.”.*

#### SEC. 3. MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT FOR VETERANS WHO SERVED IN CLASSIFIED MISSIONS.

*(a) SENSE OF CONGRESS.—It is the sense of Congress that veterans who experience combat-related mental health wounds should have immediate, appropriate, and consistent access to comprehensive mental health care.*

*(b) IN GENERAL.—Subchapter II of chapter 17 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following section:*

#### “§ 1720H. Mental health treatment for veterans who served in classified missions

*“(a) ESTABLISHMENT OF STANDARDS.—(1) The Secretary shall establish standards and procedures to ensure that each covered veteran may access mental health care provided by the Secretary in a manner that fully accommodates the obligation of the veteran to not improperly disclose classified information.*

*“(2) The Secretary shall disseminate guidance to employees of the Veterans Health Administration, including mental health professionals, on the standards and procedures established under paragraph (1) and how to best engage covered veterans during the course of mental health treatment with respect to classified information.*

*“(b) IDENTIFICATION.—In carrying out this section, the Secretary shall ensure that a veteran may elect to identify as a covered veteran on an appropriate form.*

*“(c) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:*

*“(1) The term ‘classified information’ means any information or material that has been determined by an official of the United States pursuant to law, an Executive order, or regulation to require protection against unauthorized disclosure for reasons of national security.*

*“(2) The term ‘covered veteran’ means a veteran who—*

*“(A) is enrolled in the health care system established under section 1705(a) of this title;*

*“(B) is seeking mental health treatment; and*

*“(C) in the course of serving in the Armed Forces, participated in a sensitive mission or served in a sensitive unit.*

*“(3) The term ‘sensitive mission’ means a mission of the Armed Forces that, at the time at which a covered veteran seeks treatment, is classified.*

*“(4) The term ‘sensitive unit’ has the meaning given that term in section 130b(c)(4) of title 10.”.*

*(c) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections at the beginning of such chapter is amended by adding after the item relating to section 1720G the following new item:*

*“1720H. Mental health treatment for veterans who served in classified missions.”.*

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. ABRAHAM) and the gentleman from California (Mr. TAKANO) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Louisiana.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. ABRAHAM. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and add extraneous material on H.R. 2915, as amended.

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

There was no objection.

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

I rise in support of H.R. 2915, as amended, the Female Veteran Suicide Prevention Act. This bill would amend the Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for American Veterans, or the SAV Act, by directing the Department of Veterans Affairs to ensure that the independent third-party evaluation of mental health and suicide prevention programs required in the act identifies programs and metrics that are effective in treating women veterans.

Women are an important and an increasing segment of our Active Duty and veteran populations, and, moving forward, we must ensure that VA takes the unique needs of women veterans into account when conducting program reviews and evaluations.

This is particularly important for mental health and suicide prevention programs, given that recent research has shown that female veterans commit suicide at nearly six times the rate of other women and are five times more likely to commit suicide than male veterans.

H.R. 2915, as amended, would also require the VA to establish and disseminate standards and procedures to ensure that a veteran who has participated in a classified mission or served in a sensitive unit while in the Armed Forces may access VA mental health care in a manner that fully accommodates his or her obligation to not improperly disclose classified information.

Serious concerns have been raised about the mental health care that VA provides to veterans following the suicide death of Sergeant Daniel Somers in 2013. Sergeant Somers served on a number of classified missions during his time in the military.

When he separated from service and sought VA care, he was enrolled in group therapy sessions despite his fear of being unable to participate comfortably in group sessions due to his fear that he may inadvertently share classified information.

Had VA been more responsive to Sergeant Somers' concerns and provided him treatment that was sensitive to his concerns, he may be with us today.

H.R. 2915, as amended, is sponsored by Congresswoman JULIA BROWNLEY of California, the ranking member of the Subcommittee on Health, and incorporates provisions sponsored by Congresswoman KYRSTEN SINEMA of Arizona.

I am grateful to both of them for their work.

I urge all of my colleagues to support H.R. 2915, as amended.

I reserve the balance of my time.

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

I rise today in support of H.R. 2915, a bill to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to identify mental health care and suicide prevention programs that are effective in treating women vet-

erans as a part of the evaluation of such programs by the Secretary.

My friend, the ranking member of the Health Subcommittee, Ms. JULIA BROWNLEY, was integral to identifying the issues affecting women suicides. I commend her leadership in bringing this issue to our attention.

Congress has long recognized the unacceptable rates of suicide among our Nation's veterans. Most recently, Congress passed the Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for American Veterans Act, Public Law 114-2, which requires an independent third party to evaluate VA mental health care and suicide prevention programs.

VA's most recent suicide data report was released in February of 2013. That report found that 18 to 22 veterans per day commit suicide. In a follow-up report, the VA found an increase in the suicide rate among female veterans who use the VA healthcare system.

This finding echoes recent research that found that female veterans commit suicide nearly six times the rate of other women and that women veterans are five times more likely to be successful in committing suicide than male veterans.

This bill would amend the Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for American Veterans Act to include within the independent third-party evaluation specific metrics applicable to women and to identify the VA mental health care and suicide prevention programs that are most effective and have the highest satisfaction rates among with women veterans.

Additionally, this legislation includes a provision that my friend, Representative KYRSTEN SINEMA of Arizona, has been working on for years.

This section requires the VA to establish and publish standards and procedures to ensure that a woman who participated in a classified mission or served in a sensitive unit while in the Armed Forces may access VA mental health care without improperly disclosing classified information.

This provision would also require the VA to find alternative methods of mental health treatment for veterans who need to access care without being put in a position where they may reveal information that should not be disclosed.

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

Mr. ABRAHAM. Mr. Speaker, I have no additional speakers. Once again, I encourage all Members to support H.R. 2915, as amended.

I yield back the balance of my time. Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I yield 5 minutes to the gentlewoman from California (Ms. BROWNLEY).

Ms. BROWNLEY of California. Mr. Speaker, first I would like to thank Chairman MILLER and Ranking Member BROWN for their help in moving the Female Veteran Suicide Prevention Act forward.

I would also like to recognize my colleague from Arizona whose bill honoring the memory of her constituent,

Army veteran Sergeant Daniel Somers, has been included.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, the women veteran population is more than 2 million and growing quickly. But our understanding of the experience of women in the military and women veterans is not keeping pace with this rapidly changing demographic.

We agree that one of the most pressing and immediate issues we must address, as Members of Congress, is the tragic epidemic of suicide among all of our veterans. Last year Congress passed the Clay Hunt SAV Act, which required the VA to conduct annual evaluations of its suicide prevention and mental health programs.

I am confident that the Clay Hunt bill will save lives. But recently researchers analyzed data from 23 States and the Suicide Repository on more than 170,000 suicides over a 10-year period.

These researchers found data suggesting that female veteran suicide follows very different patterns than male veteran suicide. The statistics are extremely startling. Suicide among women veterans increased by an astounding 40 percent from 2000 to 2010.

The suicide rate among veteran women is nearly six times higher than among nonveteran women. For women ages 18 to 29, the risk of suicide is even higher, at nearly 12 times the rate of nonveteran women.

We don't know whether the reasons are related to the high rate of military sexual assault, gender-specific experiences on the battlefield, or factors that distinguish differing personal backgrounds, which is exactly the point. Without looking more closely at the root causes, we cannot hope to find better solutions.

Last year the Los Angeles Times wrote about this issue describing the heartbreaking case of Army medic Sara Leatherman. Even before her deployment, Sara had experienced depression and attempted suicide.

She was discharged early from her deployment because of a back injury sustained in Iraq. Suffering from post-traumatic stress and experiencing physical pain from her injury, Sara was not able to live by herself and moved in with her grandmother.

Sara was trying to get her life back on track and was attending community college. Although Sara was receiving VA treatment for PTSD, at the very young age of 24, she tragically took her life. Her family has been utterly destroyed by their loss.

While so very distressing, the VA was unable to help Sara. So we must honor Sara's memory and the memory of other women veterans whom we so tragically lost to suicide by doing our very best to better understand the underlying and unique causes that lead women veterans to take their lives over wanting to live their lives.

I introduced the Female Veteran Suicide Prevention Act to do just that by

building upon and improving the Clay Hunt SAV Act. My bill will help identify the different mental health and suicide prevention programs that are most effective for either male or female veterans.

My bill will also require the VA to report to Congress annually on the results of this analysis. Finally, my bill will require that VA's evaluation of its suicide prevention programs include specific performance metrics for women veterans.

The Female Veteran Suicide Prevention Act passed the House Veterans' Affairs Committee proudly with bipartisan support. It is also supported by the Service Women's Action Network, The American Legion, the Military Order of the Purple Heart, Disabled American Veterans, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Paralyzed Veterans of America, and the Vietnam Veterans of America.

Mr. Speaker, this bill will give us more tools in the toolbox to help save the lives of men and women who have bravely served our country with great honor and distinction. One human life unnecessarily lost is one life too many.

I thank my colleagues on the committee for making the Female Veteran Suicide Prevention Act a priority. I urge all of my colleagues to join me in voting "yes" on this important legislation.

THE AMERICAN LEGION,  
Washington, DC, September 11, 2015.

Hon. JULIA BROWNLEY,  
U.S. House of Representatives,  
Washington, DC.

DEAR REPRESENTATIVE BROWNLEY: On behalf of the over 2 million members of The American Legion, I would like to express our support for H.R. 2915, the Female Veteran Suicide Prevention Act. This bill, as written, would improve female veteran suicide prevention programs within the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) by amending Title 38 directing the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to identify mental health care and suicide prevention programs and metrics that are effective in treating women veterans. This bill also strives to improve suicide prevention programs for female veterans enrolled in the VA healthcare system.

In 2014, The American Legion passed a resolution urging the President and Congress to sign into law the Suicide Prevention for American Veterans Act or similar acts that will expand and improve the care provided to veterans and servicemembers who have mental health issues or are at risk of suicide. Under this Act, the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs would be required to review their mental health care programs on an annual basis to ensure their effectiveness, offer special training on identifying those high risk veterans who are suicidal to their mental health providers, and to improve the process regarding medical records and prescriptions for the purpose of ensuring that there is a seamless health care process for those servicemembers who are transitioning out of the service.

Again, The American Legion supports H.R. 2915, the Female Veteran Suicide Prevention Act and applauds your leadership in addressing this critical issue facing our nation's veterans and their families.

Sincerely,

DALE BARNETT,  
National Commander.

MILITARY ORDER OF  
THE PURPLE HEART,  
Springfield, VA, December 15, 2015.

Hon. JEFF MILLER,  
Chairman, Committee on Veterans' Affairs,  
Washington, DC.

DEAR CHAIRMAN MILLER: On behalf of the Military Order of the Purple Heart (MOPH), I am pleased to offer support for H.R. 2915, the "Female Veteran Suicide Prevention Act". This legislation, if enacted, would help to identify mental health and suicide prevention programs that are the most effective and have the best outcomes among women veterans and would require that the results be reported to both the Senate and House Veterans Committees.

The recent data that has been published is deeply troubling. The data suggests that the suicide rate among women veterans is approximately six times higher than that of women who did not serve in the military.

While the Department of Veterans Affairs is examining why the suicide rate among women veterans is so much higher and how a history of Military Sexual Trauma may be one of the contributing factors, we as a nation must devote the time and resources to support these women who served our country in uniform.

MOPH requests that you bring this legislation before your committee as soon as possible so that America's women veterans understand that this issue will be given a high priority and that their service is appreciated.

Respectfully,

ROBERT PUSKAR,  
National Commander.

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, again, I wish to thank my colleagues, Ms. BROWNLEY and Ms. SINEMA, for bringing the issues surrounding the prevention of female suicides in the military to our attention.

I urge passage of this very important bill.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of the Female Veteran Suicide Prevention Act (H.R. 2915).

The VA estimates that 22 veterans take their own lives each day, or over 8,000 per year—more than have been killed in action since 9/11. The incidence of suicide among our veteran population is stunning, tragic beyond words, and simply unacceptable.

Too many veterans have returned from fighting our enemies overseas to fighting for their lives at home. As the son of a WW2 combat veteran, I have witnessed the residual wounds of war, the struggle to cope with the post-traumatic stress that can continue for decades and the pain that a lack of access to services can cause for veterans and their families.

Recognizing this great, unmet need, Congress recently enacted the bipartisan "Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for American Veterans (SAV) Act," legislation targeting the gaps in the VA's mental health and suicide prevention efforts. Among other provisions, the law requires annual, independent third party evaluations of the effectiveness of the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) programs and establishes best practices for caring for at-risk veterans.

While the Clay Hunt Act is a comprehensive and well-designed law—I cosponsored and voted for it twice—there is one area where improvements could be made to maximize its impact and better assist one group of veterans: female veterans.

As the House Veterans' Affairs Committee report states: In 2014, the VA released an update to the survey and found increases in the suicide rate in female users of the VA health care system. Female veterans commit suicide at nearly six times the rate of other women and that women veterans are five times more likely to commit suicide than male veterans. Yet the VA's research focuses primarily on men and little is known about the complex causes and factors that are driving the suicide rate among females who have served.

The bill we are voting on today offers a modest but important step to enhance our understanding of, and hopefully help remedy, these staggering numbers. Specifically, H.R. 2915 directs the VA to identify mental health care and suicide prevention programs that are most effective and have the highest satisfaction rates among women veterans.

We as a nation have a duty and obligation to repay the debt we owe to those who have fought in defense of our nation and our ideals. This bill helps ensure we better address the physical and emotional wounds of all veterans and I urge all members to support it.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Speaker, as a proud cosponsor I rise in strong support of H.R. 2915, the "Female Veteran Suicide Prevention Act," which directs the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to implement mental health care and suicide prevention programs and identify metrics that are effective in reducing the incidence of suicide among female veterans.

Over the last decade suicide has become a major issue for the military, but the research has been predominantly focused on men and too much remains unknown about the cause and frequency of suicide among female veterans.

Mr. Speaker, several recent studies show that, unfortunately, female military veterans commit suicide at nearly 6 times the rate of other women.

The suicide rate among female veterans is so high that it approaches that of their male counterparts, a finding that surprises researchers because men generally are far more likely than women to commit suicide.

The highest rates of suicide are found among young female veterans, ages 18–29, who are 12 times more likely to commit suicide as their civilian counterparts.

This is heart breaking, but perhaps not unexpected, since reports indicate that 10% of women serving on active duty are victims of rape and another 13% were subjected to other unwanted sexual contact.

Mr. Speaker, in every other age group, including women who served as far back as the 1950s, suicide rates for female veterans are between 4 and 8 times higher than that of their civilian counterparts.

These trends are so disturbing that it has earned the sobriquet from the Houston Chronicle as "The Silent National Epidemic."

The Texas Department of State Health Services lists a decedent's military experience in his or her death record, regardless of whether the deceased was serving in the armed forces at time of death.

While it is not clear what is driving the rates of female veteran suicides, the consistency across age groups suggests that a statistically significant correlation exists between gender and military service but the sad truth is that we lack sufficient data to generate externally valid inferences about causation.

In the general population, women attempt suicide more often than men but succeed less because women usually use pills or other methods that are less lethal than firearms.

Female veterans, however, are more likely than other women to possess firearms, and more likely to use a firearm to commit suicide (40% compared to 34% of civilian women).

H.R. 2915 is intended to make progress in identifying the causes and reducing the incidences of suicide by female veterans.

The bravery and devotion of female veterans, who have provided heroic service to our nation, often at great personal costs, is unquestioned.

We owe it to them to be there when they need our help just as they were there to answer the call when their country needed them.

I urge all Members to join me in voting to pass H.R. 2915, the "Female Veteran Suicide Prevention Act."

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. ABRAHAM) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 2915, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

The title of the bill was amended so as to read: "A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to identify mental health care and suicide prevention programs and metrics that are effective in treating women veterans as part of the evaluation of such programs by the Secretary, and for other purposes."

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

#### DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS ILLIANA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM PROPERTY CONVEYANCE

Mr. ABRAHAM. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 3262) to provide for the conveyance of land of the Illiana Health Care System of the Department of Veterans Affairs in Danville, Illinois, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 3262

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

#### SECTION 1. LAND CONVEYANCE, DANVILLE, ILLINOIS.

(a) CONVEYANCE AUTHORIZED.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs may convey to the Danville Area Community College of Danville, Illinois, all right, title, and interest of the United States in and to certain real property, including any improvements thereon, consisting of approximately .6 acres known as "Building Number 48", which is part of the Illiana Health Care System of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

(b) CONSIDERATION.—As consideration for the conveyance under subsection (a), the Danville Area Community College shall convey to the United States all right, title, and interest of Danville Area Community College in and to certain real property, including

any improvements thereon, consisting of approximately 1.06 acres with a gazebo located approximately 293 feet south of the Danville Area Community College Library Building, which is part of the Danville Area Community College.

(c) CONDITION OF CONVEYANCE.—The conveyance under subsection (a) shall be subject to the condition that the recipient accept the conveyed real property in its condition at the time of the conveyance.

(d) DESCRIPTION OF PROPERTY.—The exact acreage and legal description of the parcels of real property conveyed under subsections (a) and (b) shall be determined by surveys satisfactory to the Secretary.

(e) ADDITIONAL TERMS AND CONDITIONS.—The Secretary may require such additional terms and conditions in connection with the conveyances under subsections (a) and (b) as the Secretary considers appropriate to protect the interests of the United States.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. ABRAHAM) and the gentleman from California (Mr. TAKANO) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Louisiana.

□ 1645

#### GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. ABRAHAM. 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. 3262.

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

There was no objection.

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 3262.

This bill authorizes the Department of Veterans Affairs to convey property on the VA Illiana Health Care System campus in Danville, Illinois, to the Danville Area Community College.

Authorizing this conveyance would allow the VA to dispose of a vacant building for which it has no intended future use and is costly to maintain.

It would also allow the Department to straighten their property line, subsequently shortening the amount of fencing that is required to secure the safety of the medical center campus.

H.R. 3262 is sponsored by my friend and colleague from Illinois, Congressman JOHN SHIMKUS, and I thank him for his leadership in sponsoring and advancing this legislation.

I urge all of my colleagues to support H.R. 3262.

I reserve the balance of my time.

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

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 3262 authorizes the VA to convey to the Danville Area Community College of Danville, Illinois, what is known as Building Number 48, which is part of the VA Illiana Health Care System.

