

direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide comprehensive health care to children of Vietnam veterans born with spina bifida, and for other purposes.

Spina bifida is a developmental birth defect that affects the spinal cord. It is a debilitating disease that can cause a number of neurological problems including paralysis and cognitive disorders.

Under its current authorities, VA is providing monetary allowances, vocational training, and certain medical care benefits to more than 1,100 children of veterans from Vietnam and Korea who were born with spina bifida. The VA Spina Bifida Health Care Program began in 1997 as a benefit for children of Vietnam veterans exposed to Agent Orange. In 2003 Congress expanded this program to children of certain Korean conflict veterans as well. However, medical care benefits under the program are limited to those necessary for the treatment of spina bifida and related medical conditions.

Although VA is supporting about 90 percent of the health care needs of these beneficiaries, the current requirement to receive prior approval for services creates an undue administrative burden for those families seeking treatment for their children. As these children age, it is especially important that the complete and comprehensive health care is available to them.

Madam Speaker, I am pleased to support H.R. 5729, and I commend the gentleman from Indiana for bringing this to our attention. This bill expands VA's authority to cover all health care services needed for those who suffer with spina bifida as a result of their parents' service to our country.

Madam Speaker, I urge my colleagues to adopt this legislation.

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

Mr. FILNER. Madam Speaker, I would thank again the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. ELLSWORTH) for recognizing a problem, for having so much energy, and bringing us a solution.

We salute you for doing that.

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. 5729, as amended.

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

There was no objection.

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. 5729, 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.

VETERANS' COMPENSATION COST-OF-LIVING ADJUSTMENT ACT OF 2008

Mr. FILNER. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 5826) to increase, effective as of December 1, 2008, 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.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 5826

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 "Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2008".

SEC. 2. INCREASE IN RATES OF DISABILITY COMPENSATION AND DEPENDENCY AND INDEMNITY COMPENSATION.

(a) RATE ADJUSTMENT.—Effective on December 1, 2008, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall increase, in accordance with subsection (c), the dollar amounts in effect on November 30, 2008, for the payment of disability compensation and dependency and indemnity compensation under the provisions specified in subsection (b).

(b) AMOUNTS TO BE INCREASED.—The dollar amounts to be increased pursuant to subsection (a) are the following:

(1) WARTIME DISABILITY COMPENSATION.—Each of the dollar amounts under section 1114 of title 38, United States Code.

(2) ADDITIONAL COMPENSATION FOR DEPENDENTS.—Each of the dollar amounts under sections 1115(1) of such title.

(3) CLOTHING ALLOWANCE.—The dollar amount under section 1162 of such title.

(4) DEPENDENCY AND INDEMNITY COMPENSATION TO SURVIVING SPOUSE.—Each of the dollar amounts under subsections (a) through (d) of section 1311 of such title.

(5) DEPENDENCY AND INDEMNITY COMPENSATION TO CHILDREN.—Each of the dollar amounts under sections 1313(a) and 1314 of such title.

(c) DETERMINATION OF INCREASE.—

(1) PERCENTAGE.—Except as provided in paragraph (2), each dollar amount described in subsection (b) shall be increased by the same percentage as the percentage by which benefit amounts payable under title II of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 401 et seq.) are increased effective December 1, 2008, as a result of a determination under section 215(i) of such Act (42 U.S.C. 415(i)).

(2) ROUNDING.—Each dollar amount increased under paragraph (1), if not a whole dollar amount, shall be rounded to the next lower whole dollar amount.

(d) SPECIAL RULE.—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 title 38, United States Code.

SEC. 3. PUBLICATION OF ADJUSTED RATES.

The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall publish in the Federal Register the amounts specified in section 2(b), as increased under that section, not later than the date on

which the matters specified in section 215(i)(2)(D) of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 415(i)(2)(D)) are required to be published by reason of a determination made under section 215(i) of such Act during fiscal year 2009.

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 such time as I may consume.

