

2008." This legislation grants to our veterans access to a comprehensive continuum of substance abuse treatment services provided by Department of Veterans Affairs medical centers. The bill also requires the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to inform veterans of Operations Enduring Freedom or Iraqi Freedom about the availability of such care.

Madam Speaker, we have sent thousands of otherwise healthy young men and women to Iraq and Afghanistan to fight. Many of those who were lucky enough to escape unscathed physically, are suffering agonizing symptoms emotionally. Depression, anxiety, and symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder plague countless veterans returning from the battlefield. Without proper treatment, our veterans turn to self-medicating these psychiatric symptoms by abusing alcohol and other substances.

It would be negligent, if not hypocritical, of us not to offer comprehensive substance abuse treatment for all returning veterans. This legislation ensures that a "continuum" of services, including screening for substance use disorders, detoxification and stabilization services, intensive outpatient services, relapse prevention services, counseling services, and other necessary services, are offered to our returning veterans.

Of course, these services require funding. H.R. 5554 ensures that funding for a full continuum of substance abuse treatment is made available to veterans seeking such care. Although H.R. 5554 authorizes a pilot program for Internet-based substance use disorder treatment, let us not sell our veterans short by cutting corners on care. More funding is needed to ensure that enough psychiatrists, nurses, psychologists, and social workers are available to care for our returning veterans. As well, more research funding is required in order to better understand and treat disorders of substance abuse and dependence which plague our veterans.

Madam Speaker, I find it appalling that we ask our young men and women in the Armed Forces to sacrifice life and limb overseas in Iraq and Afghanistan, yet when those very soldiers return home, we deny them vital mental health and substance abuse treatment services. Let us begin to right this wrong by supporting H.R. 5554, and improve substance abuse treatment services available to our veterans.

Mr. FILNER. Madam 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. 5554, 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.

REQUIRING REGULAR UPDATES TO HANDBOOK FOR DESIGN FURNISHED TO VETERANS ELIGIBLE FOR SPECIALLY ADAPTED HOUSING ASSISTANCE

Mr. FILNER. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the

bill (H.R. 5664) to amend title 38, United States Code, to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to update at least once every six years the plans and specifications for specially adapted housing furnished to veterans by the Secretary, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 5664

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

SECTION 1. REQUIREMENT FOR REGULAR UPDATES TO HANDBOOK FOR DESIGN FURNISHED TO VETERANS ELIGIBLE FOR SPECIALLY ADAPTED HOUSING ASSISTANCE BY SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

Section 2103 of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) by striking "The Secretary" and inserting "(a) PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS.—The Secretary"; and

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

"(b) HANDBOOK FOR DESIGN.—The Secretary shall make available to veterans eligible for assistance under this chapter, without cost to the veterans, a handbook containing appropriate designs for specially adapted housing. The Secretary shall update such handbook at least once every six years to take into account any new or unique disabilities, including vision impairments, impairments specific to the of upper limbs, and burn injuries."

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. Madam Speaker, I yield myself as much time as I may consume.

Madam Speaker, again we thank and we draw on the expertise of Mr. RODRIGUEZ of Texas for this bill. It's a commonsense solution to assist our Nation's veterans.

We would simply require the Secretary of the VA to furnish and update a handbook for designs of specially adapted housing to include vision impairments, impairments to the upper limbs, and burn injuries.

Ensuring that our brave men and women have a comfortable home to heal from the injuries of war is the very least we can do for our veterans. This is especially true since the last time this VA pamphlet was published was 30 years ago, in 1978.

I feel confident that with this legislation the VA can provide improved guidance to incorporate today's medical breakthroughs in health care and any advanced technologies. I hope all my colleagues will support H.R. 5664.

Madam Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

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

I rise in support of H.R. 5664, as amended, a bill which would amend title 38, United States Code, to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to update at least once every 6 years the plans and specifications for specially

adapted housing furnished to veterans by the Secretary.

