

floor the sacrifice of those who died or were injured that day. Previous resolutions were passed in 1996, 2001 and 2005.

I note these milestones because they should remind us of important facts. One fact is that the global war on terrorism did not begin on September 11, 2001. It was well before that date that terrorists set out to kill and injure Americans on a large scale. We must never forget, and must be ever vigilant today against the continuing commitment of terrorists to seriously damage America and its interests whenever and wherever they can.

Another fact is that the 19 Air Force personnel who died at Khobar Towers in June, 1996, were defending our freedom and the national security interests of the United States. The resolution today honors them for that sacrifice.

The resolution also serves as a way to extend our continued sympathy to their families.

So, Mr. Speaker, I call upon all Americans to pause and honor the service and sacrifice of those not only 19 Americans who died in the Khobar Towers bombing, but also those who served and continue to serve in the defense of our Nation and its values. I urge my colleagues to support this most worthy resolution.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MILLER) for that time which he might consume.

Mr. MILLER of Florida. I thank the gentleman for yielding.

Mr. Speaker, I do rise today in honor of H. Con. Res. 32, which does honor the members of the United States Air Force that were killed on the 25th of June, 1996 in the Khobar Towers in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia.

This is the 12th anniversary of the terrorist bombing which killed 19 members of the U.S. Air Force and injured over 300 Americans. On that day in 1996, a truck bomb exploded outside the fence around the Khobar Towers compound.

□ 1215

The bomb, estimated at more than 3,000 pounds, detonated about 85 feet from a residential housing unit where U.S. troops were, killing 19 United States Air Force servicemen and wounding hundreds of other Americans. The force of that explosion destroyed or damaged six high-rise apartment buildings and shattered windows throughout the entire residential compound.

Today we honor the 19 airmen who gave their lives in the service of this great Nation. This Congress joins me in paying tribute to those men, who are individually recognized in H. Con. Res. 32.

It's important to note that 12 of the 19 men killed in the attack were based at Eglin Air Force Base in Florida's First District. Several of the airmen, along with their families, were constituents. These brave men, like the men and women currently serving in

our military today, were on freedom's watch, prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice in defense of our Nation. As we approach Memorial Day, it's only fitting that we remember the 19 airmen killed at Khobar Towers as well as the many brave men and women who gave their lives for our freedom and our security. It's my sincere hope that all Americans will give pause and honor these heroes and others for their sacrifice.

As we look back to 12 years ago, we know that Khobar Towers and the bombing there was a precursor to the terrorist attacks on the USS *Cole*; the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center; and the current global war on terrorism that we fight in Iraq and Afghanistan. No matter where our troops are stationed, we recognize that they are prepared to defend our security, American values, and the American way of life. It's my hope that we can prevent future attacks like the one at Khobar Towers as we aggressively fight terrorism all around the globe.

I want to personally express my deepest appreciation to the families of these heroes who were killed at Khobar Towers. We can never undo the tragedy that they have lived. We can never ease the pain, and I know it's with each of them each and every day. But I hope, and I know that my colleagues join me in this hope, that with the adoption of this resolution, they will take from our actions some solace in the fact that we do not forget those contributions and those sacrifices of their loved ones. They were much more than airmen. They were sons, fathers, brothers, and they are loved ones.

Mr. Speaker, our action on this resolution sends a message to the families of those who died, to our Nation, and to the rest of the world, that we honor the sacrifices of these 19 airmen and the families they left behind. They served with the highest distinction and professionalism which is indicative of the United States military. No one could have served better or given more.

I urge all of my colleagues to join me and the 50 cosponsors in support of this resolution.

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

Mrs. DAVIS of California. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank Mr. MILLER for bringing this resolution forward in honoring the brave men killed in the Khobar Towers bombing.

Mr. BUYER. Mr. Speaker, today I rise in support of H. Con. Res. 32 to honor the 19 airmen that were killed by a cowardly act of terrorism while serving our Nation on June 25, 1996, at Khobar Towers in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia.

June 1996, Mr. Speaker. That is more than 5 years before many people believe the global war on terror began. But the terrible attack on our Nation on September 11, 2001, was by no means the first attack against Americans in the global war on terror. These 19 Americans

were killed, and 300 others injured, by a bomb created at the hands of vicious and deceitful extremists who oppose the principles that we all share and that these airmen were helping defend.

