

goals we must, among other things, improve the outreach capabilities and capacities of the Department of Veterans Affairs while also improving its coordination with state, territorial and local authorities. This will help greatly in our ongoing efforts to disseminate information regarding veterans programs and services and also help improve the quality of claims for benefits submitted by our veterans.

I remain committed to facilitating communication between federal authorities, veteran service organizations, and veterans on Guam. We have achieved some success in this regard. But more must be done. I am routinely informed by federal officials that the quality of claims received from Guam veterans, in particular, needs to be improved. Efforts to improve and enhance outreach, communication, and information sharing between federal and local officials and veterans embodied in this bill will help the situation on Guam. But I also want to take this opportunity to again urge the veterans service organizations and veterans themselves to be vigorous and proactive in seeking out information and training on veterans programs and benefit claims submissions. Many veterans already are, and in many ways, we are witnesses to veterans helping veterans. Continued information sharing and collaboration among and within the greater veterans community across the country will continue to result in stronger programs and services for them.

This legislation is timely and important. On Guam, indeed across the country, our population of veterans grows each month. We have a moral obligation to serve, in the best way possible, those who have served to protect us and to defend our freedom and liberty. Support for this legislation is one way to help fulfill that obligation. I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting H.R. 67.

Mr. REICHERT. Mr. Speaker, as a former member of the Air Force Reserve, I am pleased to rise in support of this important veterans outreach measure. We must continue to ensure that all of our veterans are aware of and receive the benefits that they have earned and deserve. These grants will help our states connect veterans with the many benefits for which they are eligible but may be unaware are available to them.

But it is not just our states' responsibility to conduct this outreach, and I encourage all of my colleagues in the House to use the privilege of our offices to help veterans obtain needed benefits and services. In March, I held a Veterans' Resource Fair in my district. I brought 45 service providers together under one roof to help more than 350 veterans register for benefits, find jobs, and resolve pressing case work issues. I will hold another in just a few months time. My office stands ready to assist any one of you in conducting a similar event for the veterans in your district.

We must work to support the men and women who made individual sacrifices to preserve our freedom not just on Memorial Day, but on all days. I urge my colleagues to pass this bill, and I hope that we will continue to join together to promote and protect meaningful benefits for our veterans. I yield back.

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

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER) that the House suspend the

rules and pass the bill, H.R. 67, 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. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

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

ESTABLISHMENT OF NATIONAL CEMETERY IN SOUTHERN COLORADO REGION

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 1660) to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a national cemetery for veterans in the southern Colorado region, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 1660

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

SECTION 1. ESTABLISHMENT OF NATIONAL CEMETERY IN SOUTHERN COLORADO REGION.

(a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall establish, in accordance with chapter 24 of title 38, United States Code, a national cemetery in El Paso County, Colorado, to serve the needs of veterans and their families in the southern Colorado region.

(b) CONSULTATION IN SELECTION OF SITE.—Before selecting the site for the national cemetery established under subsection (a), the Secretary shall consult with—

(1) appropriate officials of the State of Colorado and local officials in the southern Colorado region; and

(2) appropriate officials of the United States, including the Administrator of General Services, with respect to land belonging to the United States in El Paso County, Colorado, that would be suitable to establish the national cemetery under subsection (a).

(c) AUTHORITY TO ACCEPT DONATION OF PARCEL OF LAND.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs may accept on behalf of the United States the gift of an appropriate parcel of real property. The Secretary shall have administrative jurisdiction over such parcel of real property, and shall use such parcel to establish the national cemetery under subsection (a).

(2) INCOME TAX TREATMENT OF GIFT.—For purposes of Federal income, estate, and gift taxes, the real property accepted under paragraph (1) shall be considered as a gift to the United States.

(d) REPORT.—As soon as practicable after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall submit to Congress a report on the establishment of the national cemetery under subsection (a). The report shall set forth a schedule for such establishment and an estimate of the costs associated with such establishment.

(e) RELATIONSHIP TO CONSTRUCTION AND FIVE YEAR CAPITAL PLAN.—The requirement to establish a national cemetery under subsection (a) shall be added to the current list of priority projects, but should not take priority over existing projects listed on the National Cemetery Administration's construc-

tion and five-year capital plan for fiscal year 2008.