In return, the college will convey back to the VA certain lands near the college library building.

We do not have any issues with the legislation, and I urge its passage.

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

Mr. ABRAHAM. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. SHIMKUS).

(Mr. SHIMKUS asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. SHIMKUS. Mr. Speaker, it does take an act of Congress to transfer lands and buildings, and that is kind of what we are doing here today, so I rise in support of this bill.

It is a very simple bill that is going to benefit the VA there in Danville, but also the local community with the Danville Area Community College.

Danville, Illinois, is a small town that has been home to some big names. Dick Van Dyke called Danville home in his childhood. Speaker Joe Cannon, a name we all know in Congress, was from Danville. Today, Danville is home to the VA Illiana Health Care System and the Danville Area Community College, commonly known as DACC.

DACC's president, Dr. Alice Jacobs, is an exceptional leader who has dedicated 45 years to higher education, including the last 16 years leading DACC. She has recently announced her retirement in the coming year, and I thank her for her dedicated service to the students and the community of Danville and wish her the best in the future.

The VA and DACC are an excellent example of how two institutions can work in cooperation to serve our veterans. The location of the VA hospital adjacent to the community college campus allows our veterans returning home to seek their medical care and help with benefits, while the college provides the opportunity for educational and training experiences that can help them transition into civilian life.

However, when the property lines were drawn between these two fine institutions, it wasn't in a straight line. Today, that has created a challenge as the VA explores the option of building a security fence along its boundary. Building that fence along the existing property lines will be more expensive. My bill, H.R. 3262, solves this problem by swapping two small parcels of land that both the VA and DACC have agreed to, creating a straight fence line.

Swapping these parcels is beneficial for the local community as well. In exchange for the land it gives up, DACC will receive a parcel of land with a historic, century-old Carnegie Library. This building has become so deteriorated and expensive to maintain that the VA has stopped using it. Now the building sits vacant while the VA still pays for basic maintenance and utilities. In its testimony to the House Veterans' Affairs Committee's Health Subcommittee, the VA stated that disposing of this building would save an estimated \$98,000 over the next 10 years.

Danville and DACC see great potential for the building. Through the generosity of a private donor, DACC plans

to transform the old library into a cultural center, providing the local treasure. Swapping these parcels of land is a win for the VA, saving money on the construction of the fence and maintenance of an unused building, and a win for Danville, providing the community with a historically significant location to host a valuable cultural attraction.

H.R. 3262 is a simple, win-win bill for all parties involved.

Mr. Speaker, I thank Chairman MILLER and Ranking Member BROWN for their support in moving this bill, along with the Veterans' Affairs Committee staff for their work in getting the bill to the floor.

I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting H.R. 3262.

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 3262.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. ABRAHAM. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time.

Once again, I encourage all Members to support H.R. 3262.

I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. ABRAHAM) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 3262.

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.

#### 9/11 MEMORIAL ACT

Mr. MACARTHUR. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 3036) to designate the National September 11 Memorial located at the World Trade Center site in New York City, New York, as a national memorial, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 3036

*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 "9/11 Memorial Act".*

#### SEC. 2. DEFINITIONS.

*For purposes of this Act:*

(1) **ELIGIBLE ENTITY.**—*The term "eligible entity" means a nonprofit organization as defined in section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 (26 U.S.C. 501(c)(3)) in existence on the date of enactment of this Act.*

(2) **MAP.**—*The term "map" means the map titled "National September 11 Memorial Proposed Boundary", numbered 903/128928, and dated June 2015.*

(3) **NATIONAL SEPTEMBER 11 MEMORIAL.**—*The term "National September 11 Memorial" means the area approximately bounded by Fulton, Greenwich, Liberty and West Streets as generally depicted on the map.*

(4) **SECRETARY.**—*The term "Secretary" means the Secretary of the Interior.*

#### SEC. 3. DESIGNATION OF MEMORIAL.

(a) **DESIGNATION.**—*The National September 11 Memorial is hereby designated as a national memorial.*

(b) **MAP.**—*The map shall be available for public inspection and kept on file at the appropriate office of the Secretary.*

(c) **EFFECT OF DESIGNATION.**—*The national memorial designated under this section shall not be a unit of the National Park System and the designation of the national memorial shall not be construed to require or authorize Federal funds to be expended for any purpose related to the national memorial except as provided under section 4.*

#### SEC. 4. COMPETITIVE GRANTS FOR CERTAIN MEMORIALS.

(a) **COMPETITIVE GRANTS.**—*Subject to the availability of appropriations, the Secretary may award a single grant per year through a competitive process to an eligible entity for the operation and maintenance of any memorial located within the United States established to commemorate the events of and honor—*

(1) *the victims of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and United Airlines Flight 93 on September 11, 2001; and*

(2) *the victims of the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center on February 26, 1993.*

(b) **AVAILABILITY.**—*Funds made available under this section shall remain available until expended.*

(c) **CRITERIA.**—*In awarding grants under this section, the Secretary shall give greatest weight in the selection of eligible entities using the following criteria:*

(1) *Experience in managing a public memorial that will benefit the largest number of visitors each calendar year.*

(2) *Experience in managing a memorial of significant size (4 acres or more).*

(3) *Successful coordination and cooperation with Federal, State, and local governments in operating and managing the memorial.*

(4) *Ability and commitment to use grant funds to enhance security at the memorial.*

(5) *Ability to use grant funds to increase the numbers of economically disadvantaged visitors to the memorial and surrounding areas.*

(d) **SUMMARIES.**—*Not later than 30 days after the end of each fiscal year in which an eligible entity obligates or expends any part of a grant under this section, the eligible entity shall prepare and submit to the Secretary and Congress a summary that—*

(1) *specifies the amount of grant funds obligated or expended in the preceding fiscal year;*

(2) *specifies the purpose for which the funds were obligated or expended; and*

(3) *includes any other information the Secretary may require to more effectively administer the grant program.*

(e) **SUNSET.**—*The authority to award grants under this section shall expire on the date that is 7 years after the date of the enactment of this Act.*

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. PITTENGER). Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. MACARTHUR) and the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. GRIJALVA) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New Jersey.

#### GENERAL LEAVE

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

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

There was no objection.

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

Mr. Speaker, I was working in New York City in the fall of 2001 when terrorists tore a hole in our skyline and nearly 3,000 Americans lost their lives. Like many others, I lost people that I knew. For many, they lost their dearest loved ones—their soulmate, mother, father, brother, sister, children, child, friend.

All of us were moved by stories of heroism that followed that event—hundreds of firefighters and police and other first responders who gave their own lives to save others.

In the months that followed, I remember coming around that site every morning as I went to work because I couldn't take the tunnel anymore. It was closed. I would take the ferry from New York to New Jersey. We would come around the tip of Manhattan. Every morning as we passed the World Trade Center site, a hush would fall on that ferry boat, and people would ponder what happened there. That went on as autumn turned into winter and winter turned into spring, month after month, as we watched the seemingly endless restoration of that tragic site.

Mr. Speaker, on September 11, 2011—10 years later—the National September 11 Memorial opened. It was erected to remember those who fell, to recognize the endurance of the survivors, to honor the bravery of those who risked their lives, and often lost their lives, to save others, and, above all, to remember the power of our free Nation to overcome evil with good. It stands as a reminder to every generation that we must never forget and we must never falter.

Mr. Speaker, private citizens with deep concern erected that memorial. I applaud them for their good work. But now it is our part to preserve and protect this hallowed ground and to answer this national tragedy with national support. The National 9/11 Memorial at the World Trade Center Act recognizes this site as a national memorial. It provides for funding for security and operations.

I want to thank the many who have endorsed this bill. Eighty-two Members of this Chamber have cosponsored it. Police organizations have gotten behind it, including the National Association of Police Organizations and the Fraternal Order of Police, veterans organizations, including the Iraq and Afghanistan Vets of America, Governor Chris Christie of New Jersey, Governor Andrew Cuomo of New York, and, most importantly, nearly a dozen family and friend support groups of those that were most deeply impacted by 9/11.

Private donors and concerned citizens have done their part at this site, and they continue to. But now it is our solemn duty, I believe, to honor the fallen and to protect the living.

I urge my colleagues to pass the National 9/11 Memorial at the World Trade Center Act.

I reserve the balance of my time.

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

This bill, as we know, designates the 9/11 Memorial at the World Trade Center as the National September 11 Memorial and authorizes a grant program of up to \$25 million per year for the next 7 years to support the operation and the maintenance of the memorial.

The bill was amended at markup to make the grant program available to other September 11 memorials located in the United States. Money for the grant program will be subject to appropriation and come out of the overall budget of the Department of Interior.

I want to thank and congratulate my colleague from New York, Representative NADLER, as the lead Democratic cosponsor. He has diligently guided this bill through the legislative process. It is because of his hard work and advocacy that it has come this far.

September 11 both rattled and united this country like few other events in our history. We still live with the repercussions, and the memorial is a fitting tribute and a solemn reminder.

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

Mr. MACARTHUR. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from California (Mr. CALVERT).

Mr. CALVERT. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of the National 9/11 Memorial at the World Trade Center Act.

The events of September 11 continue to stir emotions for Americans when we think about that day's tragic losses, remarkable acts of bravery, and the stark reminders that life is precious and evil is real.

As a Nation, we have pledged to "Never Forget" what happened on September 11, and today, by passing this legislation, we can put our actions behind that sentiment.

2016 marks the 75th anniversary of Pearl Harbor and the 15th anniversary of 9/11. Just as the USS Arizona provides a place for future generations to understand where—and more importantly how and why—we were attacked in 1941, the National September 11 Memorial gives Americans a place to understand the tragedy of that day and ongoing sacrifices of the United States Armed Forces. Indeed, December 7 and September 11 are now two dates that will live in infamy.

□ 1700

I thank my colleague, TOM MACARTHUR, for introducing this legislation, and I thank everyone from the National September 11th Memorial and Museum for all of their hard work.

I have been to the Memorial and have felt the incredibly emotional effect it has had on each visitor. Unfortunately, many of our enemies see this symbol of our Nation's strength and resolve as a target, and, as such, the Memorial requires a high level of security in order to keep its over 6 million annual visitors safe. This legislation ensures the Memorial will receive the support it needs to provide a safe experience for every visitor who passes through,

whether he be His Holiness, Pope Francis, or whether he be the young schoolchild who was not yet born on September 11, 2001.

I would like to take a moment to recognize a very special person, Rob O'Neill, a former member of SEAL Team 6, who is best known for his actions in the raid that killed Osama bin Laden. The 9/11 Memorial has a special place in his heart, and he has been a strong advocate for this bill. He has told me and others that the site is important to him and to his fellow special operators. It helps signify the cause for which they were fighting. In fact, the shirt he wore on the mission is on display at the museum, along with other artifacts from 9/11 and from the many years since, chronicling how Americans have pulled together to support each other, to secure our Nation, and to rededicate ourselves to liberty and justice. So I thank Mr. O'Neill for his service and for his sacrifice.

Once again, I convey my support for this bill, and I encourage all of my colleagues to pass the 9/11 Memorial Act.

I thank Tricia Evans and Ian Foley, who are on my staff, for their hard work on this bill.

Mr. GRIJALVA. Mr. Speaker, I would be remiss if I did not extend to Representative MACARTHUR my appreciation for his leadership and for bringing the bill to this point as well.

I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from New York (Mr. NADLER), whom I thank for his leadership and hard work in getting this bill to this point.

Mr. NADLER. I thank the gentleman for yielding.

Mr. Speaker, more than 14 years ago, two jet planes were deliberately crashed into the World Trade Center—killing thousands of innocent people. A third plane slammed into the Pentagon, and a fourth plane, likely destined for this very Capitol complex in which we now stand, was brought down by a group of courageous passengers in a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania.

As I do today, I represented Ground Zero—the World Trade Center area—on September 11, 2001. In the hours immediately after the attack, I left Washington and took the last train back to my home in New York. I will never forget the moment I first saw the ravaged skyline of Lower Manhattan from the train windows. Normally, on the train, while going between Philadelphia and New York, I would look to see the first glimpse I could catch of the Twin Towers. Now what you could see were not the Twin Towers but long, tall, billowing clouds of smoke that were going straight up and then were stretching down the Jersey Shore. The Twin Towers had been replaced by the brutal glow of raging fires and of black, billowing smoke.

The train that left at 10 o'clock arrived at 6 p.m. We had been held up in Baltimore while they walked the tracks, looking for bombs. Coming out of Penn Station at 6 o'clock was like a

scene from the movie "On the Beach" for those who remember that movie. Nothing was moving. The city at 33rd Street and Eighth Avenue seemed completely empty—no people, no cars, no buses. There was nothing moving as if it were completely depopulated. To get home, I had to call a friend to come pick me up.

When I went down to the World Trade Center the next morning, the scene was absolutely horrible. There was fire, smoke, debris, twisted metal, human remains—total devastation. Yet, even then, there were signs of hope. Firefighters, police, Emergency Medical Technicians, ironworkers, and construction workers of all types rushed to Ground Zero from around the country to offer their help. Messages of support and comfort flooded in from all 50 States. The American people were united and determined to help New York get back on its feet. The attack may have occurred in my district, but it was an attack on our Nation as a whole, and we all recognized that.

In the years since the attacks, America has acted as a Nation to help rebuild New York and to support the responders, survivors, and families of the victims. Last year, Congress reauthorized the James Zadroga 9/11 Health and Compensation Act so as to provide health care and support the 33,000 responders and survivors who now live in all 50 States and in 429 congressional districts. By passing a permanent health program and reauthorizing the Victim Compensation Fund, Congress provided peace of mind for tens of thousands of brave Americans.

In addition to making our responders and survivors whole, Congress invested billions of dollars to help rebuild Lower Manhattan. One World Trade Center now fills the hole that was left in our skyline when the towers fell, and businesses that were shuttered after the attack are reopened and are thriving. In what was once the shadow of the towers, there now stands a comprehensive museum that is dedicated to sharing the stories of September 11th and the bravery of those who risked everything to protect their fellow Americans on that day and on the days following.

In place of the smoking hole that Congressman MACARTHUR and I saw day after day in Lower Manhattan, there now exists a somber and inspiring memorial. It is a site of remembrance and hope—a place for every American to come and reflect as to what happened on that September morning and to renew our promise to never forget the events of that day. It is a national memorial for a national tragedy.

That is why I am pleased to cosponsor the legislation, introduced by my colleague from New Jersey, to provide Federal recognition and support for the memorial. This legislation will help ensure the memorial continues to provide a sacred and inspiring spot for generations to come.

I appreciate the bipartisan support from the members of the Natural Resources Committee and from the House leadership in bringing this bill to the floor today. I look forward to working with my colleagues on the House Appropriations Committee every year to ensure that the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum receives appropriate levels of funding. I will also work with my colleagues to maintain open communications with the Department of the Interior to ensure the money is spent wisely and achieves our shared goal of ensuring the memorial remains a spot of reflection and peace and is accessible to millions of visitors every day.

I urge my colleagues to support this bill and provide the recognition and support this memorial deserves.

Mr. MACARTHUR. Mr. Speaker, I acknowledge Representative NADLER, and I thank him for his support in this process.

I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from New York (Mr. DONOVAN).

Mr. DONOVAN. Mr. Speaker, 15 years ago this September 11th, our country suffered the most deadly and devastating attack since its birth. Terrorists chose the Twin Towers because they stood proud and they stood tall. They stood as symbols of the raw power of people free to pursue their dreams, to live their values, and to practice their faiths.

When the towers fell, they took Americans from every corner of our Nation; and when the President stood atop a fire engine and spoke through a bullhorn to console a broken Nation, he spoke to every man, woman, and child in our United States who was suffering and was saddened by an unimaginable act of hate. Heroes from all over the country came to Lower Manhattan to sift through the rubble and pick up the pieces. It was a site of national tragedy, a site of national heroism, and it must also be the site of a national memorial. It is only fitting that the 9/11 Memorial receives proper funding just like every other national memorial. It is sacred ground, and it must be maintained accordingly. Also, annual security costs run into the millions of dollars as the site remains a top terrorist target.

Mr. Speaker, terrorists may have attacked our country at three locations that day, but they also attacked the spirit inside all of us. I encourage every Member of this body to vote for this legislation and to visit the 9/11 Memorial and Museum to see what I and Representative NADLER see every day.

I thank Representative MACARTHUR for introducing this legislation, and I again thank—always—the heroes of that fateful day.

Mr. GRIJALVA. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PASCRELL).

Mr. PASCRELL. I thank the ranking member.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 3036, the National 9/11 Memorial

at the World Trade Center Act, which was introduced by my friends Congressmen TOM MACARTHUR and JERRY NADLER—two sentinels of Americans' liberty and freedom.

President Bush traveled to the site with Democrats and Republicans. I have never seen in my experience here no other effort close to it of how we were united. We accomplished so much when we were united, and we learned to respect each other even more. On that day, our lives, our country, and the world changed forever. In the aftermath, Americans came together for a common purpose—to rescue, to rebuild, and to remember those we had lost—friends and neighbors, many of them. They were from all faiths, all persuasions.

This memorial and the museum at the World Trade Center were constructed so that we would never forget those brothers and sisters, children and parents, cousins and colleagues. We called them that at the time; yet the further we get from 9/11 we very seldom refer to "sisters" and "brothers" except for our relatives and our brave first responders who perished during one of the darkest moments in our Nation's history.

Ensuring this Memorial site will be here for years to come will give millions of people around the world the opportunity to pay tribute to those who were lost and to find inspiration in how our Nation has recovered. As a proud supporter of our National Park Service, I know it will make sure the site remains a sacred place of healing and of hope as a national memorial.

As a result, Mr. Speaker, I urge the swift passage of H.R. 3036 in order to solidify the memorial's standing, to honor the memories of those we lost, and to ensure future generations can learn about that tragic day.

Mr. MACARTHUR. Mr. Speaker, may I inquire as to how much time I have remaining?

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman from New Jersey has 11½ minutes remaining.

Mr. MACARTHUR. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentlewoman from New York (Ms. STEFANIK).

Ms. STEFANIK. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 3036, the 9/11 Memorial Act.

I thank my colleague, Mr. MACARTHUR, for his leadership on this incredibly important issue.

