

and Business Act," I rise today in strong support of H.R. 6221, as amended.

I would like to thank full Committee Chairman FILNER, Ranking Member BUYER, and the sponsor of the bill, Subcommittee Ranking Member BOOZMAN for their leadership and bipartisan support of this bill, which the Economic Opportunity Subcommittee passed on June 26 and the full Committee approved on July 15.

As I noted, this important measure to improve business and education opportunities for veterans includes the "Pilot College Work Study Programs for Veterans Act," which I introduced on June 10 of this year. The purpose of my bill is to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to conduct a 5-year pilot program to expand on existing work-study activities for veterans. Currently, veterans that qualify for work-study would be limited to working on VA related work. My bill would allow those veterans the option of working in academic departments and student services. This change would put them at par with students that qualify for a work-study position under programs not administered by the VA.

I also would like to thank Representative PETER WELCH for a bill, which was also included in H.R. 6221, to reauthorize the Military Occupational Specialty Transition (MOST) Program, and Subcommittee Ranking Member BOOZMAN for the introduction of the underlying bill to require VA contractees to comply with contracting goals and preferences for small businesses owned by veterans.

Again, I thank Chairman BOOZMAN for sponsoring this important bill. I encourage my colleagues to support H.R. 6221, as amended.

Mr. BUYER. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 6221, as amended, the Veteran Owned Small Business Protection and Clarification Act of 2008. This bill, as amended, would amend title 38, United States Code, to require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to include in each contract the Secretary enters for the acquisition of goods and services a provision that requires compliance with the contracting goals and preferences for small business concerns owned or controlled by veterans, and for other purposes.

H.R. 6221, as amended, does 3 very good things for veterans.

First, it closes a loophole in the service disabled veteran-owned business provisions in Public Law 109-461 to require that any VA agreement with other entities to provide contracting services include provisions to comply with those provisions.

Second, the bill would expand the types of VA work study jobs on college campuses to provide more jobs for student veterans, and widen interaction between veterans, the faculty, staff and most importantly, other students.

Finally, H.R. 6221, as amended, would take provisions from H.R. 6272, introduced by Congressman WELCH to create the Military Occupational Specialty Transition (MOST) program, a modernized version of the old Service Members' Occupational Conversion and Training Act or SMOCTA.

Focusing on veterans whose military specialty does not translate well into civilian life and who do not have other training opportunities available under title 38, this bill will benefit veterans whose job skills no longer match what is needed by today's economy.

I appreciate our colleague from Vermont, Mr. WELCH, for his bill which would renew

funding for the old Service Members' Occupational Conversion and Training Act or SMOCTA. Again, in a bipartisan manner, the Economic Opportunity Subcommittee has brought us a bill that meets Mr. WELCH's goal of providing a training program for veterans who finish military service with few or no skills that are transferrable to civilian life.

Mr. Speaker, I extend my gratitude to Chairman FILNER, Subcommittee Chairwoman HERSETH SANDLIN and Ranking Member BOOZMAN for working together to bring this bill to us as a bipartisan effort to make veterans more competitive in the job market.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 6221.

Mr. FILNER. 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. 6221, 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. BOOZMAN. Mr. Speaker, I object to the vote on the ground that a quorum is not present and make the point of order that a quorum is not present.

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.

The point of no quorum is considered withdrawn.

EXTENDING ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON MINORITY VETERANS

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 674) to amend title 38, United States Code, to repeal the provision of law requiring termination of the Advisory Committee on Minority Veterans as of December 31, 2009.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 674

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

SECTION 1. REPEAL OF SUNSET PROVISION FOR ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON MINORITY VETERANS.

Subsection (e) of section 544 of title 38, United States Code, is repealed.

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.

This bill comes to us from our colleague from Chicago, Congressman LUIS GUTIERREZ, and this would repeal the law that requires the termination of the Advisory Committee on Minority Veterans on December 31 of 2009.

We cannot let this important committee vanish.

