

those who died and remain missing as a result of the Vietnam War.

□ 1515

The organization works to promote healing through networking and special projects, and it regularly addresses high schools and college classes in the hopes of providing education on the historical and emotional legacies of war. Today, through local chapters, events, this organization has reunions and partnerships with the veterans' community.

These sons and daughters have become examples of America's resilience. It is fitting that we remember the contributions and the legacies left behind by those who served and who made the ultimate sacrifice for their Nation. These young men and women left their homelands to fight on foreign soil, answering their Nation's call to duty. They served honorably and often with merit and honor.

This Father's Day, the Sons and Daughters in Touch will be honoring their fathers on their 20th-year reunion. With a new generation of children who recently suffered the loss of parents in current conflicts, the members of the Sons and Daughters in Touch will be able to provide them with support and encouragement for years to come. In honoring the children of those lost during the Vietnam War, we honor the men and women who served during that conflict, and we remember their sacrifices to a grateful Nation.

It is always very, very important to tell the story, not only by those who served in war but also with regard to those who kept the watch fires burning and remained home—not only by the wives but also by the widows and by the children. It is important to tell their stories, to actually convey their stories.

At times, those of us who have served this Nation in war have come back home and have gotten upset with individuals who may not share the same dimension of our experience, and we can get upset with them just as easily as they can get upset with regard to whatever conflict we participated in. Sometimes we judge the world through our own prism and our own dimensions, and we have our own value systems. Yet, unless we are able to convey the stories, how can we even hope that someone would be able to understand? So, when the widows and, in fact, the orphans of those who lost their lives in service to this country tell their stories, it helps others to understand the sacrifice.

Madam Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this bill, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. FILNER. Madam Speaker, again, I thank the gentlewoman from Illinois (Mrs. HALVORSON), who put together this important resolution that we are considering.

I urge my colleagues to unanimously support H. Con. Res. 278, 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 agree to the concurrent resolution, H. Con. Res. 278.

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. 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.

VETERANS DOG TRAINING THERAPY ACT

Mr. FILNER. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 3885) to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out a pilot program on dog training therapy.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 3885

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 Dog Training Therapy Act".

SEC. 2. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS PILOT PROGRAM ON DOG TRAINING THERAPY.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Commencing not later than 120 days after the date of the enactment of the Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall carry out a pilot program for the purpose of assessing the effectiveness of addressing post-deployment mental health and post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms through a therapeutic medium of training service dogs for veterans with disabilities.

(b) DURATION OF PILOT PROGRAM.—The pilot program required by subsection (a) shall be carried out at least three and not more than five Department of Veterans Affairs medical centers during the five-year period beginning on the date of the commencement of the pilot program.

(c) LOCATIONS OF PILOT PROGRAM.—In selecting medical centers for the pilot program required under subsection (a), the Secretary shall ensure that each medical center selected provides a training area for educating veterans with mental health conditions in the art and science of assistance dog training and handling. Such training area shall—

(1) include a dedicated space that is suitable for grooming and training dogs indoors;
 (2) be wheelchair accessible;
 (3) include classroom or lecture space;
 (4) include office space for staff;
 (5) include a suitable space for storing training equipment;

(6) provide for periodic use of other training areas for training the dogs with wheelchairs and conducting other exercises;

(7) include outdoor exercise and toileting space for dogs; and

(8) provide transportation for weekly field trips to train dogs in other environments.

(d) DESIGN OF PILOT PROGRAM.—In carrying out the pilot program under this section, the Secretary shall—

(1) administer the program through the Recreation Therapy Service of the Department of Veterans Affairs under the direction

of a certified recreational therapist with sufficient administrative experience to oversee all pilot program sites;

(2) establish, for purposes of overseeing the training of dogs at medical centers selected for the pilot program, a director of service dog training with a background working in social services, experience in teaching others to train service dogs in a vocational setting, and at least one year of experience working with veterans or active duty service members with post-traumatic stress disorder in a clinical setting;

(3) ensure that each pilot program site has certified dog trainers;

(4) ensure that each assistance dog used in the program is purpose-bred for assistance dog work and has adequate temperament and health clearances;

(5) ensure that each assistance dog participating in the pilot program is taught 90 commands pertaining to assistance dog skills;

(6) ensure that each assistance dog live at the pilot program site or a volunteer foster home in the vicinity of such site while receiving training;

(7) ensure that the pilot program involves both lecture of assistance dog training methodologies and practical hands-on training and grooming of assistance dogs; and

(8) ensure that the pilot program is designed to—

(A) maximize the therapeutic benefits to veteran participating in the program; and

(B) provide well-trained assistance dogs to veterans with disabilities.

(e) VETERAN ELIGIBILITY.—A veteran with post-traumatic stress disorder or other post-deployment mental health condition may volunteer to participate in the pilot program under subsection (a) if the Secretary determines that there are adequate program resources available for such veteran at the pilot program site.

(f) HIRING PREFERENCE.—In hiring service dog training instructors under the pilot program under subsection (a), the Secretary shall give a preference to veterans who have successfully graduated from post-traumatic stress disorder or other residential treatment programs and who have received adequate certification in assistance dog training.

(g) COLLECTION OF DATA.—The Secretary shall collect data on the pilot program required under subsection (a) to determine how effective the program is for the veterans participating in the program. Such data shall include data to determine how effectively the program assists veterans in—

(1) reducing stigma associated with post-traumatic stress disorder or other post-deployment mental health condition;

(2) improving emotional regulation;

(3) improving patience;

(4) instilling or re-establishing a sense of purpose;

(5) providing an opportunity to help fellow veterans;

(6) reintegrating into the community;

(7) exposing the dog to new environments and in doing so, helping the veteran reduce social isolation and withdrawal and increase their sense of safety;

(8) building relationship skills;

(9) relaxing the hyper-vigilant survival state;

(10) improving sleep patterns; and

(11) enabling veterans to decrease the use of pain medication.