(f) SOUTHERN COLORADO REGION DEFINED.—In this Act, the term "southern Colorado region" means the geographic region consisting of the following Colorado counties:

- (1) El Paso.
- (2) Pueblo.
- (3) Teller.
- (4) Fremont.
- (5) Las Animas.
- (6) Huerfano.
- (7) Custer.
- (8) Costilla.
- (9) Alamosa.
- (10) Saguache.
- (11) Conejos.
- (12) Mineral.
- (13) Archuleta.
- (14) Hinsdale.
- (15) Gunnison.
- (16) Pitkin.
- (17) La Plata.
- (18) Montezuma.
- (19) San Juan.
- (20) Ouray.
- (21) San Miguel.
- (22) Dolores.
- (23) Montrose.
- (24) Delta.
- (25) Mesa.
- (26) Crowley.
- (27) Kiowa.
- (28) Bent.
- (29) Baca.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER) and the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. LAMBORN) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California.

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

I am pleased to bring to the floor a bipartisan bill authored by Congressman SALAZAR of Colorado with Congressman LAMBORN of Colorado. It establishes a veterans cemetery in El Paso County, Colorado.

Southern Colorado, which includes El Paso, Colorado, and the city of Colorado Springs, has the second highest concentration of veterans living in the United States. Currently those veterans and their families who wish either to visit a veterans cemetery or have their loved ones interred must travel into the Denver metropolitan area to Fort Logan National Cemetery.

Not only is this an undue burden, but the Fort Logan cemetery is running out of room. To alleviate this problem, H.R. 1660 directs the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a national cemetery for veterans in El Paso County, Colorado. This was a fitting tribute to those Americans who have served our Nation with honor. The veterans national cemeteries of the United States demonstrate the desire of a grateful Nation to appropriately commemorate those who have served in the Armed Forces.

Since 1862, close to 3 million burials have been made in the VA national cemeteries. The National Cemetery Administration of the Department of Veterans Affairs manages 125 of these cemeteries nationwide for our veterans. Of these, 58 of them are no longer accepting interments. Thus, the

need to build new cemeteries is quite urgent.

As we lose more and more of our greatest generation of veterans and face the increasing prospects of additional fatalities of Iraq, this country, at the very least, needs to ensure that veterans are provided a dignified, accessible and well-maintained final resting spot. This bill would go a long way in making that happen.

It is supported by the Military Order of the Purple Heart, American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Disabled American Veterans and Paralyzed Veterans of America.

I was proud to see the bipartisan approach taken by two members of our committee, Mr. SALAZAR and Mr. LAMBORN, to make sure that this bill got through the committee. They both worked cooperatively and tirelessly to get this bill to the floor today.

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

Mr. LAMBORN. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 1660, and I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I strongly support this bill. I would like to thank both Ranking Member BUYER and Chairman FILNER for their work on this bill. I would also like to thank Mr. HALL, chairman of the DAMA subcommittee, and Mr. SALAZAR for their leadership on H.R. 1660 as well.

This bill would authorize the Secretary to build a national cemetery to serve the needs of the veterans and families in southern Colorado. As amended by my own amendment, this bill would place the national cemetery in El Paso County, Colorado. El Paso County is the largest county in Colorado and is home to approximately 100,000 veterans. Southern Colorado is home to more than 150,000 veterans, and that population is expanding rapidly.

With the establishment of this new national cemetery, families will have a much shorter and easier commute to visit the final resting place of their loved ones since they will no longer need to travel to Fort Logan National Cemetery in Denver.

I understand that this cemetery is not included in the Department of Veterans Affairs 5-year plan, and I look forward to working with our committee's distinguished ranking member, chairman and other members of the committee to ensure that we serve the needs of all veterans and their families as we develop these national shrines.

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

□ 1515

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I yield to the coauthor of the bill, Mr. SALAZAR of Colorado, as much time as he may consume.

Mr. SALAZAR. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding. I thank the chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee for his strong support of veterans, not only now, but during his tenure in the U.S. Congress.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to bring forward this legislation directing the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a national cemetery for veterans and their families in the Southern Colorado region. I would like to thank Mr. LAMBORN from Colorado who, together, we have worked in a bipartisan effort and the bipartisan spirit of the Veterans' Affairs Committee trying to make sure that the issue is resolved.

As you know, Fort Logan is the only cemetery that we have in Colorado that will accept veterans, and it is due to be filled. It is strange to say, but it has got a life expectancy of 10 years. I think it is important that we begin working on this issue right now. I would like to especially thank Chairman FILNER for allowing us to bring this forward.

The National Cemeteries of the United States offer testimony to the desire of a grateful Nation to commemorate the Americans who have served our Nation in the Armed Forces.