This bill is called the Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act, which was introduced by myself and Mr. RODRIGUEZ of Texas. And I want to thank our ranking member, Mr. BUYER, who, of course, supported this legislation and helped us to get here with unanimous support from our committee.

The fact that we were able to get this bill to the floor only a month after its introduction shows the House leadership's commitment to our Nation's veterans and their survivors.

Since 1976 Congress has passed a measure to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to increase the rates of basic compensation for disabled veterans and the rates of dependency and indemnity compensation, so-called DIC, to their survivors and dependents, along with other benefits, in order to keep pace with the rising cost of living. The disability COLA here would be effective on December 1 of this year and will be equal to that provided on an annual basis to Social Security recipients.

Madam Speaker, this bill will provide over 3 million disabled veterans from the World War I era through the current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan that VA estimates will be receiving disability compensation for the coming fiscal year. It will help over 300,000 of their survivors during the same period.

Many of the nearly 3.5 million recipients of these benefits depend on these tax-free payments not only to provide for their own basic needs but those of their spouses, children, and parents as well. Without an annual COLA increase, these veterans and their families would see the value of their hard-earned benefits slowly erode.

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We would be derelict in our duty if we failed to guarantee that those who sacrifice so much for this country receive benefits and services that don't keep pace with their necessities. I know we have had some disagreement over the past weeks over what, and how, our priorities for veterans should be funded. But on this bill, there is no disagreement. The veterans compensation COLA is included in the CBO baseline. In layman's terms, that means we have already paid for this.

Regardless of whether or not you agree or disagree with the funding of the war in Iraq, our young men and women who have served in our Armed

Forces deserve to be adequately compensated for injuries due to their military service. We fund the war, we must fund the warrior, and their families and their survivors, by ensuring their benefits will keep pace with their living expenses. Let's ensure that these benefits make ends meet at the end of the month.

Madam Speaker, as we approach our country's 140th Memorial Day commemoration, I ask all my colleagues to support this bill and send a clear message of support to our troops: You will be taken care of when you return, and we will not forget your sacrifice.

No action by a Member of Congress is more irritating to many Americans than those who say they support the troops but then turn a cold shoulder when those same troops come home, become veterans, and need our help to become whole again. That costs money; money we should not hesitate to spend, just like our military men and women did not hesitate to offer to lay down their lives to defend our freedom and the way of life that we cherish.

I ask my colleagues to consider these facts when voting on the full portfolio of veterans' legislation that is under consideration on the floor today, and of course to support passage of this bill, the Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2008.

I would reserve the balance of my time.

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

Madam Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 5826, the Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2008. I would like to thank my colleagues, Mr. HALL of New York, chairman of the Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs Subcommittee, and Mr. LAMBORN of California, the ranking member of the subcommittee, as well as the bill's sponsor, Mr. RODRIGUEZ of Texas, for the leadership on this bill.

This veterans' COLA would increase the rates of compensation for veterans with service-connected disabilities and the rates of dependency and indemnity compensation for survivors of certain disabled veterans. The COLA adjustment includes wartime disability compensation, additional compensation for dependents, clothing allowance, dependency and indemnity to surviving spouse, and dependency and indemnity compensation to children.

Madam Speaker, this is an important annual authorization, which provides much-needed assistance to our Nation's veterans, and every year receives unanimous support from the House.

With that, I yield back my time.

Mr. FILNER. Madam Speaker, I would yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. RODRIGUEZ) who authored this bill.

Mr. RODRIGUEZ. Let me also once again thank Chairman BOB FILNER and Ranking Member BUYER. Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak regarding H.R. 5826, and thank you for

allowing me the opportunity, Mr. Chairman, to sponsor this piece of legislation.

I want to also just take this opportunity on this bill to thank the chairman because I have had the opportunity to serve on the VA Committee for, prior to being gone for 2 years, 8 years, and I know we had a series of things that occurred and we were not able to make things happen during that period of time, and there was a great deal of frustration. But I do want to thank the chairman because this past year and a half has been one of the highlights, at least in my career serving on the VA committee, having the opportunity to not only hear and be able to make something happen for our veterans and be able to do the right thing. We have been able to make some significant pieces of legislation. So I wanted to take this opportunity to thank the chairman for his leadership in allowing us to make that happen.