Today, Mr. Speaker, over 14 percent of veterans are from racial or ethnic minority groups. African Americans comprise about 10 percent. The rest are Hispanic, Asian, or Native American. However, the Census Bureau projects that the number of minority Americans will shift significantly in the future and will grow to about 35 percent of the total population by 2050. Undoubtedly, that will be reflected in the percentage of people of color in the military, which is already steadily on the rise.

This trend has been true for black women who are joining the military at a greater rate than they are represented in the overall population and in a greater ratio than their male counterparts. In fact, black women comprise almost 35 percent of female servicemembers. This pattern will affect the VA's mission and scope, and it must be prepared to respond to properly deliver benefits.

Congress developed the Center for Minority Veterans and the Advisory Committee in 1994 to advise VA and Congress on providing health care and delivering benefits to minority veterans because there were disparities in such service. We had hoped to improve VA practices for future generations of minority veterans. This center has issued an annual report since 1994, and it's mandated to focus specific attention on African American, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, and Pacific Islanders, which it has done by conducting town hall meetings and site visits to such places as inner city Los Angeles and Native American tribes in Alaska.

The House Committee on Veterans' Affairs has explored these disparities and has been greatly assisted by the Committee on Minority Veterans. Its recommendations regarding outreach, research, education, staff diversity, translation services, and housing have been extremely enlightening and have resulted in many improvements.

At the present time, the Advisory Committee on Minority Veterans is due to sunset in 2009. This bill would prevent this from occurring and would serve to bring permanent awareness to cultural, racial, and ethnic issues among veterans to Congress and VA leadership.

I urge this Congress to support the bill and allow the Advisory Committee on Minority Veterans to continue its work uninterrupted and fully supported.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. LAMBORN. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 674, a bill to amend title XXXVIII, United States Code, to permanently establish the Advisory Committee on Minority Veterans which is set to expire on December 31, 2009. I commend my colleague from Illinois, LUIS GUTIERREZ, for introducing this bill.

Mr. Speaker, in 1994 under Public Law 103-446, the Veterans' Benefits Improvements Act, Congress established the Advisory Committee on Minority Veterans. The committee is comprised of veterans who represent their respective minority groups and are recognized authorities in fields pertinent to their needs. The committee's goal is to promote the use of VA programs, benefits, and services by minority veterans, to make benefits and services more accessible to minority veterans, and to evaluate current programs and make recommendations on how the VA can better serve minority veterans.

As I said, current authority for the committee is set to expire December 31, 2009. By supporting H.R. 674, we eliminate the expiration date and permanently extend this important committee to ensure the perspectives of minority veterans are considered during the establishment of VA benefits and services. I urge my colleagues to support the bill.

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

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I would again ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and to include extraneous material on H.R. 674.

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

There was no objection.

Mr. GUTIERREZ. I rise today to urge my colleagues to support H.R. 674, legislation to make the Advisory Committee on Minority Veterans permanent. I have sponsored this legislation along with Congresswoman CORRINE BROWN, who serves on the Veterans' Affairs Committee. Current law mandates the termination of the Advisory Committee on Minority Veterans (ACMV) on December 31, 2009. This bill would simply repeal the provision of law that sunsets this important committee so that its critical work on behalf of minority veterans can continue.

The Advisory Committee on Minority Veterans operates in conjunction with the VA Center for Minority Veterans. This committee consists of members appointed by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs and includes minority veterans, representatives of minority veterans groups and individuals who are recognized authorities in fields pertinent to the needs of minority veterans.

The Advisory Committee on Minority Veterans helps the VA Center for Minority Veterans by advising the Secretary on the adoption and implementation of policies and programs affecting minority veterans, and by making recommendations to the VA for the establishment or improvement of programs in the department for which minority veterans are eligible.

The Committee has consistently provided the VA and Congress with balanced, forward-looking recommendations, many of which go far beyond the unique needs of minority veterans. In 2002, the Committee met in my hometown of Chicago and warned that in the Chicago regional office, "it was mentioned that it was much easier to deny benefits than to

grant benefits because of stringent requirements of the Veterans Benefits Administration and the Court of Appeal for Veterans Claims."