I thank my colleague, Mr. RODRIGUEZ of Texas, for introducing this bill, and Subcommittee Chairwoman STEPHANIE HERSETH SANDLIN, Ranking Member BOOZMAN and full committee Chairman FILNER for their efforts to bring the bill before the House.

Madam Speaker, many of our most severely disabled veterans qualify for the specially adapted housing program that provides grants for up to \$50,000 to modify the veteran's home. This bill would require the VA to update the handbook on adapted homes designs on a 6-year cycle, to include adaptations for a wider variety of disabilities and to provide the handbook to qualified veterans.

□ 1415

In the previous Congress, we allowed the homes of a family member to be adapted where the veteran temporarily resides. I think that was a good move that we had done that, and this measure that Mr. RODRIGUEZ has brought is one that is prudent and it should be passed.

Madam Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. FILNER. Madam Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the author of the legislation, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. RODRIGUEZ).

Mr. RODRIGUEZ. Chairman FILNER and Ranking Member BUYER, thank you very much for this opportunity regarding H.R. 5664, a bill that I introduced to correct a bureaucratic oversight in the way that the Veterans Administration advises contractors as they deal with renovating housing for disabled veterans.

Madam Speaker, our veterans have made difficult sacrifices and secured our freedom and the way of life. This Memorial Day we honor veterans with our words and our actions, and this bill is a reflection of that.

My bill seeks to ensure that veterans whose homes are updated under the program benefit from all that modern technology and construction practice can provide. Today's veterans, particularly those from Iraq and Afghanistan, are sustaining injuries that in past conflicts would have resulted in their death. The variety of these injuries requires a fresh look at the ways the VA provides guidance to veterans in using special adaptive housing grants. The primary guidance that the VA provides contractors who modify homes under this grant program is VA pamphlet 26-13, titled "Handbook for Design: Specially Adaptive Housing." The guide was last updated in 1978. This bill requires an update of this guide at least every 6 years.

I would like to thank also Congressman HALL for his assistance in getting the bill in the Economic Opportunity Subcommittee and being able to make it happen as quickly as possible, getting the cost of it assessed, and I believe that the bill will go a long way in

assisting our veterans and making sure that we have good housing.

Let me just give you one of the examples that we had. For example, the particular bill required that arm bars be built in these homes, that arm bars be installed in a restroom for a veteran who had his arms amputated, and there are other types of options that can be utilized, keyless entries and other forms. So this is definitely a bill that is helpful, and the purpose is to allow construction contractors who are updating disabled veterans' homes to be more flexible in employing state-of-the-art technology.

Once again thank you very much for allowing me this opportunity, Chairman FILNER.

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

Mr. FILNER. Madam Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this bill.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. FILNER. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 5664, as amended.

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

There was no objection.

Ms. HERSETH SANDLIN. Madam Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 5664, a bill to direct the VA to update the plans and specifications for specially adapted housing furnished to veterans.

As the Chairwoman of the Veterans' Affairs Economic Opportunity Subcommittee, I would like to thank Representative RODRIGUEZ for introducing this important bill. I also would like to thank Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman FILNER and Ranking Member BUYER for their support of the bill.

The VA's main grant program guide, which is provided to contractors to draw up plans and specifications to modify homes, was last updated in 1978. H.R. 5664 will ensure that the 30-year-old guide contains up-to-date directions and is applicable for today's veterans, who often come home from battle with injuries different than servicemembers from previous military conflicts.

Again, I thank Representative RODRIGUEZ for introducing this important bill. I encourage my colleagues to support it.

Mr. FILNER. Madam 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. 5664, 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.

SPINA BIFIDA HEALTH CARE PROGRAM EXPANSION ACT

Mr. FILNER. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the

bill (H.R. 5729) to amend title 38, United States Code, to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide comprehensive health care to children of Vietnam veterans born with spina bifida, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 5729

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 "Spina Bifida Health Care Program Expansion Act".