Fifteen years ago on September 11th, every American will remember where he was when the horrifying news broke of these terrorist attacks. Mr. Speaker, as the youngest Member currently serving in Congress, I was in my high school English class when the horrible news was shared with my classmates from our teacher. I remember my schoolmates, crying, who couldn't get ahold of their older siblings, of their aunts and uncles, of their cousins who worked in the World Trade Center.

On that horrifying day when terrorists attacked our Nation, we also saw

true acts of heroism. As the workers of the World Trade Center were running out to escape, our first responders were running up the stairs to save their fellow Americans. Strangers helped fellow strangers escape the buildings. New Yorkers helped others walk miles home to get to their families.

□ 1715

New Yorkers will never forget the horrifying attacks. This Nation will never forget these horrifying attacks. The 9/11 memorial is truly hallowed ground.

I urge all of my colleagues to vote "yes" on this legislation.

Mr. GRIJALVA. Mr. Speaker, I have no further speakers. I urge passage of this legislation.

This legislation, this 9/11 National Memorial, no matter what corner of this great Nation of ours we are from, we have a shared legacy here. That shared legacy is about sacrifice, heroism, and indeed loss as well.

We have a shared future from this memorial about determination, resilience, and the very nature of this Nation to be hopeful and to look forward. To one another, we have a shared responsibility. This memorial will remind us of that and keep that thought very much alive in all of us.

Again, let me congratulate and thank the sponsors of the legislation, Mr. NADLER and Mr. MACARTHUR, for their fine work and for bringing this before us today.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. MACARTHUR. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the remarks of my colleagues. Events like 9/11—and the world that it has brought us into—demand that we come together, and I am glad that we have done that on this bill. We have come together to honor the fallen and to protect the living.

I urge my colleagues to join in making this the voice of this Chamber as we vote.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Mrs. MALONEY of New York. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 3036, The National 9/11 Memorial at the World Trade Center Act, and thank my colleagues Reps. MACARTHUR and NADLER for their leadership to bring this bill to the House floor.

In the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks, Congress has come together to rebuild New York and the Pentagon and support the responders, survivors, and families of the victims. Last year, we reauthorized the James Zadroga 9/11 Health and Compensation Act, making the health care program essential permanent and extending the Victims Compensation Fund for an additional five years, with full funding.

As a New Yorker, the memory of 9/11 continues to evoke pain and sorrow—and the Memorial at Ground Zero stirs these emotions like no other place. The dramatic reflecting pools are a sanctuary of calm within the bustle of lower Manhattan and a moving tribute to the thousands of innocent Americans lost in the attacks.

This bill affirms our commitment to remember those lost on 9/11 by designating the site

a national memorial and enabling the memorial to access the federal support it needs for security and maintenance. The 9/11 Memorial is now among New York's most popular sites, with over 23 million visitors since it opened in 2011. This designation will ensure that the site continues to welcome everyone who comes to remember those we have lost.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Speaker, as a senior member of the House Committee on Homeland Security and the Ranking Member of the Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, Homeland Security, and Investigations, I rise in support of H.R. 3036, the "National 9/11 Memorial at the World Trade Center Act."

This bill will designate the National September 11 Memorial located at the World Trade Center site in New York City, New York, as a national memorial.

H.R. 3036 authorizes the Secretary of Interior to award a grant in an amount not to exceed \$25 million each fiscal year to the National September 11 Memorial and Museum at the World Trade Center Foundation for the operation and maintenance of the memorial.

Finally, the bill requires the National September 11 Memorial and Museum to report annually to the Interior Secretary and Congress on (1) the amount of grant funds expended; (2) the purpose for which the funds were used; and (3) any other information the Secretary may require.

As a member of the House Committee on Homeland Security since its creation, and Ranking Member of the Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism and Homeland Security, I strongly support this resolution.

I will never forget September 11, 2001, a day on which I stood on the East Front steps of the Capitol on September 11, along with 150 Members of the House of Representatives, singing "God Bless America."

September 11, 2001 remains a tragedy that defines our Nation's history since that fateful day for many reasons.

This year marks the 15th anniversary of the September 11 attacks that killed 2,977 men, women, and children.

At the World Trade Center site in Lower Manhattan, 2,753 people were killed when hijacked American Airlines Flight 11 and United Airlines Flight 175 were intentionally crashed in the North and South towers.

Of those who perished during the initial attacks and the subsequent collapses of the towers, 343 were New York City firefighters, another 23 were New York City police officers and 37 others were officers at the Port Authority.

The victims ranged in age from two to 85 years.

At the Pentagon in Washington, 184 people were killed when hijacked American Airlines Flight 77 crashed into the building.

Near Shanksville, Pennsylvania, 40 passengers and crew members aboard United Airlines Flight 93 died when the plane crashed into a field.

It is believed that the hijackers crashed the plane in that location, rather than their unknown target, after the passengers and crew attempted to retake control of the flight.

The act of those passengers to stop the hijackers likely saved the lives of thousands of their fellow Americans that day.

The heroic work done by the first responders who rushed into the burning Twin Towers and the Pentagon saved lives.

We will forever remember the first responders who lost their lives in the line of duty on September 11.

This Nation shall forever be grateful for the selfless sacrifice shown that day.

That is why the National September 11 Memorial and Museum is so important.

The National September 11 Memorial at the World Trade Center remembers and honors the thousands of innocent lives lost during the September 11th attacks, and the attacks of February 26, 1993.

This Memorial is a testament to the triumph of human dignity over human depravity and affirms an unwavering commitment to the fundamental value of human life.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. MACARTHUR) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 3036, 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. MACARTHUR. 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.

#### JOHN H. CHAFEE COASTAL BARRIER RESOURCES BOUNDARIES SYSTEM MAP REVISIONS

Mr. MACARTHUR. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 890) to correct the boundaries of the John H. Chafee Coastal Barrier Resources System Unit P16, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 890

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

#### SECTION 1. REPLACEMENT OF JOHN H. CHAFEE COASTAL BARRIER RESOURCES SYSTEM MAP.

(a) *IN GENERAL.*—The maps subtitled "Cape Romano Unit P15, Tigertail Unit FL-63P" and "Keewaydin Island Unit P16" included in the set of maps entitled "Coastal Barrier Resources System" referred to in section 4(a) of the Coastal Barrier Resources Act (16 U.S.C. 3503(a)) and relating to certain John H. Chafee Coastal Barrier Resources System units in Florida are hereby replaced by other maps relating to the units subtitled "Cape Romano Unit P15/P15P", "Keewaydin Island Unit P16/P16P, Tigertail Unit FL-63P", and "Keewaydin Island Unit P16/P16P", respectively, and dated April 10, 2015.

(b) *AVAILABILITY.*—The Secretary of the Interior shall keep the replacement maps referred to in subsection (a) on file and available for inspection in accordance with section 4(b) of the Coastal Barrier Resources Act (16 U.S.C. 3503(b)).

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. MACARTHUR) and the gentleman from New Mexico (Mr. GRIJALVA) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New Jersey.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. MACARTHUR. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous materials on the bill under consideration.

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

There was no objection.

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

This bipartisan bill corrects Coastal Barrier Resources System boundary errors in Collier County, Florida. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which administers the coastal barriers system program, has acknowledged the need to correct these errors and has since remapped the area.

The agency sent the new maps to the Congress, which has the sole authority to change the boundaries and codify the correct maps in this case. This is what the bill, as amended, achieves. I urge its adoption.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. GRIJALVA. I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, the Coastal Barrier Resources Act, or CBRA, requires the identification of hazardous areas on the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts and makes Federal subsidies off limits to people who choose to develop these lands.

Particularly in this time of rising sea levels and increased storm surge brought on by global warming, CBRA is critical to protecting American taxpayers and sensitive coastal ecosystems.

H.R. 890 would adjust the boundaries of several Coastal Barrier Resources System units in Florida. These changes have been carefully mapped by the Fish and Wildlife Service and reflect improvements in technology that have allowed us to show with great accuracy which parcels of land do and do not constitute coastal barrier resources under the law.

As a result, numerous properties that were originally included by mistake will be removed, and other properties that have been identified as at risk will be included. These changes to the CBRS are protective of private property rights, the environment, and the taxpayers.

I urge support of this bipartisan legislation.

Mr. Speaker, having no other Members to address this legislation on my side, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. MACARTHUR. Mr. Speaker, I yield 5 minutes to the gentleman from Florida (Mr. CLAWSON).

Mr. CLAWSON of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate this opportunity to present H.R. 890, which adopts new Coastal Barrier Resources System maps for the southern part of my district, Florida 19, in southwest Collier County, Florida.

A special thanks to my fellow Members—DON BEYER, MARIO DIAZ-BALART, and Chairman ROB BISHOP—for their support and helping me push this through. I urge support of the passage.

On a personal note, it has been my lifelong concern for the environment and involvement in water quality issues in my hometown of Bonita Springs, Florida, that led me to Congress on an unknowing path really. So introducing this bill, to me, today is really special and personal.

A special note of thanks to those who helped—so many folks—particularly Bob and Jack for their perseverance. Perseverance paid off. Also, I thank Cherie for her abiding inspiration and to Yodi.

The CBRS was created by Congress with the 1982 Coastal Barrier Resources Act. This initiative preserves the ecological integrity of coastal areas while still protecting private property rights. This initiative preserves the ecological integrity of coastal areas that serve as important barriers against wind and tidal forces caused by coastal storms, and reduces further development in these sensitive areas. In other words, it creates a perpetual protected area for our wonderful Gulf wildlife.

These new maps have passed public review, OMB review, and have been released by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

This is the southern part of my district. The new maps correct errors from 40 years ago, which seriously hurt some 1,600 of our constituents and hurt their access to flood insurance, home mortgages, and refinancing.

These new maps also add 17,000 acres in perpetuity to CBRS, 17,000 acres principally in this zone right here, between Naples and Marco Island and also a little bit south. Keewaydin Island—that you see right here, just south of Naples—and Cape Romano are part of the pristine, picturesque Ten Thousand Islands chain that begins 20 miles of Naples. These newly preserved areas highlighted on these charts cover five geographical units, part of now over 40,000 continuous acres that will be permanently protected.

This is government doing something right for all stakeholders and for all the generations that will follow us.

H.R. 890, protecting 15 miles of natural coastal barriers, is sound economics. It is a piece of what needs to be done toward growing southwest Florida's multibillion dollar private and commercial real estate values and south Florida's tourism industry, which brings in over 5 million visitors to my district. It also employs one out of every five people in the local workforce.

I am proud to report that this bill will create the largest grouping of CBRS units nationwide, protecting our unique Florida Everglades and ecosystem, aquatic plants and animals, other wildlife, and also protecting private properties from storms and floods.

Keewaydin Island right here, just south of Naples, is one of the largest, if

not the largest, sea turtle nesting areas in Florida and in the United States. Depending on the time of year, these are the nests that we see throughout our district on the beach. Also in this area, we see lots of the beautiful spoonbill that you can't find in too many different places.

The Florida Everglades are a natural treasure. It is home to wildlife and plants that are unique in our Nation: fish, tortoises, reptiles, and insects. It is our duty to protect these species. This bill will have a permanent, positive impact on preserving this fragile ecological area and quality of life.

Three years ago, I waded into the Gulf of Mexico with my folks. They urged me to get involved in local politics, hoping that I could have just a small impact and make a small, positive difference in the health of the waters of southwest Florida. My mom is gone now, but she always hoped that a moment like this would come.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The time of the gentleman has expired.

Mr. MACARTHUR. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from Florida.

Mr. CLAWSON of Florida. Mr. Speaker, this is a moment that we can accomplish something positive for our constituents, positive for our economy, and positive for our waters of south Florida. I am very appreciative to have a small role, and I acknowledge that we have so much more to do to conserve the beauty of southwest Florida for generations to come.

Mr. MACARTHUR. Mr. Speaker, I have no other speakers.

I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. MACARTHUR) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 890, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

The title of the bill was amended so as to read: "A bill to revise the boundaries of certain John H. Chafee Coastal Barrier Resources System units in Florida."

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

#### EXPEDITED REPORTING OF CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT TO STATE CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES

Mr. MACARTHUR. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 3894) to amend title 10, United States Code, to require the prompt notification of State Child Protective Services by military and civilian personnel of the Department of Defense required by law to report suspected instances of child abuse and neglect.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 3894

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

#### SECTION 1. EXPEDITED REPORTING OF CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT TO STATE CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES.

(a) REPORTING BY MILITARY AND CIVILIAN PERSONNEL OF THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE.—Section 1787 of title 10, United States Code, is amended—

(1) by redesignating subsections (a) and (b) as subsections (c) and (d), respectively; and

(2) by inserting before subsection (c), as so redesignated, the following new subsections:

“(a) REPORTING BY MILITARY AND CIVILIAN PERSONNEL.—A member of the armed forces, civilian employee of the Department of Defense, or contractor employee working on a military installation who is mandated by Federal regulation or State law to report known or suspected instances of child abuse and neglect shall provide the report directly to State Child Protective Services or another appropriate State agency in addition to the member's or employee's chain of command or any designated Department point of contact.

“(b) TRAINING FOR MANDATED REPORTERS.—The Secretary of Defense shall ensure that individuals referred to in subsection (a) who are mandated by State law to report known or suspected instances of child abuse and neglect receive appropriate training, in accordance with State guidelines, intended to improve their—

“(1) ability to recognize evidence of child abuse and neglect; and

“(2) understanding of the mandatory reporting requirements imposed by law.”.

(b) CONFORMING AND CLERICAL AMENDMENTS.—Section 1787 of title 10, United States Code, is further amended—

(1) in subsection (c), as redesignated by subsection (a)(1), by striking “IN GENERAL.—” and inserting “REPORTING BY STATES.—”; and

(2) in subsection (d), as redesignated by subsection (a)(1)—

(A) by striking “(d) DEFINITION.—In this section, the term” and inserting the following:

“(d) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

“(1) The term”;

(B) by adding at the end the following new paragraph:

“(2) The term ‘State’ includes the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, the Virgin Islands, American Samoa, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palau.”.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentlewoman from New York (Ms. STEFANIK) and the gentlewoman from Hawaii (Ms. GABBARD) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from New York.

#### GENERAL LEAVE

Ms. STEFANIK. 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 material on the bill under consideration.

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

There was no objection.

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

I rise today in support of H.R. 3894, Talia's law, which would require military and Department of Defense civilian personnel working on a military installation to report instances of child abuse and neglect to State Child Protective Services in addition to their designated Department of Defense point of contact.

□ 1730

Our Nation is extremely proud of our military servicemembers and the sacrifices they endure to protect our national security. Members of our military's Active Duty Reserve component and the National Guard knit the blanket of freedom to keep us safe from those who wish to do us harm.

Standing beside our Nation's brave servicemembers are the spouses and children who bear constant challenges and maintain resiliency throughout the continuous moves and the strain deployments incur on families.

There are approximately 2 million children with one or both parents who serve in the U.S. military, and the support role these children fulfill is beyond significant and should be commended. Our Nation's military dependents face greater academic challenges and emotional stress due to relocation and attending multiple schools.

It is difficult enough growing up and enduring adolescence without having to move every couple of years, face new surroundings, make new friends, and all the while having a mother or father serving our Nation in harm's way.

Military children must rely on their loved ones, family, friends, and their parents to get through the struggles that only a military household can understand.

However, it is when those individuals, those adults who these children trust the most, hurt them in any way. It is inexcusable. Our children are truly our Nation's future, and anyone who abuses or neglects a child is appalling and must be held accountable.

That is why I stand here today in support of H.R. 3894, an imperative piece of legislation which would require a childcare provider located on a DOD installation to report any signs of child abuse or neglect directly to Child Protective Services and the provider's chain of command.

Not only does this bill enforce the reporting procedure, but it also requires those individuals who work with children on an installation receive the necessary training to recognize child abuse as well as fully understand the reporting requirements.

I applaud my Committee on Armed Services colleague and friend, Ms. GABBARD, for her leadership on this issue and encourage the rest of my House colleagues to support this important bill.

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

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

In 2005, 5-year-old Talia Williams was beaten to death by her own father, who

was stationed at Schofield Barracks in Hawaii at the time. Talia suffered through months and months of abuse from her father and her stepmother, which ultimately led to her death.

Why didn't someone do something? Why was this allowed to occur? Why didn't someone take action to stop this horrific abuse that was visible to so many who knew Talia? There were multiple reports that were made to military officials, but when it came right down to it, nothing was done to take Talia out of harm's way.

I am rising today to ask my colleagues to support my bill, H.R. 3894, Talia's Law, because more than 10 years after Talia's tragic death, the same gaps in the military's reporting requirements that failed to protect Talia remain unchanged. In fact, over the last decade, there have been 29,000 cases of child abuse and neglect in military homes.

Now, outside of the military, in the civilian world, doctors, psychologists, social workers, teachers, or other professionals who work closely with children are required to report any suspected cases of child abuse and neglect directly to that State's Child Protective Services.

But the military's reporting requirements do not require that direct reporting to State authorities. So reports of Talia's suspected abuse never reached the Hawaii Child Protective Services. Instead, they stayed within the Army's chain of command.

Now, I know there were a lot of people around Talia who had good intentions and who were gravely concerned about the abuse that they were seeing, but the fact remains that Talia was never removed from this abusive environment.

To close this gap and fix this problem, Talia's Law requires the same protections that exist for any other child, whether they are in a military household or not. This bill requires immediate and direct reporting to State Child Protective Services in cases of suspected abuse and neglect.

I recently spoke to Talia's mother, Tarshia, who knows that this bill will not bring Talia back, it cannot right the wrongs that failed to protect Talia.

But what she does know and what she does hope is that the passage of this bill will take an important step forward in helping to better protect the thousands of other children in military families who may be facing this same situation and get them the care and services that they deserve.

Mr. Speaker, I strongly urge my colleagues to honor Talia and all of our children in military families and support H.R. 3894.

I would also like to thank my colleague, the gentlewoman from New York (Ms. STEFANIK) for her very thoughtful remarks on this and for championing Talia's Law to be able to help these children who are facing numerous challenges and who deserve better than to have this kind of abuse.

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

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

Ms. GABBARD. Mr. Speaker, I yield 5 minutes to the gentleman from Hawaii (Mr. TAKAI), my friend and colleague, the distinguished gentleman representing Hawaii's First Congressional District.

Mr. TAKAI. Mr. Speaker, today I rise in favor of a bill my friend and colleague TULSI GABBARD and I have introduced.