The Chicago Sun-Times later exposed that Illinois veterans ranked 50th in disability benefit compensation. That information sparked a campaign by the Illinois Congressional Delegation to rectify the situation. Since then, the VA Inspector General has issued his report and recommendations, and the Secretary has pledged additional staff and resources to the Chicago regional office.

The Committee will also be needed in the future since the unique concerns of minority veterans will become increasingly important for our nation over the next decade.

Currently, 17 percent of the troops serving in Iraq and Afghanistan are African-American, while 11 percent are Hispanic. The concerns of these veterans and others will not disappear on December 31, 2009, nor should the Committee that represents them. The Advisory Committee on Minority Veterans has helped our minority veterans from past wars with programs to address their concerns. We should not shortchange our newly returning soldiers by allowing this Committee's tenure to expire.

Many specific issues of concern to minority veterans need to be addressed further. Minority veterans confront the debilitating effects of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and substance abuse in greater numbers. Minority veterans suffer from a higher incidence of homelessness. Access to health care for Native American veterans is also a common problem. In addition, access to adequate job training is a difficulty for many minority veterans, a high percentage of whom qualify as low-income, category A veterans.

Unfortunately, discrimination and cultural insensitivity remain problematic for minority veterans at many VA facilities. The Advisory Committee on Minority Veterans still has a lot of work to do, and I urge my colleagues to support this legislation to make this important Committee permanent.

Mr. BUYER. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 674, a bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to permanently establish the Advisory Committee on Minority Veterans, which is set to expire December 31, 2009.

I commend my colleague from Illinois, LUIS GUTIERREZ for introducing this bill.

Mr. Speaker, in 1994, under Public Law 103-446, the Veterans' Benefits Improvements Act, Congress established the Advisory Committee on Minority Veterans.

The Committee is comprised of veterans who represent their respective minority groups and are recognized authorities in fields pertinent to their needs. The Committee's goal is to: promote the use of VA programs, benefits, and services by minority veterans; make benefits and services more accessible to minority veterans; and, evaluate current programs and make recommendations on how VA can better serve minority veterans.

As I previously stated, authority for the Committee will expire December 31, 2009. By supporting H.R. 674, we eliminate the expiration date and permanently extend this important committee to ensure the perspectives of minority veterans are considered during the establishment of VA benefits and services.

I urge my colleagues to support the bill.

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support the bill, and 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. 674.

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. LAMBORN. Mr. Speaker, I object to the vote on the ground that a quorum is not present and make the point of order that a quorum is not present.

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.

The point of no quorum is considered withdrawn.

VETERANS DISABILITY BENEFITS CLAIMS MODERNIZATION ACT OF 2008

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 5892) to amend title 38, United States Code, to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to modernize the disability benefits claims processing system of the Department of Veterans Affairs to ensure the accurate and timely delivery of compensation to veterans and their families and survivors, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 5892

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 Disability Benefits Claims Modernization Act of 2008".

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

Sec. 1. Short title; table of contents.

Sec. 2. Findings.

TITLE I—MATTERS RELATING TO MODERNIZING THE DISABILITY COMPENSATION SYSTEM OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

Sec. 101. Office of Survivors Assistance.

Sec. 102. Study on readjustment of schedule for rating disabilities.

Sec. 103. Study on employee work credit system of Veterans Benefits Administration.

Sec. 104. Study on work management system.

Sec. 105. Certification and training of employees of Veterans Benefits Administration responsible for processing claims.

Sec. 106. Annual assessment of quality assurance program.

Sec. 107. Expedited treatment of fully developed claims and requirement for checklist to be provided to individuals submitting incomplete claims.

Sec. 108. Study and report on employing medical professionals to assist employees of Veterans Benefits Administration.

Sec. 109. Assignment of partial disability ratings to qualifying veterans.

Sec. 110. Review and enhancement of use of information technology at Veterans Benefits Administration.