

PAs. There is also a hiring trend in the VA of NPs outpacing PAs nearly three to one, again despite the interchangeability between the two specialties.

Finally, PAs are not included in any of the VA special locality pay bands, so PA salaries are not regularly tracked and reported by the VA. There is evidence that this has resulted in lower pay for PAs employed by the VA compared to other health care professionals. This only serves as yet another deterrent for PAs to enter the VA system.

A permanent Director at the VA Central Office (VACO) would serve as an advocate on behalf of PAs and work to ensure their fair treatment. It is time for the VA to devote serious attention to PA recruitment and retention. Enactment of H.R. 1302 is a start.

As a Congressman who represents a district with rural communities, I know that PAs play a key role in providing medical care in rural and other medically underserved areas. I want to ensure that they are equally well utilized by the VA. I know that medical institutions like the Cleveland Clinic, the Mayo Clinic, the MD Anderson Cancer Clinic at the University of Texas, and others have a Director of PA Services to make sure that the PAs they employ are integrated into their health systems. Additionally, each branch of the Armed Services has a Chief PA to help the military best utilize its PA workforce. It is time for the VA to do the same.

I strongly urge my colleagues to show their support of strengthening Veterans' healthcare by voting "yes" on H.R. 3219.

Mr. TEAGUE. Mr. Speaker, I believe that this bill represents something that we can always use more of in government, a little common sense. In this case, that common sense is a simple fix that will ensure that disabled veterans will be able to receive the housing assistance that they have earned. I am the sponsor of legislation that will make that fix.

My bill, H.R. 2180, will waive VA home loan fees for certain veterans with service-connected disabilities that have been recalled to active service. I am proud to say that this provision has been included in H.R. 3219.

Currently, the Department of Veterans Affairs underwrites home loans that are made by private lenders to eligible veterans. The benefits of having a VA home loan are many. For example, the buyer is informed of reasonable value, the interest rate is negotiable, and there are no mortgage insurance premiums. Veterans also have the right to prepay without penalty, and the VA provides assistance to veteran borrowers in default due to financial difficulty.

Additionally, many disabled veterans and some injured soldiers qualify for a waiver of home loan fees. Unfortunately, however, a different part of the law prevents an eligible servicemember or veteran from receiving a home loan funding fee waiver if the veteran is called up back to active duty service. This bill gets rid of this oversight in the law and allows all eligible servicemembers to receive the fee waiver, whether or not they have been called back to service.

Mr. Speaker, I simply think that it is wrong that someone who has served their country and been injured as a result of that service be penalized because they are returning to service.

This provision represents a common-sense solution to a problem that I do not think any-

one anticipated. I believe that when the Congress established the VA Home loan program they had the best of intentions. This program has created an opportunity for thousands of veterans that simply want to be part of the American dream. With this bill we can correct an oversight that will help even more veterans along the way.

I would like to take this time to thank the staff members of the Economic Opportunity Subcommittee who lent their expertise during the drafting of this bill. I truly believe that this one measure can open up many doors of opportunity to our veterans and hope that my colleagues will support its passage.

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. 3219, 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.

DISABLED VETERANS HOME IMPROVEMENT AND STRUCTURAL ALTERATION GRANT INCREASE ACT OF 2009

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 1293) to amend title 38, United States Code, to provide for an increase in the amount payable by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to veterans for improvements and structural alterations furnished as part of home health services.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 1293

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 "Disabled Veterans Home Improvement and Structural Alteration Grant Increase Act of 2009".

SEC. 2. INCREASE IN AMOUNT AVAILABLE TO DISABLED VETERANS FOR IMPROVEMENTS AND STRUCTURAL ALTERATIONS FURNISHED AS PART OF HOME HEALTH SERVICES.

(a) INCREASE.—Section 1717(a)(2) of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) in subparagraph (A), by striking "\$4,100" and inserting "\$6,800"; and

(2) in subparagraph (B), by striking "\$1,200" and inserting "\$2,000".

(b) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendments made by subsection (a) shall apply with respect to a veteran who first applies for benefits under section 1717(a)(2) of title 38, United States Code, on or after the date of the enactment of this Act.