H.R. 3894, Talia's Law, gets its name from a 5-year-old girl named Talia Williams who was beaten to death at the hands of her father, an Army soldier stationed at Schofield Barracks in Hawaii.

We in Hawaii and all across the country are so thankful for the sacrifices our servicemen and servicewomen make to protect our freedoms, but we also have a duty to protect the most vulnerable among us, our children. In Hawaii, we call them our keiki.

As a father myself, I am proud to stand up for Talia's Law, which would require prompt reporting of possible abuses not only to a military supervisor, but also prompt reporting of possible abuse and neglect to the State's Child Protective Services. It would strengthen reporting requirements for these allegations and make sure that they are properly investigated.

I hope that, as we deliberate this bill, we also draw attention to the fact that Congress can come together and should come together to provide better access to resources for those in uniform suffering from wounds that may not be visible to the eyes.

I ask for the consideration of this bill and its urgent passage. These children, our keiki, and all the victims of abuse and neglect cannot wait.

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

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

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 3984, legislation requiring military and civilian personnel of the Department of Defense required by law to report suspected instances of child abuse and neglect to do so promptly and directly to State child protective service agencies.

I support this legislation sponsored by Congresswoman TULSI GABBARD of Hawaii, a good friend and veterans of the Armed Services, because no child should have to bear the pain and suffering of abuse or neglect alone.

Mr. Speaker, the reason this important legislation is needed is illustrated by the tragic and heart breaking case of Talia Williams, an innocent and loving 5-year old girl who was beaten to death by her father, an active-duty infantryman stationed in Hawaii.

After investigation and through subsequent legal proceedings, it came to light that before being murdered, precious Talia had suffered through months of torture and abuse by both her father and stepmother.

Even worse, Mr. Speaker, it was revealed that multiple federal employees, including military police and workers at her on-base child

care facility, failed to report suspected signs of Talia's abuse.

But the shocking case of Talia Williams is not isolated; it is estimated that more than 29,000 children have been abused in military homes over the past decade.

The system failed Talia Williams but it is not too late to save other children at risk by passing H.R. 3894.

Under current law, Family Advocacy Programs operated by the Armed Forces are to identify individuals who are mandated to report known or suspected cases of child abuse to designated "points of contact," who then are to conduct an assessment investigation into the reported abuse and to communicate with State child protective services agencies.

H.R. 3894 amends current law and requires DoD professionals who come into contact with children such as physicians, psychologists, social workers, and teachers to report suspected instances of abuse or neglect directly to the State child protective services agencies in addition to Defense Department points of contact or chain of command.

H.R. 3894 also requires these "mandated reporters" to receive training in accordance with state guidelines in order to improve their ability to recognize evidence of child abuse and neglect and understand mandatory reporting requirements imposed by law.

Mr. Speaker, it is too late to save Talia Williams but out of the horrific tragedy that claimed her life, it is possible to identify and save other children from a similar fate.

H.R. 3894 will help ensure that instances of child abuse and neglect are recognized and reported immediately by empowering appropriate military and civilian personnel in the Department of Defense with the skills and training need to recognize evidence of child abuse and neglect and to place on them an affirmative duty to report instances of suspected abuse or neglect promptly and directly to child protective agencies.

I urge all Members to join me in voting to pass H.R. 3894.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentlewoman from New York (Ms. STEFANIK) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 3894.

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.

#### RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until approximately 6:30 p.m. today.

Accordingly (at 5 o'clock and 38 minutes p.m.), the House stood in recess.

□ 1830

#### AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. COSTELLO of Pennsylvania) at 6 o'clock and 30 minutes p.m.

#### 9/11 MEMORIAL ACT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, proceedings

will resume on the motion to suspend the rules previously postponed.

The unfinished business is the vote on the motion to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 3036), as amended, on which the yeas and nays were ordered.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. MACARTHUR) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, as amended.

The vote was taken by electronic device, and there were—yeas 387, nays 12, not voting 34, as follows:

[Roll No. 64]

YEAS—387

Abraham	Davis, Danny	Huffman
Adams	Davis, Rodney	Hultgren
Aderholt	DeFazio	Hunter
Aguilar	DeGette	Hurd (TX)
Allen	Delaney	Hurt (VA)
Amodei	DeLauro	Israel
Ashford	DelBene	Issa
Babin	Denham	Jackson Lee
Barletta	Dent	Jeffries
Barr	DeSantis	Jenkins (KS)
Barton	DeSaulnier	Jenkins (WV)
Bass	DesJarlais	Johnson (GA)
Beatty	Deutch	Johnson (OH)
Becerra	Diaz-Balart	Johnson, E. B.
Becerra	Dingell	Johnson, Sam
Berra	Doggett	Jolly
Bilirakis	Dold	Jones
Bishop (GA)	Donovan	Jordan
Bishop (MI)	Doyle, Michael	Joyce
Bishop (UT)	F.	Kaptur
Black	Duckworth	Katko
Blackburn	Duffy	Keating
Blum	Duncan (TN)	Kelly (IL)
Blumenauer	Edwards	Kelly (MS)
Bonamici	Ellison	Kelly (PA)
Bost	Ellmers (NC)	Kennedy
Boustany	Emmer (MN)	Kildee
Boyle, Brendan	Engel	Kilmer
F.	Eshoo	Kind
Brady (PA)	Esty	King (IA)
Brady (TX)	Farenthold	King (NY)
Bridenstine	Farr	Kinzinger (IL)
Brooks (IN)	Fattah	Kirkpatrick
Brown (FL)	Fitzpatrick	Kline
Brownley (CA)	Fleischmann	Knight
Buchanan	Fleming	Kuster
Buchon	Forbes	Labrador
Bustos	Fortenberry	LaHood
Butterfield	Foster	LaMalfa
Calvert	Frankl (FL)	Lamborn
Capps	Franks (AZ)	Lance
Cardenas	Fudge	Langevin
Carney	Gabbard	Larsen (WA)
Carson (IN)	Garamendi	Larson (CT)
Carter (GA)	Garrett	Latta
Carter (TX)	Gibbs	Lawrence
Cartwright	Gibson	Lee
Castor (FL)	Goodlatte	Levin
Chabot	Graham	Lewis
Chaffetz	Granger	Lieu, Ted
Chu, Judy	Graves (LA)	Lipinski
Cicilline	Graves (MO)	LoBiondo
Clark (MA)	Grayson	Loeb sack
Clarke (NY)	Green, Al	Loftgren
Clawson (FL)	Griffith	Long
Cleaver	Grijalva	Loudermilk
Clyburn	Grothman	Love
Cofman	Guinta	Lowenthal
Cohen	Guthrie	Lowey
Cole	Gutiérrez	Lucas
Collins (GA)	Hahn	Luetkemeyer
Collins (NY)	Hardy	Lujan Grisham
Comstock	Harper	(NM)
Conaway	Harris	Luján, Ben Ray
Connolly	Hartzler	(NM)
Conyers	Hastings	Lummis
Cook	Heck (NV)	Lynch
Cooper	Heck (WA)	MacArthur
Costello (PA)	Hensarling	Maloney,
Courtney	Hice, Jody B.	Carolyn
Crawford	Higgins	Marchant
Crenshaw	Hill	Matsui
Cuellar	Hinojosa	McCarthy
Culberson	Holding	McCaul
Cummings	Honda	McClintock
Curbelo (FL)	Hoyer	McCollum
Davis (CA)	Huelskamp	McDermott

McGovern	Price, Tom	Stefanik
McHenry	Quigley	Stewart
McKinley	Rangel	Stivers
McMorris	Ratcliffe	Swalwell (CA)
Rodgers	Reed	Takai
McNerney	Reichert	Takano
McSally	Renacci	Thompson (CA)
Meadows	Ribble	Thompson (MS)
Meehan	Rice (NY)	Thompson (PA)
Meeks	Rice (SC)	Thornberry
Meng	Rigell	Tiberi
Messer	Roby	Tipton
Mica	Roe (TN)	Titus
Miller (FL)	Rogers (AL)	Tonko
Miller (MI)	Rogers (KY)	Torres
Moolenaar	Rohrabacher	Trott
Mooney (WV)	Rokita	Tsongas
Moore	Rooney (FL)	Turner
Moulton	Ros-Lehtinen	Upton
Mulvaney	Roskam	Valadao
Murphy (FL)	Ross	Van Hollen
Murphy (PA)	Rothfus	Vargas
Nadler	Rouzer	Veasey
Napolitano	Roybal-Allard	Velázquez
Neal	Royce	Vislosky
Neugebauer	Ruiz	Wagner
Newhouse	Ruppersberger	Walberg
Noem	Russell	Walden
Nolan	Ryan (OH)	Walker
Norcross	Salmon	Walorski
Nugent	Sánchez, Linda	Walters, Mimi
Nunes	T.	Walz
O'Rourke	Sarbanes	Wasserman
Olson	Scalise	Schultz
Palazzo	Schakowsky	Waters, Maxine
Pallone	Schiff	Watson Coleman
Pascrell	Schrader	Weber (TX)
Paulsen	Schweikert	Webster (FL)
Payne	Scott (VA)	Welch
Pearce	Scott, Austin	Westrup
Pelosi	Scott, David	Westerman
Perlmutter	Serrano	Whitfield
Perry	Sessions	Williams
Peters	Sewell (AL)	Wilson (FL)
Peterson	Sherman	Wilson (SC)
Pingree	Shimkus	Wittman
Pittenger	Shuster	Womack
Pitts	Simpson	Woodall
Pocan	Sinema	Yoder
Poe (TX)	Slaughter	Young (AK)
Poliquin	Smith (MO)	Young (IA)
Polis	Smith (NE)	Young (IN)
Pompeo	Smith (NJ)	Zeldin
Posey	Smith (TX)	Zinke
Price (NC)	Speier	

NAYS—12

Amash	Burgess	Massie
Brat	Duncan (SC)	Palmer
Brooks (AL)	Fox	Sanford
Buck	Gosar	Sensenbrenner

NOT VOTING—34

Beyer	Gohmert	Richmond
Byrne	Govdy	Rush
Capuano	Graves (GA)	Sanchez, Loretta
Castro (TX)	Green, Gene	Sires
Clay	Hanna	Smith (WA)
Costa	Herrera Beutler	Stutzman
Cramer	Himes	Vela
Crowley	Hudson	Westmoreland
Fincher	Huizenga (MI)	Yarmuth
Flores	Maloney, Sean	Yoho
Frelinghuysen	Marino	
Gallego	Mullin	

□ 1850

Ms. CLARKE of New York and Mr. HINOJOSA changed their vote from "nay" to "yea."

So (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

The result of the vote was announced as above recorded.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

Stated for:

Mr. YOHO. Mr. Speaker, on rollcall No. 64, had I been present, I would have voted "yes."

Mr. GRAVES of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I was absent today to attend the funeral of a family member. Had I been present, on rollcall No. 64, I would have voted "yes."

Mr. CASTRO of Texas. Mr. Speaker, my vote was not recorded on rollcall No. 64 on H.R. 3036—9/11 Memorial Act. I am not recorded because I was absent due to the birth of my son in San Antonio, Texas. Had I been present, I would have voted “aye.”

#### COMBATTING THE SPREAD OF INVASIVE SPECIES

(Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, last week, I visited Penn State University, which is located in Pennsylvania's Fifth Congressional District, for a discussion on the effect that invasive species are having on forests across our Commonwealth. I was joined by several experts in the field of entomology—from the university and from Pennsylvania's Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.

Among the insects discussed were the spotted lanternfly, the gypsy moth, and the emerald ash borer. These experts discussed at length the challenges each species presents as well as the ongoing efforts to combat the devastating impact and spread.

As chairman of the House Agriculture Subcommittee on Conservation and Forestry, I know that my State is not alone and that the effects of these pests are being felt all across the Nation.

I applaud the research being done at Penn State University and by foresters and entomologists around the Nation. Research and applying that science will go a long way in preventing these species from spreading further and causing more destruction on our forests.

I remain hopeful that we can all work together to ensure that our forests remain healthy, both ecologically and economically.

#### AMERICAN HEROES COLA ACT

(Ms. TITUS asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Ms. TITUS. Mr. Speaker, this afternoon, the House passed H.R. 677, the American Heroes COLA Act, legislation I introduced with Dr. ABRAHAM from Louisiana. This legislation will ensure that veterans receive automatic cost-of-living increases annually based on the consumer price index.

Unlike with Social Security, Congress must act each year to provide veterans with the COLA increases they need and deserve. Now, by permanently adjusting benefits to include cost-of-living increases, we are providing critical peace of mind to those who have so heroically served our country.

Furthermore, this legislation includes two provisions to address the VA appeals problem, which currently has 440,000 claims backlogged. The first, authored by Congressman O'ROURKE, creates a fully developed ap-

peals pilot program. The second I introduced with Chairman MILLER to create a task force to examine the appeals process and make recommendations for improvements before the situation gets worse.

H.R. 677 and some of the other bills that we passed today take important steps towards ensuring that our veterans are able to get the benefits they have earned and deserve.

#### MARIA KELLER AND ZAKRIA GHANI RECEIVE YOUTH VOLUNTEER AWARDS

(Mr. PAULSEN asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. PAULSEN. Mr. Speaker, I rise to honor Maria Keller of Plymouth and Zakria Ghani of Maple Grove for being recognized as Minnesota's top youth volunteers by the Prudential Spirit of Community Awards.

Maria, a sophomore at Orono High School, was awarded the top prize after setting up a program called “Read Indeed,” which has collected more than 1.7 million books and has provided them to underprivileged children. It is estimated that 800,000 students have received books from the organization.

Zakria, a senior at Al-Amal School, was a finalist for raising critical money for the victims of a devastating fire in Minneapolis. His efforts resulted in raising \$8,500 within one week after the fire in order to help the affected victims and residents.

Mr. Speaker, the work and service by these young people to serve and assist others should be inspiring to us all, and thanks to their actions, countless people have been helped. Their selflessness will serve them and their communities well in the future, and these accolades are well deserved.

Congratulations to Maria and Zakria.

#### BLACK HISTORY MONTH

(Mr. FOSTER asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. FOSTER. Mr. Speaker, I rise to honor St. Elmo Brady. He was the first African American to obtain a Ph.D. degree in chemistry in the United States. He received a Ph.D. in chemistry at the University of Illinois in 1916 for work done at the Noyes Laboratory. Dr. Brady was a pioneer in the teaching of science at both Tuskegee University and at Howard University in Washington, D.C.

His research included work on determining the structure of organic acids, methods of determining properties of alkaloids and infrared spectroscopy. This later research resulted in the formation of the Fisk Infrared Spectroscopy Research Laboratory and the Fisk Infrared Institute. In conjunction with faculty from the University of Illinois, Dr. Brady also established a summer program in infrared spectroscopy,

which was open to faculty from all colleges and universities.

Dr. Brady is just one of the many African American pioneering scientists whose work should be lifted up as the role model that it is, not just during Black History Month, but all year round.

□ 1900

#### IMPORTANCE OF THE MOX FACILITY

(Mr. WILSON of South Carolina asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. WILSON of South Carolina. Mr. Speaker, today in the President's budget proposal, sadly, the President terminated funding to the Mixed Oxide Fuel Fabrication Facility (MOX) at the Savannah River site. I am disappointed the President has not acknowledged how crucial MOX is to environmental cleanup and promoting nonproliferation.

Support for MOX is bipartisan, as shown by former New Mexico Governor and Secretary of Energy Bill Richardson, along with former Senator Richard Lugar. Both are experts who advocate the completion of the facility. Today, MOX is 70 percent completed, and there is no viable alternative for eliminating plutonium. What is more, closing MOX would make South Carolina and Georgia a permanent repository for nuclear waste.

MOX is also critical to upholding our nonproliferation agreement with the Russian Federation.

I am grateful for the leadership of Governor Nikki Haley along with Attorney General Alan Wilson, who have already filed a lawsuit against the Department of Energy to enforce the law for South Carolina's agreement with the Federal Government.

In conclusion, God bless our troops, and may the President, by his actions, never forget September the 11th in the global war on terrorism.

Thank you, Navy SEAL Rob O'Neill, for eliminating Osama bin Laden.

#### REHABILITATION RESEARCH IMPROVEMENT BILL

(Mr. LANGEVIN asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. LANGEVIN. Mr. Speaker, earlier today, the Senate HELP Committee passed by voice vote S. 800, the Enhancing the Stature and Visibility of Medical Rehabilitation Research at NIH Act.

As the lead sponsor of this legislation in the House of Representatives, with my good friend and colleague Congressman GREGG HARPER, I am very encouraged to see progress on efforts to advance the state of rehabilitation science at the National Institutes of Health and improve the care provided

to people with disabling injuries, illnesses, and conditions.

Millions of people across the country require medical rehabilitation to restore, maintain, or prevent deterioration of function. And this legislation will play an important role in the provision of that care.

I commend Senator KIRK for championing this important bill, and I look forward to its swift passage in the Senate and urge its subsequent consideration in the House.

#### NORTH KOREA IS A ROGUE STATE LUSTING FOR INTERNATIONAL MISCHIEF

(Mr. POE of Texas asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. POE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, as Peyton Manning and the Denver Broncos celebrated their Super Bowl win, around 8:27 California time, a North Korean satellite passed in space over the stadium.

What is next? Before long, it could be an intercontinental ballistic missile with a nuclear warhead headed for some American city.

Mr. Speaker, this is not some wacky idea out of a Hollywood movie. On January 6, the North Koreans tested a more advanced nuclear bomb that could kill even more people than the nuclear bomb they already have. Last Saturday, North Korea conducted a rocket launch to try to develop a ballistic missile that could hit the United States.

The North Koreans also support Hezbollah, work with Iran on missile development, hacked Sony Entertainment, kidnapped an American college student and put him in jail, and there is much more.

Mr. Speaker, North Korea is a rogue state lusting for international mischief. It is time to put them back on the State Sponsors of Terrorism list before Super Bowl LI takes place in my hometown of Houston, Texas.

And that is just the way it is.

#### BOKO HARAM

(Ms. WILSON of Florida asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Ms. WILSON of Florida. Mr. Speaker, tomorrow is Wear Something Red Wednesday to bring back our girls.

Boko Haram is burning children alive. This heartbreaking and, yes, unsettling picture is of Sani, a victim of Boko Haram's terror.