Since 1862, more than 3 million burials have been made in VA national cemeteries. Of the 120 cemeteries, 58 of them are no longer accepting burials, and many are out of reach and geographically inconvenient for our veterans and their families. Southern Colorado, including El Paso County and the city of Colorado Springs, has one of the highest concentrations of veterans living in the United States. For that reason, Mr. Speaker, Congressman LAMBORN and myself worked together in this bipartisan spirit to try to make sure that for the veterans coming back from this war, for the veterans that have served in Colorado, and for veterans that want to be buried in Colorado in 10 years, that there will be adequate space for them to be buried in Colorado. Currently, those veterans, their aging widows, and their families must sometimes travel hours into the highly congested area of Denver to Fort Logan National Cemetery, which is quickly running out of room.

The Colorado congressional delegation has worked in a bipartisan manner to create legislation that will benefit all veterans of this great State, and I would like to thank my good friends, Mr. UDALL and Mr. PERLMUTTER of Colorado, for taking time to speak on this important bill. I think a national cemetery in Southern Colorado will serve as a fitting tribute and a final resting place to those who have served our Nation with honor.

I certainly urge a "yes" vote on H.R. 1660. But before I yield back, I want to remind the ranking member of the Veterans' Affairs Committee that on his question on Jerry Murphy, Jerry Murphy died on Good Friday. Jerry Murphy was born in Pueblo, Colorado. He attended college at Adams State College in Durango and Western State College, and it was a week after we came back that we gave a fitting tribute to Jerry Murphy on this House floor.

So he is remembered, Mr. Ranking Member, and I believe that the process

takes a little bit of time before we can get things moving on the floor, but certainly he is not forgotten.

Mr. LAMBORN. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the gentleman from Colorado for his good work, for his words just now, and I wholeheartedly support him and his work on this bill. We have worked together in a bipartisan spirit, and I thank him for that.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the ranking member from Indiana (Mr. BUYER) such time as he may consume.

Mr. BUYER. Mr. Speaker, this bill would authorize the VA Secretary to build a national cemetery in Southern Colorado.

Providing our veterans with a place of honor of repose is one of the most sacred missions of the veterans committee, and we have accorded this mission our support over the years.

The National Cemetery Administration's record of satisfaction among the families and its beneficiaries is the envy of the Federal Government, a reflection of the sound administration, the strong congressional support, free of political influence. Yet I have some concerns about the bill.

The Department of Veterans Affairs has a well-established and proven method that uses distance and demographics to select cemetery sites. Congress has long deferred to that process, which is essentially free from this institution's political pressures. Since 1999, Congress has authorized 12 new national cemeteries, all of which went through this process. In the absence of political pressures, the Nation has benefited with a rational distribution of cemeteries that serve veterans their families, and the Nation very well.

This region of Colorado is not on any of the VA's strategic plans for new cemeteries in the next 20 years, nor was it identified by an independent 2002 Logistics Management Institute study that listed the areas with the greatest need for a national cemetery all the way to the year 2030.

Nonetheless, we have before us a bill to develop a cemetery in Southern Colorado, which has not been identified as a priority in any of these studies. Therefore, I ask the chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee if you have now, since having brought this bill to the floor, developed criteria with regard to the development of VA national cemeteries whereby Members will know what to follow when they file bills before your committee? I yield to the gentleman.

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, we have criteria, as the gentleman stated, in the VA; and, if the need requires, we will establish the criteria for Members' requests.

Mr. BUYER. Reclaiming my time. I would like to work with the chairman, because I believe in that answer we do not have the criteria at this moment, and I think all the Members in this body need to know what the criteria would be with regard to placing a VA national cemetery. We have given such

deference to the executive branch. And I know that both gentlemen from Colorado brought up the issue to us about rural areas in the country and felt that, given the way that these studies were structured, that this VA cemetery could never be built. So given that deference, the chairman was very responsive to you.

We took up an amendment by Mr. STEARNS, which both of the gentlemen from Colorado had agreed to, whereby we did not want this to displace any of the other present cemeteries in the present priority.

I respect the gentleman, and I want to work with the chairman on coming up with criteria.

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

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I yield to another gentleman from Colorado (Mr. PERLMUTTER) such time as he may consume.

Mr. PERLMUTTER. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman, and I thank my colleagues from Colorado, Mr. SALAZAR and Mr. LAMBORN, for bringing this legislation to the floor.

As we approach Memorial Day, let us remember those who have fallen fighting for our country. And this is one way to recognize our service men's and women's sacrifices, by establishing a new VA cemetery in El Paso County. Although I don't represent that area, it is south of where I live, this is an area of our State that needs a cemetery of this kind.

Memorial Day is usually marked by parades, speeches, and the decoration of graves; but for the people of Southern Colorado, this means traveling up to Fort Logan which is in the Denver area. With the passage of this bill, the 150,000 veterans residing in Southern Colorado will have their own VA cemetery to honor and decorate.