These American warriors were in Saudi Arabia to aid in preserving freedom for our friends in Kuwait. They were willing to risk their lives on the other side of the world, far away from their families, far from home, to support a mission to oppose tyranny. We must always remember the price these Americans paid. We must always honor their sacrifice for the freedom of others. Today, I pay tribute to these American airmen. They were brothers, fathers, and sons, and I know their families still mourn their loss. Nothing will ever replace the precious life of a lost loved one, but I offer their families my prayers and sympathy.

These 19 American airmen represent the essence of what makes our Nation great. Their selfless service and the sacrifice that they made in the name of liberty is one that we shall forever be in their debt. We should never let them be forgotten.

Mr. WILSON of South Carolina. Mr. Speaker, I wish to take this opportunity to state my strong support for this legislation. I am grateful to my colleague Representative JEFF MILLER for introducing this bill.

The terrorist bombing of the Khobar Towers in 1996 was a vicious attack upon the United States and our allies in Saudi Arabia. It took the lives of 19 brave U.S. servicemembers and hundreds of civilians were injured. This attack was and remains a clear example of the type of enemy we face in the Global War on Terrorism. And so, it is incumbent upon us all to honor the lives of those lost as we comfort the families that were forever changed by this horrible event.

As we pause to remember their lives and their sacrifice, we should recommit ourselves to doing all we can to protect Americans—those serving overseas and those here at home. We must be ever vigilant of the enemies we face and resolve to do all that is necessary to defeat terrorism wherever it may be.

Mrs. DAVIS of California. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SERRANO). The question is on the motion offered by the gentlewoman from California (Mrs. DAVIS) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the concurrent resolution, H. Con. Res. 32, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the concurrent resolution, as amended, was agreed to.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

#### ESTABLISHING POSITION OF DIRECTOR OF PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT SERVICES

Mr. HARE. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 2790) to amend title 38, United States Code, to establish the position of Director of Physician Assistant Services within the office of the Under

Secretary of Veterans Affairs for Health, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 2790

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

**SECTION 1. ESTABLISHMENT OF DIRECTOR OF PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT SERVICES AT VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.**

(a) *IN GENERAL.*—Section 7306(a) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by striking paragraph (9) and inserting the following:

“(9) The Director of Physician Assistant Services, who shall be a qualified physician assistant who shall report to the Under Secretary for Health on all matters relating to the education and training, employment, appropriate utilization, and optimal participation of physician assistants within the programs and initiatives of the Administration. The Director of Physician Assistant Services shall serve in a full-time capacity at the Central Office of the Department.”.

(b) *DEADLINE FOR IMPLEMENTATION.*—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall ensure that an individual is serving as the Director of Physician Assistant Services under section 7306(a)(9) of title 38, United States Code, as added by subsection (a), by not later than 120 days after the date of the enactment of this Act.

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

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Illinois.

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

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that the House today is considering H.R. 2790, a bill I authored to elevate the current position of Physician Assistant Advisor to a full-time Director of Physician Assistant Services in the VA Central Office.

I would like to thank my good friend Representative JERRY MORAN for leading the effort with me, as well as Chairman FILNER and Ranking Member BUYER for their cosponsorship of this legislation. I'd also like to acknowledge all of my colleagues on the Veterans' Affairs Committee who joined as cosponsors and the American Academy of Physician Assistants for their tireless work on this bill.

Mr. Speaker, there are currently 1,600 physician assistants serving the Veterans' Health Administration, including many veterans, National Guard, and Reservists. PAs are a critical component of the health care delivery system and are responsible for roughly one-quarter of all primary care patients seen in the VHA.

The change from the current role of PA Advisor, who works part time and is based in the field, to a full-time Director is necessary in order to ensure that PAs are being appropriately and effectively utilized throughout the VHA. Right now the PA Advisor is being left out of strategic planning discussions and long-term staffing narratives, leaving PAs with no voice and no advocate. Additionally, there is a

severe disparity throughout the VA facilities in how PAs are being used, what medical services they can perform, and even whether facilities can hire physician assistants. Most importantly, the unnecessary restrictions and widespread confusion are causing the VA to miss a clear opportunity to improve the quality of health care for our veterans.

One of the biggest challenges facing current and future PAs in the VA system is their exclusion from any recruitment and retention efforts or benefits. The VA designates certain positions, such as physicians and nurses, as critical occupations, which are given priority in loan repayment and scholarship programs. Since PAs are not designated as a critical occupation, they are excluded from these moneys, despite the fact that the VA has determined that physician assistants and nurse practitioners are functionally interchangeable and equal in the work that they perform. The underutilization, the lack of recruitment and retention efforts, and pay disparity are all leading PAs to not consider the VHA as a viable employment option.