Sani's home was destroyed when Boko Haram set his village on fire, killing his parents. The rest of Sani's family survived only to be viciously gunned down in front of him. Sani represents the millions of children and women who are being raped, kidnapped, mutilated, and killed by the world's deadliest terrorist organization, Boko Haram. If you are not outraged, then you are not paying attention.

Africans killing Africans: the world has ignored this unparalleled level of violence.

I pray that our country and this Congress awaken to these unquestionably horrific acts and take up efforts to defeat Boko Haram.

Please continue to tweet, tweet, tweet #bringbackourgirls. Please wear red tomorrow and every Wednesday. Tweet, tweet, tweet #bringbackourgirls, #joinRepWilson.

#### CONGRATULATING OKEECHOBEE HIGH SCHOOL

(Mr. ROONEY of Florida asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. ROONEY of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Okeechobee High School, home of the Fighting Brahmans of Okeechobee, Florida, for receiving a Wilson Golden Football from the National Football League to commemorate the 50th year of the Super Bowl.

As part of the nationwide Super Bowl 50 celebration, the NFL started the Super Bowl High School honor roll program to acknowledge high schools and communities that have directly influenced Super Bowl history and impacted the game of football for the better. High schools across the country were chosen to honor each player or head coach who graduated from the school and was on an active Super Bowl roster.

Okeechobee High School was chosen because of its esteemed alumni, Jimmie Jones, who played in both Super Bowls XXVII and XXVIII with the Dallas Cowboys. Interestingly, after the victory of Super Bowl XXVII, Jimmie chose to be in Okeechobee for a parade rather than a parade through Dallas with his team. We are all proud to call him one of our own.

It is my honor to represent Okeechobee in the House of Representatives.

#### WATER CRISIS IN FLINT, MICHIGAN

(Ms. KAPTUR asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Speaker, this past weekend I had the opportunity to travel with Congressman DAN KILDEE, Congresswoman BRENDA LAWRENCE, Congressman SANDER LEVIN, and Congresswoman DEBBIE DINGELL—we were joined by other Members of Congress, SHEILA JACKSON LEE, for example—to see firsthand the water crisis in Flint, Michigan.

I just want to report to Members of the House and the people of this country that what I saw was appalling. At this point, so many weeks after the lead crisis was identified, to have no central medical team examining those children is a sacrilege. To have no water buffalo supplied by the National Guard with pressurized PVC tubing

taking water to people's homes, rather than just this bottle delivery; to have no hot showers that are portable, which the military has, that they could put in the schools in that community, to me, was absolutely appalling.

I was told that the Governor of that State had not even met with the people of the community. He had come in for a press conference. Is that what this is about?

I met children who had hemorrhages and ulcers from drinking that water, who had black rashes all over their bodies with pus.

Our country has a responsibility to the citizens of this country. There ought to be a central coordinator. If that Governor can't appoint one, the President of the United States should. Those children and the citizens of that city ought to be taken care of.

#### CURTIS FOLTZ' RETIREMENT AS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF GEORGIA PORTS AUTHORITY

(Mr. CARTER of Georgia asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. CARTER of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Curtis Foltz and his retirement as executive director from the Georgia Ports Authority.

Over the past 5 years, Mr. Foltz has done an exceptional job overseeing all Georgia Ports Authority activity, including the expansion and maintenance of the deepwater ports of Savannah and Brunswick.

Since his promotion to executive director in 2010, Mr. Foltz led Georgia Ports Authority to achieve record cargo growth, modernize its terminals, increase efficiency, improve safety, and promote environmental stewardship.

I am honored and grateful for Mr. Foltz' leadership as Georgia Ports Authority's executive director and wish him all the best in his future endeavors.

I would also like to wish the incoming executive director, Griff Lynch, and the Georgia Ports Authority continued growth and success for years to come.

#### SOCIAL SECURITY

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. HURD of Texas). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 2015, the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. FORTENBERRY) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Mr. Speaker, I want to share a story with everyone tonight. Although I live in Nebraska, I keep an old family van here in Washington, D.C., which is particularly helpful when our children are visiting.

On one particular occasion, the van was very messy. My children were smaller then, and I had not had the time to clean it. I was actually parking the van in a downtown garage here in

the city, and somewhat embarrassingly, I handed the keys to the attendant and said to him: Sorry, I have five children.

He looked at me and smiled. He says: Oh, don't worry. I have seven children, and they are going to take care of me when I am old.

I looked back at him, and I also smiled. I said: You know what that is called? That is called social security.

He then said: I like that. Could I say that?

I said: You can say it all that you like.

Mr. Speaker, while we think of Social Security as that important retirement security program, which is so essential to so many people, I want to take a moment to just explore a broader understanding of how we find our security together as a people, as a Nation.

I want to re-imagine this term "Social Security" in a wider sense of the phrase, what it means to find belonging, protection, and mutual support. Ultimately, society depends upon a binding set of narratives and an agreement with one another about one fundamental fact: the agreement that we should care about each other, that we are committed to one another, and that we have a common vision.

Now, Mr. Speaker, Americans are continuing to confront a number of longstanding challenges to our country's well-being. Let's be honest. There is widespread distrust of government, and the economy's capacity is sadly deepening a sense of division and further fracturing our society as more and more people seem to feel left out.

Fortunately, Mr. Speaker, our Nation still does have great character and great strength, found first and foremost in durable values that keep us resilient with the ability to adapt and change, even in the most turbulent of times. So although there is justifiable anxiety and anger at the present moment—in fact, they are a hallmark of the present moment—Americans do desire a new settlement of both security and opportunity.

Mr. Speaker, here is the dilemma: a constant focus on a Washington-based solution offers a false sense of solidarity and is no substitute for community. Technocratic management through centralized government cannot rekindle the vibrancy of our society. And far from healing our wounded culture, the government simply cannot fix everything that is wrong. Doing so, attempting to do so will simply recalculate winners and losers. This is especially true when America's political system suffers from so much discord and dysfunction.

So here is the answer: a hopeful politics and a truly good society are ultimately relational. For instance, although we are not immune from harsher downward trends where I live, we have, in my State of Nebraska, to some degree, I believe, safeguarded the importance of community, the necessity and integrity of the family, and the

quality of care for ourselves as well as those around us.

□ 1915

I am proud of this fact, Mr. Speaker. I often refer to it as the Nebraska model. Such social vibrancy reduces the necessity for government intervention and actually creates happier outcomes.

Mr. Speaker, the Social Security program itself is so critical to protecting the well-being of America's seniors. I believe strongly in this program, as so many others do.

In fact, when I was a child, I received Social Security myself due to the premature death of my father when I was 12 years old. It helped get the family through. This is an important program for America's security and for peace of mind of so many of our elder citizens.

But I think a broader view of this concept, this ideal, of Social Security demands that we regasp the ideals of community and interdependency with one another. Proper progress in our Nation recognizes that our individual liberty is not merely a license to do whatever we want.

A hyper sense of individualism can obscure the foundational truth of our shared humanity, which longs for community. It inhibits the common endeavors necessary for advancing a brighter future together as a nation, as one people.

Liberty and, therefore, human happiness are inextricably intertwined with our society, with our responsibility to one another, and that is what gives fullness to the meaning of Social Security.

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

#### CONTAMINATED WATER IN AMERICA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 2015, the gentleman from California (Mr. GARAMENDI) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. GARAMENDI. Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about the cities of America—at least many of the cities of America.

While I was waiting for the opportunity to speak to the House and people of America, I went into the cloakroom and pulled out today's Roll Call, one of what we call the Hill rags. These are one of the newspapers around the Hill.

It says "Lead in the Water, Way Beyond Flint," and it talks about the issue of contamination in our water supplies. Indeed, they are quite correct.

This would be one of maybe 20 different slides I could put up here. What do these cities of America have in common: Flint, Michigan; Toledo, Ohio; Sebring, Ohio; Baltimore, Maryland; Brick Township, New Jersey; Washington, D.C.; Wayne County, North Carolina; Greenville, North Carolina;

Lakehurst Acres, Maine; Chicago, Illinois; Porterville, California? The list goes on and on and on. These are cities that have or have had contaminated water in the last couple of years. Some of these are ongoing.

We hear a lot of discussion about Flint, Michigan, and the tragedy of the water supply in Flint, Michigan, the lead contamination, the 8,000 or 9,000 children who have been inflicted with lead poisoning, and the incredible, awful effect that that will have on the development of their brain and of their future.

This issue is one that we are becoming aware of. Actually, we have been aware of it for a long, long time. The problem is that we haven't done anything about it or we have done very, very little about it.

Tonight we are going to talk about contaminated water in America, America's cities and towns that are providing water that is not fit to drink.

So what to do? Well, we are going to have to deal with the realities of 8,000 to 9,000 children, their development, the potential problems that they face in their lives ahead. That will be basically dealing with the fact that we had contaminated water in Flint, Michigan, and in a host of other cities.

We can't live without water. The human body requires it. If you don't get it, you are going to die very, very quickly. The fact of the matter is I am not at all sure you can live with contaminated water.

That is the actual water that was available to residents of Flint, Michigan: yucky, yellow, contaminated, polluted water. Not just lead, but yuck. Why would you want to drink that? Well, it is all you have. So you don't want to, but you really don't have any choice. Contaminated water, what to do?

Tonight we are going to discuss this issue. I guess one thing you can do is what California did. In Porterville, California, when the wells went dry, they brought a cattle water trough similar to what I have on my ranch to provide water for my cattle. This water trough provided water for the children of Porterville, California.

Now, there is a solution to the water crisis in California. Porterville isn't the only city or town in the San Joaquin Valley. In fact, there are dozens of towns in the San Joaquin Valley of California, the largest State, the richest State.

We like to think of California, my home State, as being ahead of everything. I guess we are ahead in providing cattle water troughs to provide water for children in California. We ought to be ashamed.

What are we going to do about it? There are 435 people here in the House of Representatives, and I guess there is another 100 Senators across the way, a President, and all the administration. What are we going to do about it? I guess we can look at our report card.

This is from the American Society of Civil Engineers. Let's see. The 2013 report card for America's infrastructure: Aviation, D; bridges, C plus; dams, D; down here, schools, D; roads, railroads, Cs; water—oh, here we are—water, a D.

We asked them about this. We said: Why a D?

They said: We would give them an F, but it is too much trouble to try to figure out how to do an F. So we just go to the lowest, which is D.

You don't get any lower than a D from the American Society of Civil Engineers. That is our report card in America, folks. It is not just water. It is the entire infrastructure system.

You are wondering why. Why does that happen? Take a look at this little chart. A sharp drop in government infrastructure spending. Let's see. That is 2002.

In 2002, \$330 billion spent on all infrastructure: roads, bridges, airports, water systems, sanitation systems. \$325 billion in 2002.

And in real 2014 dollars, nondefense spending on infrastructure, here we are in 2012, 2013. We are down to about \$200 billion, about \$125 billion less spent on infrastructure of all kinds.

Oh. Back to water. What about water? Where did we go with water? Spending on clean water and drinking water infrastructure in 2014 deflated dollars, go back to 1973.

In 1973, the Vietnam war was still going on. Let's see. That would be somewhere around \$10 billion in 2014 dollars in 1973. In 2016, we are down to \$2 billion.

Don't be surprised when you see a list such as I put up a moment ago of cities in the United States that have water problems. Aging infrastructure, lead pipes.

Here is a picture of a lead pipe. Corroded. You wonder why kids get lead poisoning. If you don't spend money on infrastructure, you are going to wind up with sick kids, you are going to wind up with bridges that collapse, you are going to wind up with a second-rate economy and a third-world water situation.

By the way, that is the bridge on Interstate 5, the road from Canada to Mexico down the Pacific coast. The bridge collapsed.

What happens when you don't spend money on infrastructure? Your economy fails, your kids get sick, and they are forced to drink water out of a water trough. This is not the America we want to live in. This is not the America the public sent us here to provide for them.

We like to think of ourselves as the strongest, biggest, best country in the world, and we are in many respects, but when it comes to providing for the fundamentals of life—water—we get a D rating.

We get kids getting their water supply out of a water trough. We get kids in Flint, Michigan, who are poisoned with lead. That is not the only city. It is across the United States, city after city.

In the Central Valley of California, it is arsenic, it is lead, it is other contaminants. Huh-uh. We have got work to do here in the House of Representatives. It is our responsibility. It is our task. We can't toss it off to somebody else.

So, yeah, Roll Call, you are correct: "Lead in the Water, Way Beyond Flint." Arsenic in the water. Fecal contamination in the water. You name it. City after city, ancient systems, more than 100 years old, lead pipes which were put in the ground a century ago, leaching lead into the food supply. That is America.

What would it cost? About \$348 billion just for the water systems. How can we pay for it? Well, there is a way.

Oh, America, are you aware that we are into a new nuclear arms race? We are. In the next 25 years, a trillion dollars of your tax money is going to be spent on a total rearmament of our nuclear weapons systems: intercontinental ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, submarines, stealth aircraft. A trillion dollars.

City after city in America limps along, poisoning its children with 100-year-old water systems. We have got some choices to make here. What are we going to spend your tax money on? New nuclear bombs or new water pipes? Choices.

Joining me tonight to discuss these sets of issues are some of my dear friends. PAUL TONKO and I have been working on this infrastructure issue for 5 years now, what we call the East Coast-West Coast. I am going to ask Paul if he would wait just a few moments.

SHEILA JACKSON LEE, you were in Flint, Michigan, last week—I guess yesterday, actually, for a discussion in Flint, Michigan. Share with us briefly, if you would, your reflections on what you saw there.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Thank you very much. And I thank the gentleman from New York for his kindness in my brief support of all of you on the floor.

Let me first of all acknowledge, as I indicated, your potent and powerful question to America of \$348 billion to solve our problem and are our children that valuable or are our children worth it. My answer is yes.

Let me add my appreciation, though I know that he would not want to be in this predicament, to Congressman KILDEE and the entire Michigan delegation who were there on Saturday.

They stood arm in arm listening to Flint residents just to see how painful it is to hear a mother talk about a child with spots all over his body and to have her point to other children and say, "They are getting sick, and I have lost my hair" or a teacher say, "I have children coming to school with pus sores."

□ 1930

So, let me say a few points. I sit on the Judiciary Committee. And also have the privilege of sitting on the

Oversight and Government Reform Committee as a guest. I just want to say that we need to hold someone accountable, which will then generate into what the solution is.

April 2014, a nonscientist—I just came out of the Rules Committee on science legislation—made a decision to go to Flint River. He had no anti-corrosion plan. Really, there lies the source of problems throughout a number of these cities that you have indicated. You had one with non-toxins. They were just breaking the law and suffering because of lack of money. Saving \$5 million has resulted in spending multiple millions of dollars—maybe \$1 billion-plus—to try and salvage this great city.

With Governor Snyder, of course, there is no accountability. Just to show you an example, it is very difficult to read these emails that were released. The Governor indicates that this was not relevant to the issue.

The main point is that while we are talking about the infrastructure—and I do support Mr. KILDEE's effort as well as our colleagues in the Senate to help this city of 765 million, we must also hold ourselves accountable—this body of Republicans and Democrats who know that we must invest in infrastructure.

As a member of the Judiciary Committee, I sent a letter early in January asking for an investigation by the Department of Justice. The FBI is now investigating. We want to make sure there is a review of whether there is malfeasance.

So, I come to the floor today to say there are many questions and there must be many answers. I want to make sure there is an accountable standard. I want to say to the American people that we can't have a city like Flint, where decisions are made—General Motors, by the way, stopped using the water—that we have no anticorrosion plan. This is happening across America, partly, because cities are broke and because we have not invested in the overall infrastructure of America, as you, Mr. GARAMENDI have said on the floor over and over again.

So, I wanted to come to the floor to thank my colleagues. Knowing how painful it is to represent that area, I thank Congressman KILDEE for his leadership. Congresswoman LAWRENCE, who is a neighbor, is working with him. Congressman CONYERS, Congresswoman DINGELL, SANDY LEVIN, and some Senators have all been working so hard on this issue.

Count me in as a collaborator as we stand before the American people and say: Send me. We are prepared to fight for more infrastructure to help cities across America.

Mr. GARAMENDI. I thank the gentlewoman from Texas. I know that your concerns are very real. You traveled to Flint, and you have been working on these issues for many, many years. Thank you for your participation.

Tomorrow, the Democrats are holding their own committee hearing on this issue. I am certain that we will go through the issues that you talked about: what actually happened and who is actually responsible. So, that will be a discussion for tomorrow. Perhaps we will cover it on the floor tonight.

Let me now turn to my colleague from New York, Mr. PAUL TONKO, for the continuation of the East-West show.

Mr. TONKO. Thank you, Representative GARAMENDI, for leading us in what is a very important bit of discussion.

In a broad term, infrastructure is something that needs our immediate attention because of years of neglect, but it comes to that water infrastructure that has been highlighted of late. I like to call it the hidden infrastructure. It can't be out of sight, out of mind. That would be a very painful outcome if that is the approach that is taken by certainly us as legislators or by society at large.

You are right: for a number of years, we have been discussing infrastructure. I have made it my goal to invest in water infrastructure for a number of reasons, but also because of my assignment on the Energy and Commerce Committee as ranking—the lead Democrat—on the Subcommittee on Environment and the Economy, which reports to the Energy and Commerce Committee. It is through that subcommittee that the assignment of the Safe Drinking Water Act is housed. So it is important for us to maintain a vigilance, if you will, for the outcomes that are deemed acceptable—and that is that we do not receive a D on our report card for water infrastructure.

When you shared that information, Representative GARAMENDI, I thought to myself that if any of us brought home a D on a report card, there would be a little bit of a challenge offered our way to improve that report card with the next semester. So, I believe that we have failed in this effort to maintain a strong Federal partnership.

There has been a lot of finger pointing going on since the Flint, Michigan, issue arose in the public's awareness as a national issue. That finger pointing won't solve anything. But if we are going to finger point, we need to also internalize that. We need to look at Congress and what it has done.

When you talked about the levels of funding, in the early seventies, I came onto my county board in 1976, in Montgomery County in upstate New York. I can vividly recall that we had a very lucrative revenue flow from the Federal Government for our water systems.

Today, what we look at is something like a 4 percent investment coming from the Federal Government on the total bill. That is grossly inadequate. The fact that we can turn our backs on this infrastructure and allow situations like Flint, Michigan; Sebring, Ohio; Troy, New York; or Los Angeles, California, to grip us, to shock our

senses and not respond, leaves us in a very pitiful state, I believe.