We are all keenly aware of the burden our current economy places upon our American families. The same difficulties are magnified with the veterans and the families who rely on disability compensation provided through the VA. H.R. 5826, the Veterans Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2008, seeks to address these challenges by increasing the compensation rates in line with the Consumer Price Index Social Security COLA.

We all know the difficulty that we are hearing back home with the cost of gasoline, the cost of food, and people losing their homes. This is essential, this cost of living. It's minimal, but yet it's extremely critical and important. I want to thank you for allowing me this opportunity once again to speak today, and for the considering of H.R. 5826, and I ask your support and I ask the possibility of a vote on this particular legislation, Mr. Chairman.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. FILNER. Madam 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. 5826.

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

There was no objection.

Mr. FILNER. Madam Speaker, I urge all my colleagues to support H.R. 5826 and would yield back our 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. 5826.

The question was taken.

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

Mr. FILNER. Madam 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 motion will be postponed.

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS MEDICAL FACILITY AUTHORIZATION AND LEASE ACT OF 2008

Mr. FILNER. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 5856) to increase, effective as of December 1, 2008, 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.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 5856

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 "Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Facility Authorization and Lease Act of 2008".

SEC. 2. AUTHORIZATION FOR FISCAL YEAR 2009 MAJOR MEDICAL FACILITY PROJECTS.

The Secretary of Veterans Affairs may carry out the following major medical facility projects in fiscal year 2009 in the amount specified for each project:

(1) Seismic corrections, Building 2, at the Department of Veterans Affairs Palo Alto Health Care System, Palo Alto Division Palo Alto, California, in an amount not to exceed \$54,000,000.

(2) Construction of a polytrauma healthcare and rehabilitation center at the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center, San Antonio, Texas, in an amount not to exceed \$66,000,000.

(3) Seismic corrections, Building 1, at the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center, San Juan, Puerto Rico, in an amount not to exceed \$225,900,000.

SEC. 3. MODIFICATION OF AUTHORIZATION AMOUNTS FOR CERTAIN MAJOR MEDICAL FACILITY CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS PREVIOUSLY AUTHORIZED.

(a) MODIFICATION OF MAJOR MEDICAL FACILITY AUTHORIZATIONS.—Section 801(a) of the Veterans Benefits, Health Care, and Information Technology Act of 2006 (Public Law 109-461) is amended—

(1) in paragraph (1)—

(A) by striking "\$300,000,000" and inserting "\$625,000,000"; and

(B) by striking the second sentence; and

(2) in paragraph (3), by striking "\$98,000,000" and inserting "\$769,200,000".

(b) MODIFICATION OF AUTHORIZATION FOR CERTAIN MAJOR MEDICAL FACILITY CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS PREVIOUSLY AUTHORIZED IN CONNECTION WITH CAPITAL ASSET REALIGNMENT INITIATIVE.—

(1) CORRECTION OF PATIENT PRIVACY DEFICIENCIES AT THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS MEDICAL CENTER, GAINESVILLE, FLORIDA.—Paragraph (5) of section 802 of the Veterans Benefits, Health Care, and Information Technology Act of 2006 (Public Law 109-461) is amended by striking "\$85,200,000" and inserting "\$136,700,000".

(2) CONSTRUCTION OF A NEW MEDICAL CENTER FACILITY AT THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS MEDICAL CENTER, LAS VEGAS, NEVADA.—Paragraph (7) of such section is amended by striking "\$406,000,000" and inserting "\$600,400,000".

(3) CONSTRUCTION OF A NEW OUTPATIENT CLINIC, LEE COUNTY, FLORIDA.—Paragraph (8) of such section is amended—

(A) by striking "ambulatory" and all that follows through "purchase," and inserting "outpatient clinic in"; and