Physician assistants are very important for veterans living in rural areas, like a large portion of my congressional district. Veterans that live in underserved areas made the same sacrifices as their urban and suburban counterparts. With a disproportionate number of these brave men and women being cared for by PAs, it is critical that we establish a system that will best serve their needs so as not to compromise care to our veterans. Considering the fact that nearly 40 percent of all VA PAs are projected to retire in the next 5 years, the VA is in danger of losing its physician assistants workforce unless some attention is paid to this critical group.

This bill will allow the Director of Physician Assistant Services to become an integral component within the VA system to proactively solve the many issues facing PAs and give PAs a fair and long overdue voice.

Mr. Speaker, this commonsense legislation promotes quality medical care for our veterans. I urge my colleagues to support it.

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

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

As Memorial Day approaches, it's appropriate that we take time this week to consider the next 10 bills that are on the suspension calendar. In doing so, we must be mindful of the heavy sacrifices made by the men and the women of our Armed Forces. It is their sacrifices that allow us to enjoy our American way of life and time-honored traditions like Memorial Day.

For many of us, Memorial Day will be marked with a solemn commemoration at a veterans' cemetery or a befitting memorial. I appreciate Chairman FILNER's expediting these bills through

the committee process to bring them to the floor in a timely fashion.

Mr. Speaker, I rise this afternoon in support of H.R. 2790, as amended, a bill to establish the position of Director or Physician Assistant Services within the office of the Under Secretary of Veterans Affairs for Health. I commend my colleagues Mr. HARE and Mr. MORAN for introducing this bill.

There is a strong relationship between military service and the physician assistant profession. In 1965 Duke University established the first PA education program to capture the knowledge of military medical corpsmen that served in Vietnam and transition their experience into the civilian health care system. Today the VA is the largest employer of physician assistants, and they play a central role in enhancing veterans' access to health care, and it's important for VA to continue to advance the utilization of these health care providers.

Establishing this office would be beneficial to veterans. A full-time Director would ensure PAs are used appropriately to provide veterans the health care that they deserve. I urge my colleagues to support this bill.

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

Mr. HARE. Mr. Speaker, I would like to recognize my friend from New Hampshire (Ms. SHEA-PORTER) for such time as she may consume.

Ms. SHEA-PORTER. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the sponsor of this legislation, the gentleman from Illinois, PHIL HARE, who's a leader and a tireless advocate for veterans.

This Memorial Day we honor the memory of so many who have served this Nation. In honor of their memory, it's fitting that we consider legislation today that will help deliver the benefits that were promised to our veterans and which they earned by their selfless service to our Nation.

The bill before us, H.R. 2790, will create the position of Director of Physician Assistant Services in the VA to manage the education, training, and utilization of physician assistants within the Veterans Health Administration.

PAs play an important part in the health care of our veterans, providing a whole range of diagnostic and therapeutic services, administering physicals, taking patient histories, diagnosing and treating patients. The first PAs were former corpsmen who had served in Vietnam. Their extensive medical training made them ideal candidates for further medical education and the perfect fit for the continuing medical care of their fellow veterans. Since the PA Advisor position was created in the VA in 2000, their ranks have grown, and today almost 1,600 PAs serve in the VA.

PAs go through a very vigorous 2-year-long certification program, and by creating a Director of Physician Assistant Services in the VA, we can help

ensure that their expertise is properly utilized and that our veterans receive the care they deserve. Their utilization may also mean in rural States like mine that veterans have greater access to health care.

It's appropriate that we will pass this legislation today in honor of the veterans who have served our country so bravely. As a proud wife of a veteran myself, working to improve the care veterans were promised and have earned is a top priority for me, and I enthusiastically support this legislation. I urge my colleagues to support this also.

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

Mr. HARE. Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to unanimously support H.R. 2790, as amended.

Mr. MORAN of Kansas. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank Congressman HARE for his leadership on passage of this bill and my colleagues and staff on the House Veterans Affairs Committee for their support. I joined Congressman HARE as an original cosponsor of H.R. 2790. This bill creates a full-time Director of PA Services within the Department of Veterans Affairs. This legislation is beneficial in improving patient care for our Nation's veterans, ensuring that the 1,600 PAs employed by the VA are fully utilized to provide veterans medical care.

As a Member of Congress who represents one of the most rural districts in the country, I know that physician assistants are a key to providing medical care in underserved areas. Often, they are the only health care professional available. PAs help ensure those who live in our communities receive timely access to quality health care.