We need to do better than that. We need to form a plan of action. That plan of action must include a stronger investment in the water infrastructure of this country.

Now, some of that also requires, I think, an enhancement of the investment made in the drinking water SRF, or the State Revolving Fund. That fund has not been reauthorized since 2003. So we need to go forward and reauthorize and enhance the SRF so that our States, as partners with the Federal Government, can then go forward and have some relief in responding to the strapped cities that are really impacted by a declining tax base, in many cases, and the very small bit of population in some of our rural communities that are trying to maintain systems that want to speak to public health and public safety and to offer a commodity that is not only important, but essential.

It is essential for the quality of life in our homes, it is essential for small businesses, it is essential for our manufacturing base, it is essential for our farming community. All of this requires water. Many suggest that we are transitioning from an oil-based economy to a water-based economy.

So, if we are anticipating greater use and reliance on water as a commodity, let's put our act into working order. That means that you invest not like we did last year, where the outcome was at some \$843 million, which was some \$43 million worth of a cut. That is completely going in the wrong direction. That is not listening to the needs of local government or to the basic, core essential need of sound drinking water, clean drinking water.

It is blue infrastructure. That is what we need to invest in—making certain that we have an abundance and an essential supply of clean drinking water. It is absolutely mandatory in a modern economy. If we are going to compete effectively in an innovation economy, we need to provide the essentials, including water, to the business, residential, and ag community.

When I look at some of the neglect, it is so interesting to see that we wait for crises like that of Flint. Does Flint require Federal investment? Absolutely. I stand ready and willing to assist Flint. I would rank what happened there as immoral.

So, we need to move forward and assist Flint, but the saga shouldn't begin and end there. We need to create a national response that empowers our communities across the country. We need to have interaction and dialogue at the table to best understand where we have fallen down, where we have failed.

We need to have officials from Flint, Michigan, and from the State of Michigan here to testify. I don't think it is appropriate for Governor Snyder of that State to walk away from that invitation.

It is important for us to go forward with the sort of communication, the dialogue, that will build the soundest response. And if we do not respond out of necessity to Flint, Michigan; Troy, New York, Sebring, Ohio; and Los Angeles, and the list continues to grow, we will then just see these issues keep rising in our communities.

When I last saw Troy, New York's dilemma, they were repairing things in the worst weather—conditions that were near zero, where they needed to heat the site in order to weld the materials that were completing the project. A major line, Representative GARAMENDI, broke. It was their main line. A 33-inch pipe was shooting water 100 feet into the air. Ten million gallons of water went into the street.

Are we going to sit back and say that is acceptable in a Nation like this—a Nation of abundance—that considers itself a world leader? No world-leading nation can ignore its infrastructure like we have ignored the water infrastructure.

Blue infrastructure is what we should be about: providing that clean drinking water. We have nearly a quarter of a million breaks annually in the systems from coast-to-coast. A quarter of a million. There are 700-some breaks per day.

Think about it. That wouldn't be acceptable to an ordinary business plan of any type. It should not be acceptable to the Federal Government plan in assisting communities with the sound commodity of drinking water.

So, Representative GARAMENDI, I am just thrilled to join you this evening to continue to carry the message forward that we need action, we need a plan of action, we need commitment, and we need resources. It begins now. Every missed opportunity here will perhaps cause the opportunity for yet another tragedy in a community that just should not happen.

Again, it is about investing soundly, effectively, and appropriately, in what it is an essential commodity: water for our communities.

Mr. GARAMENDI. Mr. TONKO, thank you so very, very much. You brought to this issue enormous facts and passion. Your work as the ranking member on the subcommittee of the Energy and Commerce Committee positions you in a very, very important place. Your passion and knowledge should help carry the day on this.

Mr. TONKO, if you can stick around, we will come back to this one more time.

I would like now to call on my colleague from California, Mr. TED LIEU from Los Angeles.

Mr. TED LIEU of California. Thank you, Representative GARAMENDI, for your work on clean water and for highlighting this issue in Flint, as well as in communities across America.

I sit on the Oversight Committee. On February 3, we held a hearing on the Flint water crisis. Based on the information presented, it is clear to me that

what happened in Flint was a crime of epic proportions. Tens of thousands of women, children, and men were poisoned when lead leached from lead pipes into the drinking water. Those who were most responsible know who they are. They should resign. Some of them should be prosecuted.

We need to make sure that we do what is right for the residents of Flint, as well as other communities across America, and make sure this never happens again. It is clear that this is not an issue just in Flint, but the problem with toxic water is an issue across our Nation.

□ 1945

Washington, D.C., had elevated levels of lead in 2000. Sebring, Ohio, now has elevated levels of lead. And there was a report by the Natural Resources Defense Council in 2011 that showed 19 cities had toxic issues with their drinking water.

There are a variety of solutions. First of all, we need to fund the CDC lead abatement program that had been cut by the Republican legislature in 2002. We need to restore funding and fully fund that program.

We need to also make a strong investment in improving our water infrastructure. I sit on the Budget Committee. I will be putting in amendments to make sure that we increase funding to water infrastructure across America.

And we need to look at alternatives to lead pipes. An article in Salon noted that we have many cities across America now using PVC pipes, also known as plastic pipes, as an eco-friendly alternative.

Canadian and American cities have had success with these pipes. They last longer than metal pipes, over 100 years. They do not corrode. They do not leach, and they do not contain lead.

What is happening in Flint, they are looking at a short-term solution, which is to recoat their lead pipes. I believe that is not acceptable. I believe the Governor needs to come in and replace all the lead pipes with a nonlead alternative.

The mayor of Flint has called for full replacement. I support that. I know Representative GARAMENDI and others support that.

I want to give great credit to the great work by Representative KILDEE for his constituents in Flint.

I also want to note that if we don't do something now, who knows whether your children or your grandchildren will be poisoned by lead in your drinking water.

It is very important that we make enormous infrastructure investments, and the time to do that is now.

Thank you again, Representative GARAMENDI, for highlighting this issue.

Mr. GARAMENDI. Mr. LIEU, you said you are on the Oversight and Government Reform Committee. You had the hearing last week and began the process of developing an understanding of

what happened and who was responsible. Critically important.

You also said you are on the Budget Committee. So if I might just lobby you for a moment—

Mr. TED LIEU of California. Absolutely.

Mr. GARAMENDI. Let me just lobby you. You are going to be taking up the budget—I think tomorrow, actually.

Mr. TED LIEU of California. We have various markups coming up. That is correct.

Mr. GARAMENDI. Okay. So the budget is going to be coming up, and that is the allocation of the \$4 trillion that the Federal Government will spend. We will be spending it on education. We will be spending it on roads, on the military and the like.

Let me just toss you some numbers for your consideration. Now, these are adjusted 2015 dollars, so we are keeping equal-value dollars.

In 2007, the State Revolving Fund for Drinking Water, which Mr. TONKO talked about, had \$957 million for that program. That goes to the States to repair their water systems. And it stayed around \$900 million the next year.

And then we had the stimulus bill in 2009, and we spent \$3 billion. Then we went back down, \$1.5 billion, \$1 billion, \$947 million, and we stayed somewhere in the range of \$900 million through 2016. So that is the current year. And that is \$863 million that we are spending this year on the State Revolving Fund.

Keep in mind that it is estimated that we need \$328 billion to repair all the pipes.

Now, the President's budget has \$1.2 billion for the coming year. He just introduced that today.

Mr. TED LIEU of California. Right.

Mr. GARAMENDI. Okay. Also, in the President's budget, he has \$1.36 billion for the new Long Range Strike Bomber; \$113 million for a ground-based strategic deterrence; \$1.4 billion for the Ohio class submarine—those are nuclear submarines; the new long-range cruise missile, \$995 million; to rebuild the B61 bomb, \$137 million; and the total amount that the National Nuclear Security Administration is spending this new year, 2017, \$9.24 billion.

Now, it would seem to me that this is just in the nuclear enterprise. These are our nuclear weapons.

So my lobbying is this: When you put together the budget, could you somehow squeeze out of the nuclear arms race that we are engaged in about a billion dollars so that we can stop poisoning our children?

Mr. TED LIEU of California. You made some very good points. And, as you know, America is the leading economy in the world. Our GDP is greater than the next two countries combined. We certainly have the resources to make sure we don't poison our kids with lead in their water or other toxic material.

Mr. GARAMENDI. Just double, if you would, just double the amount we are

spending for the clean drinking water programs at the Federal level from about \$1 billion to, let's say, \$2 billion, or maybe even \$3 billion, by squeezing some of the expenditures that we find in other accounts.

My particular target is the nuclear weapons account, which will in the next 25 years cost the American taxpayers \$1 trillion. So when you go to the hearing, keep that in mind.

Mr. TED LIEU of California. Thank you for raising that issue. I will absolutely look into it. I am glad you brought it up. So let me look into that issue.

I do want to say something about what Representative TONKO mentioned, which is the hundreds of water main breaks we have daily. That just shows a crumbling infrastructure. In America, in the 21st century, that should not be happening.

What we saw in Flint and we are seeing in other cities across America is a result of disinvestment in our government, in cities and municipalities. You get what you pay for, and right now, we are getting children that are being poisoned with lead. So we need to increase investment.

I will look into the issues you raised, Representative GARAMENDI. Thank you for highlighting these issues.

Mr. GARAMENDI. I appreciate the opportunity to lobby you. You are in a very important position, as are all of us; 435 of us are going to make choices about what is important and how we spend our constituents' tax money. And these are choices we are going to make.

We often don't really look at it, but the budget that will be forthcoming, the President's budget, and then the response of this House to that budget, will allocate that \$4 trillion across a whole variety of programs.

We really do have the opportunity here, as we put together the budget and then the appropriations following, to take up the challenge that Mr. TONKO put before us in the State Revolving Fund.

Mr. LIEU, thank you so very much for joining us.

Mr. TED LIEU of California. Thank you. I look forward to working with you and Representative TONKO and others to make sure we invest in America.

Mr. GARAMENDI. We appreciate you being here. Thank you so very much.

Well, Mr. TONKO, lead pipes.

Mr. TONKO. Lead pipes. The \$863 million in the Drinking Water SRF of which I spoke is a lot of money. But when you put it into context of maybe 10 million lead service lines in the country, when you think of infrastructure that is beyond 100 years old—when I did tours—I have been doing tours in my district of the water systems, and I have found systems as old as 145 years. That is when Rutherford B. Hayes was in the White House.

And I saw pipes that were 8-inch in diameter reduced to 4-inch flow because of calcification. I saw pipes removed because of corrosion by the acidity of soils that has taken its toll.

You think of new technology, invention, innovation, gauges that can be utilized, liners that can be put in certain pipes for extending the useful life, things that we can be doing that provide for preventative maintenance and speak to public health and public safety.

You know, it is a bit of wonderment, isn't it, that we will trade our cell phones every other year, or perhaps every year, because they have got a new product on the shelf; or will trade in our screens, our TV screens, because they are simply not big enough; or the car has got too many miles or we just came to dislike the color, and so we trade in the automobile every three, 4 years. But we are content to live with water pipes for 145 years. It defies human logic. Why do we accept that?

Why don't we dig into this hidden infrastructure and invest in a way that will avoid thousands of families being impacted by contamination of lead?

Children, innocent children impacted by societal neglect. Investment that ought to be highest priority, not put on the back burner.

Well, the response, as we know, is: How are you going to pay for it? What is the cost?

What is the cost of doing something? Let's contrast that with the cost of not doing something.

What are the bills going to be?

For Flint, Michigan, alone, we don't think people are going to stay silent with this tragedy in their lives. What is the impact to industry?

When I saw these lines burst in the city of Troy, New York, this winter, businesses were shut down. Schools were shut. They were closed for days. Families didn't have water in their homes.

What is the cost? What is the price tag?

So it needs to be a framework that is large enough to calculate the human impact, the financial impact, societal impact, the economic consequences. These are real.

Again, we are a country, a people that can claim the pioneer spirit within our DNA. How do we dare say "no" to what ought to be a sound investment, to grow jobs, maintain jobs, to compete effectively on a global scale in an innovation economy?

We can do better. We must do better.

And when we look at the situations out there where we have convinced ourselves that we are not worthy of investment, that is not leadership. We are trying to stall and pass it on to the next generation.

Well, this generation that will be that next generation of leaders is being impacted healthwise as we speak. Unacceptable. Immoral. We can do better.

Representative GARAMENDI, I know there are voices that really want to produce here and do this progressive bit of investment that will strengthen our communities.

Mr. GARAMENDI. As you were talking, I think back when I was growing

up, and we used to call this, not infrastructure, we used to call this "public works." Public works.

This is for the public. It is infrastructure, but this is the public investment in the things that an individual, even a private company, cannot do. This is something that we do as a community in the public domain.

It is work. We are talking, if we were to invest \$2 billion this coming year in these community water systems, we would actually generate thousands of jobs, and we would increase the economic growth immediately.

It has been estimated that for every dollar you put into public works, infrastructure, you immediately increase the economy by \$1.3, \$1.4. So this is a way of investing immediately, putting people to work in good, middle class jobs, and laying in the public works for future economic growth and, as you just said so eloquently, protecting our health, our children's health. So this is absolutely essential.

We are at a very propitious moment. The President proposed today the budget for the United States of America's next fiscal year, beginning October 1, 2016.

□ 2000

It is his proposal on how to spend about \$4 trillion of taxpayer money and debt. We, as the representatives of the people of the United States, will take that and modify it.

What if we just made one modification in that \$4 trillion and said: We are going to spend an additional billion dollars or an additional \$2 billion on public works water systems? What would it mean?

The 140-year-old pipes that you talked about, could they be replaced? Could the 250,000 water main breaks across the United States be reduced to maybe just 200,000?

People going to work, engineers designing the system, financiers figuring out how to put together the local money, the State money, and the Federal money, generating jobs, growing our economy, and stopping the poisoning of our children.

The President proposed his budget today. Tomorrow our colleagues take up the budget and begin to decide how to move that money to things that are a priority. Here we are.

Mr. TONKO. Representative GARAMENDI, when we talk about the infrastructure hidden beneath the surface of the streets and scape of our communities, it is hard to imagine wooden pipes along with those decrepit 145-year-old pipes in calcification galore.

The enormity of the situation needs to be perhaps graphically shared. Under the city of Albany, the capital of New York, which is part of the 20th Congressional District that I represent, happens to lie 317 miles of pipe, drinking water infrastructure.

You could travel from Albany, New York, to Baltimore, Maryland. That is

the sort of linear responsibility associated with that system. Should we anticipate rightfully that there may be some bumps along the road of that 317-mile stretch in any given year?

Mr. GARAMENDI. A pothole, maybe?

Mr. TONKO. Absolutely. So let's think of it in those sorts of terms so that we can have a better understanding and awareness of an aged infrastructure, which, by the way, is also accompanied by a discontinued inventory in many cases.

Valves that are required are no longer manufactured. So we have to come up with some innovative response when there is a break.

While we have talked a lot about capital improvements, capital infrastructure, and physical infrastructure that is required to pay for and build back these systems, there is also that third leg of the stool: human infrastructure.

When I tour these water systems in my district, one of the learning curves is the declining effort of professionals—not their effort—the declining numbers of professionals who have the awesome responsibility of operating and maintaining these systems.

So the education, the training, the retraining, the higher education, and the certification of individuals who makes these systems work and provide for that water when you turn on the tap, they are there.

But there is an aging out because I think we have ignored this. So career paths have not been developed in the minds of students to go into this sort of science. And it is an important, awesome responsibility.

Will that institutional knowledge be passed on or will we just go without? So the human infrastructure is an important piece of this puzzle, also, to have the qualified women and men conducting their professionalism to serve the community.

So when you turn that tap on and anticipate—rightfully again—that clean drinking water is the result, think of all the decisionmaking, think of all the investment, think of the stewardship, and the operating know-how that is required. It is awesome.

It is also a system, as we have been shown, that, when there is failure, you can have a large number of people impacted and in severe measure.

So I believe that this Nation cares about its drinking water capacity and state of purity and sound condition. They want that abundant supply of clean water, and we need stronger partnership from the Federal level being more committed, more lucrative funding streams to the States, and then the States incorporating with their local communities to come up with innovative concepts.

My gosh, we are producing new materials that perhaps won't corrode as easily or that can retrofit the given systems. We have gauges that can tell us where the next break may come. So you are dealing with the know-how that provides for the most effective and

efficient outcome from a taxpayer perspective.

All of this technology with software to accompany it is available. But, again, the technical assistance, the grants, the loans—affordable loans—that we can advance to the communities are important steps in the process of providing for a 21st-century infrastructure.

We shouldn't be content with a D on our report card. D means devastating. D means dangerous. D means in decline. Let's move forward and advance for that A on the report card.

I know you wanted those As on your report card, Mr. GARAMENDI. I wanted them on mine.

Mr. GARAMENDI. The art of the possible. The art of the possible is what we have here.

Mr. TONKO, I don't know where you were when I brought this up. This is the drinking water in Flint, Michigan. That is a recent photo from a water tap in Flint, Michigan. Unacceptable. The bottom line is it is unacceptable. Not only is it dirty, it is poisonous.

Mr. TONKO. And frightening.

Mr. GARAMENDI. It is poisonous.

So we are going to make some choices. My plea to my colleagues here—and it echoes what you said—you can talk about it in terms of jobs. Thousands and thousands of jobs would be created if we invested in our infrastructure, our public works, and the water systems.

Is the money available to do it? If we make the right choice, it is. If we make the right choice to invest in ending the poisoning of our children, it is there. We can move \$4 trillion around in one way or another and build modern infrastructure. We could do that.

We are going to do it now. We are going to do it now. The issue of the budget begins today. In the United States Congress, 535 American citizens are brought to this Capitol to make decisions about the health and the safety of their children. We have been given that responsibility.

God knows there is enough money around \$4 trillion to find a way to spend the money to build the water systems to stop the poisoning of our children. It is just a matter of choices.

What do we choose to do? Refurbish a nuclear bomb that, God willing, we would never ever even think about using? That is our choice. It is our choice.

As your representatives, we can move money into providing the public works to meet the fundamental human need, in this case, drinkable, potable, safe water. It is fundamental.