I urge my colleagues to vote "yes" on this bill.

Mr. UDALL of Colorado. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of this legislation to establish a national cemetery for veterans in southern Colorado, and I congratulate my colleague JOHN SALAZAR for his work on this bill.

I also want to recognize the work of my former colleague Joel Hefley and my current colleague DOUG LAMBORN on this issue. Establishing a national veterans cemetery in southern Colorado has been and continues to be a goal shared by the entire Colorado delegation.

For over 8 years, it has also been a goal of the Pikes Peak Veterans Cemetery Committee. And it has been a goal of the Department of Colorado Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Colorado chapters of the American Legion, the Paralyzed Veterans of America, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and the Association for Service Disabled Veterans. So many people have worked tirelessly to build support for this cemetery, and I hope they are pleased today that we are now one step closer to making it a reality.

This is a particularly timely bill to consider today, as we approach another Memorial Day and as we continue to send our troops to Iraq and Afghanistan. We remember the sacrifices

that our veterans have made and the sacrifices that our men and women in uniform continue to make today to protect our freedom.

And at a time when our country is divided over the war in Iraq, it's even more important that we honor the service of those who have given their lives for this country and of the many veterans still among us.

Of course, it isn't enough just to remember—we must provide our troops and veterans with the care and support they have been promised. And we must provide them with a resting place within or as close as possible to their own communities.

With a growing military retiree and veterans population in southern Colorado and particularly El Paso County—and with Denver's Fort Logan cemetery rapidly filling up its burial spaces—it makes sense to provide for the future even as we ensure that southern Colorado's veterans receive the recognition they deserve.

A National Veterans Cemetery in El Paso County will also serve as an important symbol for those in the military community who have given so much to their country. Mr. Speaker, this is an important piece of legislation, and I urge its passage.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 1660, as amended.

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

There was no objection.

Mr. FILNER. I urge my colleagues to support this bill, and yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 1660, 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.

RETURNING SERVICEMEMBER VA HEALTHCARE INSURANCE ACT OF 2007

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 612) to amend title 38, United States Code, to extend the period of eligibility for health care for combat service in the Persian Gulf War or future hostilities from two years to five years after discharge or release, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 612

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 "Returning Servicemember VA Healthcare Insurance Act of 2007".

SEC. 2. EXTENSION OF PERIOD OF ELIGIBILITY FOR HEALTH CARE FOR COMBAT SERVICE IN THE PERSIAN GULF WAR OR FUTURE HOSTILITIES.

Subparagraph (C) of section 1710(e)(3) of title 38, United States Code, is amended to read as follows:

"(C) in the case of care for a veteran described in paragraph (1)(D) who—

"(i) is discharged or released from the active military, naval, or air service after the date that is five years before the date of the enactment of the Returning Servicemember VA Healthcare Insurance Act of 2007, after a period of five years beginning on the date of such discharge or release; or

"(ii) is so discharged or released more than five years before the date of the enactment of the Returning Servicemember VA Healthcare Insurance Act of 2007 and who did not enroll in the patient enrollment system under section 1705 of this title before such date, after a period of three years beginning on the date of the enactment of such Act; and".

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER) and the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. BUYER) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California.

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

Mr. Speaker, not all of the returning veterans from the OEF/OIF suffer from obvious wounds. Those who suffer from an external injury are readily identified and receive immediate care for that injury. However, many of our returning veterans, and on this I include, Mr. Speaker, Guard and Reserve units who have been ordered to combat, are coming back with injuries that are not external. They are hidden wounds of the war, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, PTSD, forms of brain injury, which may not be evident without further diagnosis, which may not be evident to the soldier or to the doctor looking at him.

Unlike the physical wounds, mental wounds are not easily identified and may go undetected. PTSD is a mental health condition that is triggered by a traumatic event which causes an intense fear and/or helplessness. Some of the symptoms for this condition include reexperiencing the trauma through nightmares, obsessive thoughts, flashbacks. We know that this condition may not reveal itself for many months or maybe for years after experiencing the event.

We listened to veterans, veteran service organizations, family members, and we heard them say that their returning veterans needed more time to access the VA health care system when they came home from war.

Conditions like PTSD and traumatic brain injury are the driving force behind this bill, the Returning Servicemember VA Healthcare Insurance Act of 2007. It extends from 2 years to 5 years following discharge or release the eligibility period for veterans. And, as I said, we include Guard and Reserve units all those who served in combat during or after the Persian Gulf War are eligible to receive hospital care,