I want to be certain that PAs are appropriately utilized by the VA to serve our veterans. Like our armed forces that have full-time directors of PA services, this legislation will establish a dedicated expert in the VA Central Office. This PA Director will work to fully integrate the profession into VA health care, ensuring PAs have a stronger voice in the VA so they can better serve our veterans and their patients.

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

#### GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. HARE. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 2790, as amended.

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

There was no objection.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. HARE) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 2790, 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.

□ 1230

### VETERANS BENEFITS AWARENESS ACT OF 2008

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 3681) to amend title 38, United States Code, to authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to advertise in the national media to promote awareness of benefits under laws administered by the Secretary, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 3681

*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 "Veterans Benefits Awareness Act of 2008".*

#### SEC. 2. AUTHORITY OF SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS TO ADVERTISE TO PROMOTE AWARENESS OF BENEFITS UNDER LAWS ADMINISTERED BY THE SECRETARY.

*(a) AUTHORITY TO ADVERTISE.—Subchapter II of chapter 5 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new section:*

#### "§532. Authority to advertise in national media

*"The Secretary may purchase advertising in national media outlets for the purpose of promoting awareness of benefits under laws administered by the Secretary, including promoting awareness of assistance provided by the Secretary, including assistance for programs to assist homeless veterans, to promote veteran-owned small businesses, and to provide opportunities for employment in the Department of Veterans Affairs and for education, training, compensation, pension, vocational rehabilitation, and healthcare benefits, and mental healthcare (including the prevention of suicide among veterans)."*

*(b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections at the beginning of such chapter is amended by inserting after the item relating to section 531 the following:*

*"§532. Authority to advertise in national media."*

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

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California.

Mr. FILNER. I would yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, we are in the midst of a package of 10 separate pieces of legislation that honors our Nation's veterans, our Nation's most deserving citizens, appropriately enough, as we prepare to honor them on Memorial Day. As we honor our fallen heroes, we cannot forget those who need either health or other benefits from our Nation.

That is what these bills do. They extend benefits in a whole range of areas: Health care, substance abuse and spina bifida, reimbursement for emergency treatment outside the VA facilities, construction of new facilities to serve these heroes. We also address our responsibility for oversight of the VA by mandating the revision and update of administrative policies so that the VA can better serve our veterans.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, we have had many opportunities for oversight recently. We have had in a court case the discovery of e-mails which seem to indicate that our VA management was not being totally transparent on the number of suicides, for example, of our recent Iraqi veterans. Just last week, another e-mail was discovered that indicated that we should not adequately diagnose PTSD, post-traumatic stress disorder, and instead give these young men and women lesser kinds of diagnoses, which would cost us less.

It is unacceptable to the Congress of the United States and to the American people that the administration set up to serve our veterans would be finding ways to save money and not treating the veterans for their needs. We intend to root that kind of attitude out of the VA and to make sure that all our veterans, whether they are just coming back from Iraq or Afghanistan, or those that served us earlier in Vietnam or World War II and Korea and the Persian Gulf War I, to make sure that all of their needs are met, and that is what we are committed to and that is what these bills on the floor today indicate.

We also address the compensation cost-of-living adjustment that is so important to our veterans who base their income on the dependency and indemnity compensation. They need an annual increase to cover the cost of living, and this bill before us today will assure that.

It is my hope that on this Memorial Day we, as a Nation, remember the words of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. A half century ago he said "Those who have long enjoyed such privileges as we enjoy forget in time that men," and he would say, I am sure today, women, "have died to win them." President Washington, over 220 years ago, said, "The best guarantee of the morale of our fighting troops is a sense of how they are going to be treated when they come home."

So let us remember these words of Roosevelt, of Washington, as we prepare on Memorial Day to recognize and remember those heroes who have died in uniform. Our Nation has a proud legacy of appreciation and commitment, and we have to make sure that they know that we appreciate them and we know that our liberty, which we enjoy today, depended on them.

The bills before us today have come from all of our legislative subcommittees. Members on both sides of the aisle and all the committee worked very hard. I want to thank Chairman MICHAUD of the Health Committee, with his Ranking Member MILLER of Florida, I want to thank the chair and ranking member of the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity, Ms. HERSETH SANDLIN of South Dakota, and Mr. BOOZMAN of Arkansas, and also the chair and the ranking member of the Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs, the gentleman from New York, Mr. HALL, and the gentleman from Colorado, Mr. LAMBORN.