You cannot live but 3 days without water, and the last 2 days aren't worth living anyway because you are comatose. Water. Choices. Public works. Investment in the future. Jobs today. Engineers, as you talked about. Financial. All of that.

It is disheartening. I hear my colleagues like SHEILA JACKSON LEE come in and talk about going to Flint,

Michigan. I will never forget Mr. KILDEE on the floor last Thursday.

I asked him to talk to me about that young child that you saw in your community that you represent. He said the kid turned to him and said: I am not going to be smart enough. We make choices.

Mr. TONKO. Think of the reduction in the quality of life there. We commend Representative KILDEE, Representative LAWRENCE, and all of the members of the Michigan delegation for the work that they have done.

Again, to the price tag, the cost, let's look at the other side. Earlier I talked about 7 billion—7 billion—gallons of water lost with these main breaks, with these breaks of any kind. 7 billion gallons.

Mr. GARAMENDI. Can we talk about the California drought in this context?

Mr. TONKO. Exactly. Can you ill afford any waste of water? But it is not just water coming through those pipes. It is tax dollars flowing with that water. It is treated water.

So it is foolish for us to continue along this path of hidden infrastructure mentality because, when it is not addressed, water and tax dollars—hard-earned constituent money—are flowing out of those pipes.

Before I came here, Representative GARAMENDI, you know that I worked at NYSEDA, the New York State Energy, Research, and Development Authority.

We got national awards for energy efficiency incorporated at water treatment facilities. So we took that effort to reduce the price tag of day-to-day operational costs.

There are ways to save money. A broken pipe is pouring money down the drain. So let's stop that foolish expenditure and go wisely to the investment that enables us with our intellect, our passion, and our sense of virtue to get things done correctly.

Generations before us had that vision. Pioneers built this country. People came here as immigrants and tethered their American Dream.

They climbed the ladder of opportunity and built strong communities based on that American Dream, and we in our present moment can't find it within ourselves to address those basic core needs?

We pride ourselves on being a modern society and having the luxury of clean water. The blue infrastructure moment is now. Let's invest in that clean water infrastructure. Let's not torture our communities. Let's not disrespect our children. We are better than that.

We have the engineering savvy. We have the academic prowess. We have the intellectual capacity. Now do we have the will? I believe we do.

I believe this country, if asked: "Do you want to invest in America's drinking water systems?" would say a resounding yes. Flint, Michigan; Sebring, Ohio; Los Angeles, California; Troy, New York—the list goes on and on.

If we do nothing, we should anticipate that this list will continue to

make a growing, passionate statement that we are dragging our feet. We are allowing a hidden infrastructure to be truly that, hidden, out of sight and out of mind.

Don't burden us with the responsibility. Don't share the facts. It is too painful. I don't want to hear that it is going to cost us something.

We see what the cost is. Representative GARAMENDI held up the photo of that polluted water, that poisonous water. That is unacceptable in a country as great as America. Unacceptable.

We have invested in the soundness of education, research, and innovation, and to not utilize the byproducts of those investments is sheer foolishness. It is not exercising the love of country that needs to be engaged in this Chamber and across the country.

We can get this done. I am a firm believer—firm believer—that, with voices resonating in chorus about this issue and the connected tragedies of disinvestment, we will get it done. We will get it done.

Representative GARAMENDI, I appreciate the efforts you make to bring these issues to the attention of the American public.

For those who listen at home and watch at home, encourage your representatives to get on board with the investment in our clean drinking water infrastructure. It is so critical.

This moment can bring us together. This isn't about a partisan issue. We didn't ask those children what party their families may be assigned, have chosen. This serves us all.

Let's go forward united in the voice and the passion to get it done, the determination and the integrity to say that we had a challenge and, in the old American way, we responded to it and succeeded.

Again, thank you for bringing us together.

□ 2015

Mr. GARAMENDI. Mr. TONKO, I wasn't in Flint, Michigan when Representative KILDEE spoke to that young child—I think he was probably 4 or 5—who had been drinking this lead contaminated water, and was aware that he had been drinking the water. When that young kid turned to Mr. KILDEE and said: I am afraid I won't be smart enough, I visualize it.

My question to you, to myself, and to my colleagues here in the House of Representatives and across the way in the Senate is: Will we be smart enough to protect our children? I think we must be smart enough to do that.

Mr. TONKO. When it comes to smart, incorporating this work with the appropriate agencies—the EPA and the DEC in my home State of New York—there is a situation very close to my district in Hoosick Falls that is going through a similar contaminated water situation critical to their quality of life and their public health.

We need to advance that partnership, that soundness of checks and balances,

that will make certain that every bit of the way it is based on responsibility and professionalism and good faith efforts.

Mr. GARAMENDI. I was just thinking about your community that you mentioned, Albany and the like. I represent the University of California, Davis, in Davis, California. I think they have got maybe 12 wells that provide most of the water. About half of those wells are contaminated. They are building a new water system, and it should go online in the next few months, or maybe a year, or maybe sooner. They are investing. Perhaps they got some of this money from the State revolving fund.

It is an example of a community that wrestled with this for about a decade. They turned out to be smart enough to address it. They did it with their neighboring community of Woodland. A new water system is going into place. They will have safe drinking water.

There are other communities spread throughout California that don't have the same opportunity. It is our task to address this. I think we are smart enough to do so. I think there is enough money in the system to do it.

Mr. TONKO, would you like to do a quick 15 second wrap?

Mr. TONKO. I thank the speaker for the opportunity to share thoughts on the floor here this evening.

Blue infrastructure, let's get it done. Let's provide America one of her core basic needs.

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

#### REPORT ON RESOLUTION PROVIDING FOR CONSIDERATION OF H.R. 3442, DEBT MANAGEMENT AND FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY ACT OF 2015, AND PROVIDING FOR CONSIDERATION OF H.R. 3293, SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH IN THE NATIONAL INTEREST ACT

Mr. SESSIONS (during the Special Order of Mr. GARAMENDI), from the Committee on Rules, submitted a privileged report (Rept. No. 114-420) on the resolution (H. Res. 609) providing for consideration of the bill (H.R. 3442) to provide further means of accountability of the United States debt and promote fiscal responsibility, and providing for consideration of the bill (H.R. 3293) to provide for greater accountability in Federal funding for scientific research, to promote the progress of science in the United States that serves that national interest, which was referred to the House Calendar and ordered to be printed.

#### LEAVE OF ABSENCE

By unanimous consent, leave of absence was granted to:

Mr. HUDSON (at the request of Mr. MCCARTHY) for today on account of illness.

#### ENROLLED BILL SIGNED

Karen L. Haas, Clerk of the House, reported and found truly enrolled a bill of the House of the following title, which was thereupon signed by the Speaker:

H.R. 3033. An act to require the President's annual budget request to Congress each year to include a line item for the Research in Disabilities Education program of the National Science Foundation and to require the National Science Foundation to conduct research on dyslexia.

#### ADJOURNMENT

Mr. TONKO. Mr. Speaker, I move that the House do now adjourn.

The motion was agreed to; accordingly (at 8 o'clock and 18 minutes p.m.), under its previous order, the House adjourned until tomorrow, Wednesday, February 10, 2016, at 10 a.m. for morning-hour debate.

#### EXECUTIVE COMMUNICATIONS, ETC.

Under clause 2 of rule XIV, executive communications were taken from the Speaker's table and referred as follows:

4281. A letter from the Assistant Secretary, Legislative Affairs, Department of State, transmitting the Department's Annual Report of Interdiction of Aircraft Engaged in Illicit Drug Trafficking, pursuant to 22 U.S.C. 2291-4(c); Public Law 103-337, Sec. 1012 (as amended by Public Law 107-108, Sec. 503); (115 Stat. 1405); to the Committee on Foreign Affairs.

4282. A letter from the Assistant Secretary, Legislative Affairs, Department of State, transmitting a certification, Transmittal No.: DDTC 15-129, pursuant to 22 U.S.C. 2776(c)(2)(C); Public Law 90-629, Sec. 36(c) (as added by Public Law 94-329, Sec. 211(a)); (82 Stat. 1326); to the Committee on Foreign Affairs.

4283. A letter from the Secretary, Department of the Treasury, transmitting a six-month periodic report on the national emergency with respect to Ukraine that was declared in Executive Order 13660 of March 6, 2014, pursuant to 50 U.S.C. 1641(c); Public Law 94-412, Sec. 401(c); (90 Stat. 1257) and 50 U.S.C. 1703(c); Public Law 95-223, Sec. 204(c); (91 Stat. 1627); to the Committee on Foreign Affairs.

4284. A letter from the Secretary, Department of the Treasury, transmitting a six-month periodic report on the national emergency with respect to persons undermining democratic processes or institutions in Zimbabwe that was declared in Executive Order 13288 of March 6, 2003, pursuant to 50 U.S.C. 1641(c); Public Law 94-412, Sec. 401(c); (90 Stat. 1257) and 50 U.S.C. 1703(c); Public Law 95-223, Sec. 204(c); (91 Stat. 1627); to the Committee on Foreign Affairs.

4285. A letter from the Secretary, Department of the Interior, transmitting the Annual Operating Plan for Colorado River System Reservoirs for 2016, pursuant to 43 U.S.C. 1552(b); Public Law 90-537, 602(b); (82 Stat. 900) and Public Law 102-575, Sec. 1804(c)(2); (106 Stat. 4671); to the Committee on Natural Resources.

4286. A letter from the Chief, Publications and Regulations Branch, Internal Revenue Service, transmitting the Service's IRB only rule — Permitted disparity in employer-provided contributions or benefits (Rev. Rul. 2016-05) received February 5, 2016, pursuant

to 5 U.S.C. 801(a)(1)(A); Added by Public Law 104-121, Sec. 251; (110 Stat. 868); to the Committee on Ways and Means.

4287. A letter from the Chief, Publications and Regulations Branch, Internal Revenue Service, transmitting the Service's final and temporary regulations — Allocation of Creditable Foreign Taxes [TD 9748] (RIN: 1545-BM57) received February 5, 2016, pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 801(a)(1)(A); Added by Public Law 104-121, Sec. 251; (110 Stat. 868); to the Committee on Ways and Means.

4288. A letter from the Chief, Publications and Regulations Branch, Internal Revenue Service, transmitting the Service's IRB only rule — Expatriate Health Plans Under the Affordable Care Act, Sec. 9010 (Notice 2016-14) received February 5, 2016, pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 801(a)(1)(A); Added by Public Law 104-121, Sec. 251; (110 Stat. 868); jointly to the Committees on Ways and Means, Energy and Commerce, and Education and the Workforce.

#### REPORTS OF COMMITTEES ON PUBLIC BILLS AND RESOLUTIONS

Under clause 2 of rule XIII, reports of committees were delivered to the Clerk for printing and reference to the proper calendar, as follows:

Mr. BISHOP of Utah: Committee on Natural Resources. H.R. 3036. A bill to designate the National September 11 Memorial located at the World Trade Center site in New York City, New York, as a national memorial, and for other purposes, with an amendment (Rept. 114-416). Referred to the Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union.

Mr. BISHOP of Utah: Committee on Natural Resources. H.R. 890. A bill to correct the boundaries of the John H. Chafee Coastal Barrier Resources System Unit P16; with an amendment (Rept. 114-417). Referred to the Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union.

Mr. CHAFFETZ: Committee on Oversight and Government Reform. S. 1698. An act to exclude payments from State eugenics compensation programs from consideration in determining eligibility for, or the amount of, Federal public benefits (Rept. 114-1418). Referred to the Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union.

Mr. CHAFFETZ: Committee on Oversight and Government Reform. H.R. 4180. A bill to improve Federal agency financial and administrative controls and procedures to assess and mitigate fraud risks, and to improve Federal agencies' development and use of data analytics for the purpose of identifying, preventing, and responding to fraud, including improper payments (Rept. 114-419). Referred to the Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union.

Mr. SESSIONS: Committee on Rules. House Resolution 609. Resolution providing for consideration of the bill (H.R. 3442) to provide further means of accountability of the United States debt and promote fiscal responsibility, and providing for consideration of the bill (H.R. 3293) to provide for greater accountability in Federal funding for scientific research, to promote the progress of science in the United States that serves that national interest (Rept. 114-420). Referred to the House Calendar.

#### PUBLIC BILLS AND RESOLUTIONS

Under clause 2 of rule XII, public bills and resolutions of the following titles were introduced and severally referred, as follows:

By Mr. CHABOT (for himself, Ms. SINEMA, Mr. HURT of Virginia, and Mr. TAKAI):

H.R. 4498. A bill to clarify the definition of general solicitation under Federal securities law; to the Committee on Financial Services.

By Mr. MOONEY of West Virginia (for himself, Mr. ROGERS of Kentucky, Ms. KUSTER, Mrs. COMSTOCK, Mr. RYAN of Ohio, Mr. GUNTA, and Mr. LYNCH):

H.R. 4499. A bill to amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act to remove consideration of certain pain-related issues from calculations under the Medicare hospital value-based purchasing program, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Ways and Means.

By Mr. HULTGREN (for himself, Ms. SEWELL of Alabama, and Mr. LUETKEMEYER):

H.R. 4500. A bill to amend the Federal Deposit Insurance Act to permit certain depository institutions to use a short form call report, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Financial Services.

By Mr. SALMON (for himself, Mr. SHERMAN, Mr. ROYCE, Mr. ENGEL, Mr. CONNOLLY, and Mr. KELLY of Pennsylvania):

H.R. 4501. A bill to amend the North Korean Human Rights Act of 2004 to authorize further actions to promote freedom of information and democracy in North Korea, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Foreign Affairs.

By Mrs. BLACK (for herself and Mr. BISHOP of Utah):

H.R. 4502. A bill to amend title 28, United States Code, to allow for a stay of Federal district court actions pending resolution of unsettled and ambiguous questions of State law, and for other purposes; to the Committee on the Judiciary.

By Mr. POE of Texas:

H.R. 4503. A bill to allow for additional markings, including the word "Israel", to be used for country of origin marking requirements for goods made in the geographical areas known as the West Bank and Gaza Strip; to the Committee on Ways and Means.

By Mr. BURGESS:

H.R. 4504. A bill to repeal Federal energy conservation standards, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Energy and Commerce.

By Mr. CICILLINE (for himself, Mr. REED, Mr. RYAN of Ohio, Mr. HANNA, Mr. DOGGETT, Mr. KATKO, Mrs. BUSTOS, and Mr. GARAMENDI):

H.R. 4505. A bill to improve the competitiveness of United States manufacturing by designating and supporting manufacturing communities, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Financial Services.

By Mr. FORTENBERRY:

H.R. 4506. A bill to amend the Public Health Service Act to help health care consumers comparison shop for medical services based on quality and cost; to the Committee on Energy and Commerce.

By Mr. LOWENTHAL (for himself and Ms. McCOLLUM):

H.R. 4507. A bill to establish the Bureau of Land Management Foundation as a charitable, nonprofit corporation, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Natural Resources.

By Mr. NORCROSS (for himself, Mr. PALLONE, and Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN):

H.R. 4508. A bill to provide for increases in the Federal minimum wage and to provide a credit against the employment taxes of certain employers who pay more than the Federal minimum wage; to the Committee on Education and the Workforce, and in addition to the Committee on Ways and Means, for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned.

By Mr. PAYNE:

H.R. 4509. A bill to amend the Homeland Security Act of 2002 to clarify membership of State planning committees or urban area working groups for the Homeland Security Grant Program, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Homeland Security.

By Mr. POLIS (for himself, Mr. LAMBORN, and Mr. TIPTON):

H.R. 4510. A bill to insure adequate use and access to the existing Bolts Ditch headgate and ditch segment within the Holy Cross Wilderness in Eagle County, Colorado, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Natural Resources.

By Mr. SMITH of New Jersey (for himself, Ms. JENKINS of Kansas, and Mr. MACARTHUR):

H.R. 4511. A bill to amend the Veterans' Oral History Project Act to allow the collection of video and audio recordings of biographical histories by immediate family members of members of the Armed Forces who died as a result of their service during a period of war; to the Committee on House Administration.

By Mr. SMITH of Washington:

H.R. 4512. A bill to amend the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985 to eliminate the section 251A sequestrations; to the Committee on the Budget.

By Mr. ZELDIN (for himself and Miss RICE of New York):

H.R. 4513. A bill to authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to make grants to State and local entities to carry out peer-to-peer mental health programs; to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

By Mr. BOUSTANY:

H. Con. Res. 112. Concurrent resolution expressing the sense of Congress opposing the President's proposed \$10 tax on every barrel of oil; to the Committee on Ways and Means.

By Mr. POSEY (for himself and Mr. PIERLUISI):

H. Con. Res. 113. Concurrent resolution authorizing the use of Emancipation Hall in the Capitol Visitor Center for a ceremony to present the Congressional Gold Medal collectively to the 65th Infantry Regiment, known as the "Borinqueneers"; to the Committee on House Administration.

By Mrs. BEATTY (for herself, Mr. BISHOP of Georgia, Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN, Mr. CLAY, Ms. ADAMS, Ms. NORTON, Ms. EDWARDS, Ms. LEE, Mr. HASTINGS, Mr. DAVID SCOTT of Georgia, Mr. RYAN of Ohio, Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON of Texas, Ms. MOORE, Mr. YARMUTH, Mr. RUSH, Mr. BUTTERFIELD, Mr. RANGEL, Mr. ASHFORD, Ms. PLASKETT, Mr. MEEKS, Mr. CLEAVER, Ms. FUDGE, Mr. LEVIN, Mr. HINOJOSA, Ms. BROWN of Florida, Ms. KAPTUR, Ms. JACKSON LEE, Mr. CAPUANO, Mr. COHEN, Mr. GRAYSON, Mr. SEAN PATRICK MALONEY of New York, Mr. JEFFRIES, Mr. LARSON of Connecticut, Mr. CONYERS, Mr. HONDA, Mr. BLUMENAUER, Mr. SERRANO, Mr. VAN HOLLEN, and Mr. STIVERS):

H. Res. 610. A resolution supporting the goals and ideals of Black History Month and honoring the outstanding contributions of African-American Medal of Honor recipients; to the Committee on Armed Services.

#### CONSTITUTIONAL AUTHORITY STATEMENT

Pursuant to clause 7 of rule XII of the Rules of the House of Representatives, the following statements are submitted regarding the specific powers granted to Congress in the Constitu-

tion to enact the accompanying bill or joint resolution.