SEC. 2. PROVISION OF COMPREHENSIVE HEALTH CARE BY SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS TO CHILDREN OF VIETNAM VETERANS BORN WITH SPINA BIFIDA.

(a) *PROVISION OF COMPREHENSIVE HEALTH CARE.*—Section 1803(a) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by striking "such health care as the Secretary determines is needed by the child for the spina bifida or any disability that is associated with such condition" and inserting "health care under this section".

(b) *EFFECTIVE DATE.*—The amendment made by subsection (a) shall apply with respect to care furnished after the date of the enactment of this Act.

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. Madam Speaker, in this Congress we are blessed with having many new Members who take an active role in the legislative process and are writing legislation, and one of those is the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. ELLSWORTH), who brings us this bill, and I yield to him such time as he may consume.

Mr. ELLSWORTH. I thank the gentleman for yielding.

Madam Speaker, I rise today in strong support of H.R. 5729, the Spina Bifida Health Care Program Expansion Act.

This important issue came to my attention by my constituents Honey Sue Newby and the Nesler family of New Harmony, Indiana. Honey Sue's story is quite heart wrenching. She's a woman who lives with a complicated neurological disorder rooted in spina bifida, and her parents, Suzanne and Ron Nesler, provide her with around-the-clock attendance and care. Ron is Honey Sue's stepfather and, together with Suzanne, serves as her guardian and primary caregiver.

Honey Sue's biological father served 8 years as a marine and completed three combat tours in Vietnam. The VA concedes that Honey Sue's condition is the direct result of her biological father's exposure to Agent Orange, the defoliant and herbicide used by our Armed Forces in Vietnam.

For years the Neslers have attempted to clear seemingly insurmountable bureaucratic hurdles when seeking medical care for Honey Sue. Suzanne and Ron have to provide a letter from the

doctor to the VA each and every time that she seeks care that her condition is directly related to her spina bifida. The Neslers have to repeat this routine despite the fact that Honey Sue is recognized by the VA as a level III child. At the VA level III children are eligible to the same full health care coverage as a military veteran with 100 percent service-connected disability.

H.R. 5729 will provide the Neslers and other people facing the same challenges with relief from the tedious administrative burdens by providing the beneficiaries of the Spina Bifida Health Care Program with comprehensive care. No longer will the burden be on the Neslers to prove that Honey Sue's condition and various health ailments are related to spina bifida and therefore Agent Orange. The requirement has been removed.

When this bill is passed by Congress and signed by the President, Honey Sue and the estimated 1,200 children—and, Madam Speaker, that's important to know that this is only 1,200 children with levels I, II, and III spina bifida as caused by a parent's exposure to Agent Orange will receive the same full health care coverage as military veterans with a 100 percent service-connected disability. This bill will give families the peace of mind that their children will have access to attendant care when they are no longer capable of providing for them. I know that this concern is of great importance to the Neslers.

Madam Speaker, the Congressional Budget Office estimates that the VA already provides roughly 90 percent of the comprehensive health care needs of these beneficiaries. In fact, the CBO estimates that the implementation of this program will add around \$2,500 per person in 2009. This is a small price to pay, Madam Speaker, to ensure Honey Sue receives the health care she needs and Suzanne and Ron do not have to spend their days navigating their way through a frustrating maze of administrative paperwork.

I would like to thank the chairman, BOB FILNER, and the ranking member, Mr. BUYER, and the very capable staff of the Veterans' Affairs Committee for their leadership on this issue. I'd also at this time like to thank one of my staff in Evansville, Indiana, Emily Hayden, who has worked exceedingly hard to help the Neslers with the red tape that this bill aims to fix. Emily has shown such care and consideration for so many of my constituents that she deserves recognition. I'm proud to have her on my staff.

Madam Speaker, H.R. 5729, the Spina Bifida Health Care Program Expansion Act, follows through on these promises made to our brave servicemembers who have fought for our freedoms.

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

I rise in support of H.R. 5729, as amended, the Spina Bifida Health Care Program Expansion Act, which would amend title 38, United States Code, to