(h) REPORTS TO CONGRESS.—Not later than one year after the date of the commencement of the pilot program under subsection (a), and each year thereafter for the duration of the pilot program, the Secretary shall submit to Congress a report on the pilot program. Each such report shall include—

(1) the number of veterans participating in the pilot program;

(2) a description of the services carried out by the Secretary under the pilot program;

(3) the effects that participating in the pilot program has on the following—

(A) symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder and post-deployment adjustment difficulties, including depression, maintenance of sobriety, suicidal ideations, and homelessness;

(B) potentially relevant physiological markers that possibly relate to the interactions with the service dogs;

(C) family dynamics;

(D) insomnia and pain management; and

(E) overall well being; and

(4) the recommendations of the Secretary with respect to the extension or expansion of the pilot program.

(i) DEFINITION.—For the purposes of this section, the term “service dog training instructor” means an instructor who provides the direct training of veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder and other post-deployment issues in the art and science of assistance dog training and handling.

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.

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. 3885.

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

There was no objection.

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

Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 3885, the Veterans Dog Training Therapy Act.

I want to thank the ranking member of the Health Subcommittee, Congressman BROWN from South Carolina, for bringing us this legislation.

Madam Speaker, we all recognize how damaging the invisible wounds of war can be. The need for effective treatments for posttraumatic stress disorder and for other conditions, such as depression and substance abuse, is apparent, I think, to all Americans. This act recognizes and meets this need by exploring an innovative and promising new form of treatment, using the training of service dogs as a therapeutic medium.

The bill would require the VA to establish a pilot program where veterans with PTSD, or with other postdeployment mental health conditions, would help train service dogs. Through this pilot program, we can test the potential therapeutic benefits to participating veterans. Similar programs are already in existence within the Palo Alto VA Health Care System and at Walter Reed Army Medical Center.

There is a lot of anecdotal evidence of participants who have reported improved emotional regulation, regular sleep patterns, feelings of personal safety, and reduced levels of anxiety and social isolation. Moreover, these participants tout a strong sense of purpose that they derive from their participation in the program.

Madam Speaker, this bill will allow us to further study this innovative new treatment modality beyond the existing anecdotal evidence, and it will help us assess its place in the VA health care system.

I urge the support of all of my colleagues, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. BUYER. I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Madam Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 3885, to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out a pilot program on dog training therapy.

This bill would require the Department of Veterans Affairs to establish a 5-year pilot program in at least three medical centers for assessing the effectiveness of treating postdeployment mental illness, such as PTSD, through assistance dog training.

The pilot would allow veterans battling these invisible wounds to assist certified dog trainers in training assistance animals. The veterans will work with their dogs in their care, the trainers who are guiding the curriculum and with other wounded warriors to train dogs to become valuable therapy animals, with the animals having learned some 90 different commands. At the same time, the veterans learn valuable lessons about themselves and their world, which they need to learn so they can recover and reintegrate into society.

Once trained, the therapy dogs will be provided to other disabled veterans to aid them in daily activities, like opening doors, retrieving fallen items, et cetera. As an added benefit, the veteran dog trainers are provided vocational experience should they choose to pursue service dog training as a career path.

Just as Chairman FILNER said, there are similar programs that are very successful at Palo Alto and at Walter Reed, and trying to replicate this, I think, is extremely important. These veterans who are participating are seeing great improvements, not only in their sleep but in their social interaction, in their emotional regulation, patience, trust, sense of purpose, and personal meaning. All of these things are extremely important for veterans to be able to reintegrate into society. Some of them have even been able to reduce their medications as a result of lowering their anxiety levels, which, I think, is extremely important. As we continue to hear these stories of healing and hope, I think this bill goes a long way toward giving the necessary assurances to these veterans.

Madam Speaker, I know there are few things we take as seriously as our commitment to serving those who have served us in combat, especially when they return home with physical and mental scars. So, if there is anything that we can do to be helpful to them, we would like to do that. You know, sometimes the obvious can be right in front of us. We all know that cherished feeling of having a pet—we learned it as children—and if there is anything that we can do to touch the heart of a

veteran which can help him in the healing process, it is a good thing.

So I want to thank my colleague, former Chairman and now Ranking Member BROWN, for bringing this bill. This pilot will provide much-needed scientific grounding into these dynamics and into the efficacy of a therapeutic model that will help these veterans. I think this is a wonderful bill.

I want to thank Chairman FILNER and subcommittee Chairman MIKE MICHAUD for their leadership and for their assistance in moving this bill forward.

Once again, I know HENRY BROWN is going to be retiring, and we are going to miss his leadership on the Veterans’ Affairs Committee. It is only fitting that HENRY would bring a bill such as this. His own daughter was diagnosed with systemic lupus erythematosus, so he knows the need of having not only compassion for people but also compassion for animals. He knows how it can touch people and promote their healing. HENRY’s deep commitment to helping others in need and, in particular, our veterans is unparalleled, so I want to thank HENRY BROWN for bringing this bill to the floor for consideration today.

I encourage all of my colleagues to support the bill.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. FILNER. Madam Speaker, I have no further requests for time. I would urge unanimous support for 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. 3885.

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. 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.

ASSURING QUALITY CARE FOR VETERANS ACT

Mr. FILNER. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 5145) to amend title 38, United States Code, to improve the continuing professional education reimbursement provided to health professionals employed by the Department of Veterans Affairs, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 5145

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