By Mr. CHABOT:

H.R. 4498.

Congress has the power to enact this legislation pursuant to the following:

Article 1, Section 8, Clause 3 of the United States Constitution

By Mr. MOONEY of West Virginia:

H.R. 4499.

Congress has the power to enact this legislation pursuant to the following:

Article One, Section 8, Clause 18 of the U.S. Constitution: The Congress shall have Power To . . . make all Laws which shall be necessary and proper for carrying in Execution the foregoing Powers, and all other Powers vested by this Constitution in the Government of the United States, or in any Department or Office thereof.

By Mr. HULTGREN:

H.R. 4500.

Congress has the power to enact this legislation pursuant to the following:

Article 1, Sec 8, Clause 3

Article 1, Sec 8, Clause 18

This legislation proposes a necessary and proper reporting requirement for the FDIC to regulate such entities under the Federal Deposit Insurance Act

By Mr. SALMON:

H.R. 4501.

Congress has the power to enact this legislation pursuant to the following:

Article 1, Section 8 of the U.S. Constitution.

Mrs. BLACK:

H.R. 4502.

Congress has the power to enact this legislation pursuant to the following:

Article 1, Section 8, Clause 1 of the United States Constitution.

By Mr. POE of Texas:

H.R. 4503.

Congress has the power to enact this legislation pursuant to the following:

Article 1, Section 8, Clauses 3

By Mr. BURGESS:

H.R. 4504.

Congress has the power to enact this legislation pursuant to the following:

This legislation would repeal existing federal law, which was passed under the claimed constitutional authority of Article I, Section 8, Clause 3, often referred to as the "Commerce Clause."

By Mr. CICILLINE:

H.R. 4505.

Congress has the power to enact this legislation pursuant to the following:

Article 1, Section 8

By Mr. FORTENBERRY:

H.R. 4506.

Congress has the power to enact this legislation pursuant to the following:

Article I, Section 8, Clause 1 of the United States Constitution.

By Mr. LOWENTHAL:

H.R. 4507.

Congress has the power to enact this legislation pursuant to the following:

Article 4, Section 3, Clause 2—"The Property Clause"

Article 1, Section 8 Clause 18—"The Necessary and Proper Clause"

By Mr. NORCROSS:

H.R. 4508.

Congress has the power to enact this legislation pursuant to the following:

Article 1, Section 8

By Mr. PAYNE:

H.R. 4509.

Congress has the power to enact this legislation pursuant to the following:

The U.S. Constitution including Article 1, Section 8.

By Mr. POLIS:

H.R. 4510.

Congress has the power to enact this legislation pursuant to the following:

Article I, Section 8 of the United States Constitution, specifically clause 1 relating to the power of Congress to provide for the general welfare of the United States) and clause 18 (relating to the power to make all laws necessary and proper for carrying out the powers vested in Congress), and Article IV, section 3, clause 2 (relating to the power of Congress to dispose of and make all needful rules and regulations respecting the territory or other property belonging to the United States).

By Mr. SMITH of New Jersey:

H.R. 4511.

Congress has the power to enact this legislation pursuant to the following:

Article 1, Section 8

By Mr. SMITH of Washington:

H.R. 4512.

Congress has the power to enact this legislation pursuant to the following:

Article 1, Section 8, Clause 1, 2, 14, 18

By Mr. ZELDIN:

H.R. 4513.

Congress has the power to enact this legislation pursuant to the following:

Article 1, Section 8 of the United States Constitution.

#### ADDITIONAL SPONSORS

Under clause 7 of rule XII, sponsors were added to public bills—and resolutions, as follows:

H.R. 24: Mrs. HARTZLER, Ms. HERRERA BEUTLER, and Mr. MICA.

H.R. 27: Mr. KING of Iowa, Mr. MASSIE, and Mr. BROOKS of Alabama.

H.R. 135: Mr. WEBER of Texas and Mr. HARRIS.

H.R. 178: Mr. RODNEY DAVIS of Illinois.

H.R. 241: Mr. HARRIS and Mr. ASHFORD.

H.R. 244: Mr. VELA.

H.R. 472: Mr. VELA.

H.R. 494: Mr. STUTZMAN, Mr. ABRAHAM, Mr. SMITH of Texas, Mrs. LUMMIS, Mr. DUNCAN of South Carolina, Mr. BUCK, and Mr. KING of Iowa.

H.R. 541: Mr. ASHFORD.

H.R. 581: Mr. KILDEE.

H.R. 583: Mr. FLORES.

H.R. 662: Mr. MESSER.

H.R. 664: Mr. MOULTON.

H.R. 703: Mr. BARR.

H.R. 775: Mr. GIBSON, Ms. KAPTUR, Ms. BORDALLO, Ms. DEGETTE, Mrs. DAVIS of California, Mr. NADLER, and Mr. CAPUANO.

H.R. 842: Mr. CALVERT.

H.R. 942: Mr. MULVANEY.

H.R. 969: Ms. SPEIER and Mr. PAYNE.

H.R. 1000: Mr. MCGOVERN and Mr. JEFFRIES

H.R. 1062: Mr. BISHOP of Georgia.

H.R. 1089: Mr. HUFFMAN.

H.R. 1095: Mr. DEUTCH and Ms. EDWARDS.

H.R. 1111: Ms. CLARKE of New York.

H.R. 1116: Mr. RODNEY DAVIS of Illinois.

H.R. 1150: Mr. TIPTON.

H.R. 1258: Mr. MEEKS and Mr. JEFFRIES.

H.R. 1274: Ms. BONAMICI.

H.R. 1292: Mr. KIND.

H.R. 1309: Mr. FRANKS of Arizona.

H.R. 1391: Ms. PINGREE and Mrs. BEATTY.

H.R. 1431: Mr. GOSAR.

H.R. 1432: Mr. GOSAR.

H.R. 1453: Mr. BERA.

H.R. 1457: Mr. DEUTCH.

H.R. 1475: Mr. BECERRA and Mr. QUIGLEY.

H.R. 1486: Mr. LUCAS and Mr. AUSTIN SCOTT of Georgia.

H.R. 1548: Mr. PERLMUTTER.

H.R. 1752: Ms. ESHOO.

H.R. 1769: Mr. DAVID SCOTT of Georgia and Mr. PAYNE.

H.R. 1818: Mrs. NAPOLITANO.

H.R. 1887: Mr. BEYER.

H.R. 1942: Mr. CLYBURN and Mr. JEFFRIES.

H.R. 1944: Mr. KING of Iowa.

H.R. 1945: Ms. EDWARDS and Ms. BONAMICI.

H.R. 1995: Mr. ROHRBACHER.

H.R. 2016: Mr. LANGEVIN and Mr. MURPHY of Florida.

H.R. 2114: Mr. RYAN of Ohio.

H.R. 2132: Mr. FITZPATRICK.

H.R. 2167: Ms. ROYBAL-ALLARD.

H.R. 2236: Mr. HASTINGS, Mr. CONNOLLY, Mr. GRAYSON, Ms. JACKSON LEE, Ms. LEE, and Ms. SPEIER.

H.R. 2264: Mr. PIERLUISI, Mr. PRICE of North Carolina, Mr. BEN RAY LUJÁN of New Mexico, Mr. BRADY of Pennsylvania, and Mr. RENACCI.

H.R. 2278: Mr. FLORES and Mr. KING of Iowa.

H.R. 2342: Ms. SCHAKOWSKY, Ms. BORDALLO, and Mrs. DAVIS of California.

H.R. 2355: Mr. NORCROSS.

H.R. 2411: Ms. TITUS.

H.R. 2540: Mr. FRELINGHUYSEN and Mr. ABRAHAM.

H.R. 2613: Mrs. LOWEY.

H.R. 2656: Mr. BLUMENAUER and Ms. CLARK of Massachusetts.

H.R. 2715: Mr. MURPHY of Florida and Mrs. BEATTY.

H.R. 2752: Mr. WALBERG.

H.R. 2858: Mr. MEEKS and Mr. JEFFRIES.

H.R. 2957: Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN.

H.R. 2962: Mrs. BEATTY.

H.R. 3036: Mr. CICILLINE, Mr. SHUSTER, Mr. GRAVES of Missouri, Ms. DUCKWORTH, Mr. HIGGINS, Ms. VELÁZQUEZ, Mr. ROYCE, and Mr. SERRANO.

H.R. 3068: Mr. GALLEGU.

H.R. 3070: Mr. GOSAR.

H.R. 3071: Ms. BROWN of Florida, Mrs. LAWRENCE, Mr. HASTINGS, Mr. ENGEL, Mr. TAKAI, Mrs. KIRKPATRICK, and Mr. PALLONE.

H.R. 3074: Mr. FLEISCHMANN and Mr. COLLINS of Georgia.

H.R. 3135: Mr. GUTHRIE and Mr. MULVANEY.

H.R. 3209: Mrs. NOEM and Mr. REED.

H.R. 3222: Mr. WENSTRUP.

H.R. 3225: Mrs. BUSTOS.

H.R. 3299: Mr. STEWART, Mr. VARGAS, and Mr. BUCSHON.

H.R. 3323: Mrs. DAVIS of California.

H.R. 3390: Mr. COSTELLO of Pennsylvania.

H.R. 3515: Mr. CRAMER.

H.R. 3520: Mr. GENE GREEN of Texas and Mrs. NAPOLITANO.

H.R. 3535: Mr. DELANEY.

H.R. 3541: Mr. CLAY.

H.R. 3546: Mr. ISRAEL, Mr. SIRES, Mrs. LOWEY, Mr. LOWENTHAL, Ms. SPEIER, and Mrs. CAPPS.

H.R. 3582: Mr. HONDA and Mr. RYAN of Ohio.

H.R. 3643: Mr. PETERS.

H.R. 3687: Mr. SMITH of Missouri.

H.R. 3691: Ms. SCHAKOWSKY.

H.R. 3706: Ms. WILSON of Florida and Mr. RODNEY DAVIS of Illinois.

H.R. 3713: Mr. VARGAS.

H.R. 3720: Ms. KAPTUR.

H.R. 3779: Mr. JEFFRIES and Mr. GARRETT.

H.R. 3804: Mr. RIGELL.

H.R. 3808: Mr. ROTHFUS and Mr. WALKER.

H.R. 3870: Mr. COFFMAN.

H.R. 3929: Mrs. WAGNER, Mr. MEEHAN, Mr. JOHNSON of Ohio, Mr. ROYCE, and Mr. COFFMAN.

H.R. 3948: Ms. BORDALLO.

H.R. 3952: Mr. ABRAHAM.

H.R. 3981: Ms. SPEIER.

H.R. 3990: Ms. LOFGREN.

H.R. 3998: Mr. PAYNE.

H.R. 4007: Mr. AUSTIN SCOTT of Georgia.

H.R. 4013: Mr. LEVIN and Ms. SCHAKOWSKY.

H.R. 4029: Mr. GRIFFITH and Mr. COHEN.

H.R. 4043: Mr. MCGOVERN and Mr. POLIS.

H.R. 4061: Ms. SCHAKOWSKY.

H.R. 4062: Ms. MENG.

H.R. 4063: Mrs. NAPOLITANO.

H.R. 4065: Mr. DEUTCH and Mr. HASTINGS.

H.R. 4073: Ms. BORDALLO and Mr. ASHFORD.

H.R. 4083: Mr. CARTER of Georgia.

H.R. 4087: Mr. LOWENTHAL.

H.R. 4144: Mr. JEFFRIES and Mr. TONKO.

H.R. 4177: Mr. CALVERT, Mr. MURPHY of Pennsylvania, and Mr. CRAMER.

H.R. 4185: Mr. COURTNEY and Mrs. KIRKPATRICK.

H.R. 4211: Mr. MEEKS.

H.R. 4229: Mr. LANGEVIN, Ms. KUSTER, and Mr. MEEHAN.

H.R. 4249: Ms. NORTON.

H.R. 4262: Mr. ROUZER.

H.R. 4305: Mr. SCHIFF and Mrs. NAPOLITANO.

H.R. 4333: Mr. FITZPATRICK.

H.R. 4334: Mr. LOWENTHAL.

H.R. 4336: Mrs. ROBY, Mr. TAKANO, Mr. BILIRAKIS, Mr. GARRETT, Ms. SLAUGHTER, Mr. YOHU, and Mr. SESSIONS.

H.R. 4342: Mr. BUCSHON.

H.R. 4348: Mr. MOONEY of West Virginia.

H.R. 4362: Mr. TROTT.

H.R. 4371: Mr. BRAT, Mr. MULVANEY, and Mr. WESTMORELAND.

H.R. 4376: Ms. BONAMICI.

H.R. 4381: Mr. TAKAI and Mr. COLE.

H.R. 4386: Ms. MENG, Mr. SARBANES, and Mr. POLLS.

H.R. 4396: Mr. LOEBSACK, Mr. TONKO, Ms. CLARKE of New York, Mr. BEN RAY LUJÁN of New Mexico, Mr. ASHFORD, Ms. MATSUI, and Mr. KENNEDY.

H.R. 4400: Mr. ROSS, Mr. MEEKS and Mr. PAYNE.

H.R. 4404: Mr. LANCE.

H.R. 4406: Mr. SMITH of New Jersey.

H.R. 4410: Mr. HASTINGS.

H.R. 4420: Mr. ROKITA, Mr. RUSSELL, and Mr. MICA.

H.R. 4428: Mr. GRAVES of Louisiana.

H.R. 4438: Mr. RUSH and Mr. RANGEL.

H.R. 4442: Mr. BLUMENAUER, Ms. MATSUI, Ms. GABBARD, and Mr. JOHNSON of Ohio.

H.R. 4443: Mr. RIBBLE.

H.R. 4461: Mr. LOUDERMILK, Mr. SCHWEIKERT, Mr. BRIDENSTINE, and Mr. GOODLATTE.

H.R. 4462: Mr. ISRAEL, Mr. NOLAN, Mr. CONNOLLY, and Ms. WILSON of Florida.

H.R. 4470: Ms. KAPTUR, Mrs. KIRKPATRICK, Mr. VARGAS, Mr. HUFFMAN, Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN, Mr. VAN HOLLEN, Ms. NORTON, Ms. JACKSON LEE, Mr. CROWLEY, Ms. DUCKWORTH, Mr. DANNY K. DAVIS of Illinois, Mr. CASTRO of Texas, Mr. GARAMENDI, Mr. COLLINS of New York, Mr. RANGEL, Mrs. BEATTY, Ms. LEE, Mr. QUIGLEY, Mr. GRIFFITH, Ms. SCHAKOWSKY, Mr. GALLEGU, Ms. HAHN, Mr. THOMPSON of California, Mr. PETERS, Mr. COURTNEY, Ms. MATSUI, Mr. NOLAN, Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON of Texas, Mr. SWALWELL of California, Mr. BRENDAN F. BOYLE of Pennsylvania, Mr. COHEN, Ms. BASS, Mr. CUMMINGS, Mr. GENE GREEN of Texas, Mr. DOLD, Mr. WELCH, Ms. ESTY, Ms. PLASKETT, Mr. ISRAEL, Mr. GUTIÉRREZ, Mr. SARBANES, Mr. DESAULNIER, Mr. SCHIFF, Mr. GIBSON, Ms. MENG, Mr. SEAN PATRICK MALONEY of New York, Mr. BLUMENAUER, Mr. RICHMOND, Mr. SHERMAN, Mr. BUTTERFIELD, Mr. POCAN, Mr. CARTWRIGHT, Mr. HONDA, and Ms. BONAMICI.

H.R. 4474: Mr. CRAMER.

H.R. 4476: Mr. DESANTIS.

H.R. 4479: Mr. TED LIEU of California, Mr. LEVIN, Mrs. DINGELL, Mr. CROWLEY, Ms. JACKSON LEE, Mr. ISRAEL, Mr. BUTTERFIELD, Mr. RANGEL, Ms. LEE, Mr. QUIGLEY, Ms. HAHN, Mrs. KIRKPATRICK, Mr. O'ROURKE, Mr. SCHIFF, Ms. BASS, Mr. DANNY K. DAVIS of Illinois, Mr. CÁRDENAS, and Mr. GUTIÉRREZ.

H.R. 4482: Mr. CULBERSON.

H.R. 4490: Ms. HAHN and Ms. JACKSON LEE.

H. J. Res. 55: Mr. ROKITA.

H. J. Res. 74: Mr. BUCSHON.

H. Con. Res. 75: Mr. BRIDENSTINE, Mr. CARTER of Texas, Mr. MARCHANT, Mrs. WALORSKI, Mr. HURT of Virginia, and Mr. CHAFFETZ.

H. Res. 12: Mr. CALVERT and Mr. SHIMKUS.  
H. Res. 14: Mr. TED LIEU of California.  
H. Res. 148: Mr. MURPHY of Florida, Mr. BILIRAKIS, Ms. MENG, Mr. HASTINGS, Ms. FRANKEL of Florida, Mr. WEBER of Texas, Mr. MEADOWS, Mr. MICA, Mr. CRENSHAW, Mr. GRAYSON, Mr. CURBELO of Florida, Mr. CICILLINE, Mr. VARGAS, Mr. SCHWEIKERT, Mr. ISRAEL, Mr. VAN HOLLEN, Mr. HIGGINS, Mr. SIRES, Ms. CASTOR of Florida, Mr. TROTT, and Mr. BRENDAN F. BOYLE of Pennsylvania.  
H. Res. 266: Mr. CRAMER.  
H. Res. 509: Mr. CHABOT and Mr. HASTINGS.  
H. Res. 540: Mr. BLUMENAUER, Mr. BEYER, and Mr. MCGOVERN.  
H. Res. 552: Mr. PETERS.  
H. Res. 567: Mr. BISHOP of Michigan and Mr. DONOVAN.  
H. Res. 591: Mrs. MILLER of Michigan, Mr. KEATING, Mr. NUNES, Mr. BENISHEK, Ms. PINGREE, Ms. KUSTER, Mr. MESSER, Ms. MICHELLE LUJAN GRISHAM of New Mexico, Mr. WALZ, Mr. GRIFFITH, Mr. LUETKEMEYER, Mrs. HARTZLER, Mr. THOMPSON of California, Mrs. MCMORRIS RODGERS, Mr. BARR, Mr. WELCH, Ms. DEGETTE, Mr. CRAMER, Mr. BISHOP of Utah, and Mr. LOBIONDO.