(c) APPLICABILITY.—A veteran who exhausts such veteran's eligibility for benefits under section 1717(a)(2) of title 38, United States Code, before the date of the enactment of this Act, is not entitled to additional benefits under such section by reason of the amendments made by subsection (a).

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER) and the gen-

tleman from Florida (Mr. STEARNS) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California.

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the ranking member of our committee, Mr. BUYER of Indiana, for introducing this bill.

In the past, many of our veterans have returned from combat with life-changing injuries and illnesses. Congress saw fit to provide special adaptive grants to help them improve their quality of life. Today, another generation of servicemembers is returning from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan with even more egregious life-changing injuries and illnesses due to the development of better equipment and body armor that keeps them alive, albeit seriously injured.

The bill provides for a long overdue increase in the amount payable to veterans for improvements and structural alterations to their homes. This amount, Mr. Speaker, has not been increased for 17 years. The bill would increase the grant amounts from \$4,100 to \$6,800 for veterans with a service-connected disability and from \$1,200 to \$2,000 for veterans with nonservice-connected disability. Importantly, Home Improvement and Structural Alteration grants, called HISA, are the only grants available to nonservice-connected veterans and those conditions.

HISA grants can be used in conjunction with other adaptive housing grants offered through the Veterans Benefits Administration to help cover some of the additional costs a veteran may be facing when building or adapting a home to meet his or her unique needs. We owe it to our veterans to keep pace with the many different needs and challenges that they face on a daily basis. Seventeen years is a long time to wait.

I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 1293.

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

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 1293, the Disabled Veterans Home Improvement and Structural Alteration Grant Increase Act of 2009.

H.R. 1293 is a bill that our ranking member, Mr. BUYER, introduced to increase the authorized amount of a Home Improvement and Structural Alteration, or, as commonly referred to as HISA, grant that VA provides as part of home health services. Mr. Speaker, it is an important benefit that is available to veterans with service-connected and nonservice-connected disabilities who simply require home adaptations to continue treatment for their disability in their home, and I am proud to be an original cosponsor of this bill.

The HISA grant is used for such things as widening doors—something simple that will have a great impact for these veterans—lowering kitchen and bathroom counters and sinks,

making simple handrails and wall switches and window controls easy and accessible to these folks so they can operate, and installing elevators and stair lifts, which will help many of the veterans who are in wheelchairs.

This grant is distinct from the specifically adapted housing grants that are also available to service-connected disabled veterans. The HISA grant can also be used in addition to these grants.

Unfortunately, the HISA grant ceiling has not been raised in 17 years; yet the cost of home modification, as we all know, has increased over the years.

In addition, there is a new generation of veterans from Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom returning home with serious combat injuries.

VA reports that the number of service-connected veterans using the HISA grants grew by almost 20 percent from fiscal year 2000 to 2008, and VA expects that the trend will continue to increase at the average of 1½ percent per year.

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Under current law the maximum HISA grant is \$4,100 for service-connected veterans and \$1,200 for non-service-connected veterans. H.R. 1293 would simply raise the amounts to \$6,800 for service-connected veterans and \$2,000 for non-service-connected veterans. The proposed increase would account for inflation and simply provide a reasonable amount for the type of home modifications Congress intended the program to provide for these service-connected veterans.

H.R. 1293 is a bipartisan bill that is supported by the VA and the Veterans Service Organizations, and I urge my colleagues to support the bill.

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

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from American Samoa (Mr. FALEOMAVAEGA), a great supporter of veterans in our Nation.

(Mr. FALEOMAVAEGA asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. FALEOMAVAEGA. I certainly want to thank the chairman of our House Veterans' Affairs Committee, the gentleman from California, Chairman FILNER, and my good friend from Florida on the other side for aisle for their management. And I also commend the ranking member of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. BUYER), for his sponsorship of this important bill.

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 1293 would increase the amount authorized by the Department of Veterans Affairs under the Health Improvement and Structural Alterations, HISA, from \$4,100 to \$6,800 for improvements and structural alterations for homes of veterans with service-related disabilities of 50 percent or more, and from \$1,200 to \$2,000 for veterans with service-connected disabilities less than 50 percent.

Mr. Speaker, HISA continues to provide for our veterans necessary funding for structural and home improvements

such as widening doors; putting in handrails or special lighting; making kitchens, bathrooms, windows, electrical outlets and switches more accessible; and building ramps or improving entrance paths and driveways. These structural and home improvements are needed to meet the needs of our disabled veterans.

HISA was created in 1973 out of concern for disabled veterans returning to their homes without proper accommodations. In 1976 there was a ceiling placed, and veterans with service-connected disabilities were receiving \$2,500 and veterans with nonservice-related disabilities received only \$600. In 1992, public law increased the lifetime benefit limit from \$2,500 to \$4,100 for service-connected veterans and from \$600 to \$1,200 to nonservice-connected veterans.

Today the ceiling has been in the process for 17 years even though the costs for home modifications have increased tremendously. No one deserves to prolong their suffering. I believe that this must be addressed to show our continued appreciation for their service and all the accommodations to serve their disabilities should be made.

Mr. Speaker, with the new generation of soldiers returning from Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom, this increase is significantly necessary. Our servicemembers have served our country at its time of greatest need and have protected our Nation's best interests, and I believe we should take care of their needs and interests when they return home.

This legislation is necessary, and I urge my colleagues to support this bill.

Mr. STEARNS. Mr. Speaker, in closing, I would like to take the opportunity to thank the chairman and ranking member of the Subcommittee on Health, MIKE MICHAUD of Maine and HENRY BROWN of South Carolina, for their quick consideration of this legislation. I would also like to express my gratitude to the chairman, Mr. FILNER, and Ranking Member BUYER for moving this bill to the floor so quickly.

I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 1293.

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

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. FILNER. 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. 1293.

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

There was no objection.

Mr. BUYER. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 1293, the Disabled Veterans Home Improvement and Structural Alteration Grant Increase Act of 2009.

H.R. 1293 is a bill I introduced to increase the amount payable to a disabled veteran under the Department of Veterans Affairs, VA, Home Improvement and Structural Alteration Program.

Known as the HISA grant, this is a significant benefit that provides seriously disabled veterans the ability to make home alterations to receive in-home medical care.

Congress first authorized VA to establish the HISA program as part of outpatient care for home health services in 1973. The benefit is paid from the medical care appropriation and is available to both veterans with service-connected and non-service connected disabilities. A service-connected veteran can receive a HISA grant in addition to other home adaptations grants available through the Veterans Benefits Administration.

We have been engaged in the Global War on Terror for nearly eight years and are seeing an increasing number of servicemembers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan utilizing VA health care.

Last year, a joint Department of Defense, DOD, and VA Inspectors General review of the care transition process for injured OEF/OIF service members found that continuity of care was hindered by the inability of an injured active duty service member to obtain a HISA grant prior to discharge. Responding to this need, we enacted Public Law 110-289 to allow VA to provide such grants to eligible service members prior to their discharge from military service.

However, we did not raise the amount of the grant which is currently \$4,100 for service-connected veterans and \$1,200 for non-service connected veterans. In fact, the ceiling has not been raised since 1992.

H.R. 1293 would raise the maximum amount of a HISA grant to \$6,800 for service-connected veterans and \$2,000 for non-service connected veterans. The proposed increase reflects an additional 3 percent for each year since 1992 to account for inflation and the increased cost of making home improvements—a long overdue 66 percent increase.

It is important that we make sure that VA benefits, such as the HISA grant stay relevant and adequately meet the needs of today's veterans.

I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 1293. It is a good bill that shares bipartisan support.

Mr. FILNER. I urge my colleagues to unanimously 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. 1293.

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. STEARNS. 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 motion will be postponed.

VETERANS NONPROFIT RESEARCH AND EDUCATION CORPORATIONS ENHANCEMENT ACT OF 2009

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 2770) to amend title 38, United States Code, to modify and update provisions of law relating to nonprofit research and education corporations, and for other purposes, as amended.