

very hard in moving this bill forward. It's been quite a long time coming to fruition, and I know that many of our stakeholders look forward to its passage today.

In the last Congress and this one, the Committee on Veterans' Affairs held a multitude of hearings on the language that is in the bill today. It was developed as a result of vigorous oversight hearings and meetings conducted in the past two Congresses. We received expert input from many of our stakeholders on the myriad systemic and vexing issues surrounding the whole process of claims appeals.

As such, section 2 of the bill would allow the Board of Veterans Appeals to review evidence submitted directly to it by the veteran or a survivor without issuing often unnecessary supplemental statements of the case that serve only to delay and to deny. I know that many stakeholders are anxious to see this provision enacted, including the VA itself.

Section 3 of the bill would have established a judicial review commission that would have been made up of 11 expert members to tackle other long-standing appellate review issues facing our veterans and survivors.

These issues have included whether to continue Federal Circuit Court review of the decisions of the Court of Appeals of Veterans Claims, whether to grant class action and associational standing to the Veterans Court, and whether to require decision on all issues raised on appeal, just to name a few.

The commission would have been required at that time to report on its findings and recommendations to Congress, and it would not sunset until 2 years after that time. However, we were not able to move this section forward because of certain de minimus costs associated with operating the commission, and I know that we all have a bit of "commission fatigue" anyway. But at some point, this is an unexamined area with divergent and broad concepts that are in dire need of concentrated and expert attention.

So I hope, Mr. Speaker, that we find a way to fund this commission in the near future, and I look forward to working with Mr. MILLER in a bipartisan manner to make this a reality. I ask all my colleagues to support the bill in its amended form.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I am happy to yield as much time as he may consume to the chairman of the Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. RUNYAN).

Mr. RUNYAN. I thank the chairman for the time.

I rise today in support of the manager's amendment to H.R. 1484, as amended, and the Veterans Appeals Improvement Act of 2011.

The veterans disability claims policy is very complex, and all of us on the Veterans' Affairs Committee are con-

stantly seeking ways to improve the process for both our veterans and the VA. This bill is a good first step in accomplishing the goal by improving upon the current process. Specifically, section 2 will work to simplify the process for submitting evidence to the Board of Veterans Appeals by allowing veterans to keep their place in line at the Board of Appeals for Veterans Claims when they submit new evidence in support of their claim.

Under current law, if a veteran submitted new evidence to their case with the intention of expediting their adjudication, they may have actually made the adjudication take longer due to the VA's archaic rules that require the agency to resubmit the claim back to the regional offices. This bill corrects that problem.

While I'm hopeful that the VA's new electronic processing system, which is currently being developed, will alleviate the backlog, we must do right by our veterans by continually improving the claims process and continuing to make changes, no matter how small, to help our veterans who are currently stuck in a failed paper-based system.

This bill is one of many steps my subcommittee will take in this Congress to address the backlog of veteran disability claims. On Thursday, the subcommittee will be holding a hearing on underperforming regional offices, and my staff is currently working on ways to improve training and accountability at all VA regional offices. Every veteran has the right to have their claim adjudicated in a prompt and accurate fashion.

I am proud that many veteran service organizations, as well as the VA, have expressed support for H.R. 1484, as amended; and I urge all Members to support H.R. 1484, as amended.

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

Mr. Speaker, I just want to point out to the chair of the subcommittee—and I guess the chair of the committee also—we're taking an important step today, but it is a small step. And the chair, the gentleman from New Jersey, mentioned other small steps. We aren't going to clean up this backlog, which approaches 1 million cases, without a major step, a major blowing up of the whole way we do this stuff. We just hired 10,000 new people, and the number of claims doubled. So we're not getting anywhere with this brute force kind of thing.

I have suggested many times to just cut out the red tape completely, at least in the short term, to clean up the backlog, to say to those who have submitted claims that are backed up both by the medical evidence and with help from veteran service officers—of which we have thousands certified across the Nation—that we ought to accept those claims and honor the service of our veterans. Until we get to a mindset that says blow up the bureaucracy in this thing, we're not going to solve the problem.

So all these small steps will be taking forever. Let's pass this small step today, but let us take on a much bigger honoring of our veterans as we just talked about on Memorial Day by saying, you know, some of you have died while waiting for this process to continue, some of you have lost your homes because you didn't get a disability check. Let's really honor our veterans this Memorial Day and say let's change the whole system that we have and stop trying to fool around with these small steps.

Mr. Speaker, I urge adoption of the bill, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. MILLER of Florida. I associate myself with the remarks of my colleague, the ranking member. This issue of the disability claims backlog has haunted this Congress and this committee for many, many years; but nobody is more haunted by it than the veterans who have to go through that process. We, together, in a bipartisan way are looking for a way to try to solve this issue, and it's obvious that money and bodies are not the way to do it.

So together, Mr. FILNER and I and the members of our committees will work together and try to bring a reasonable solution to this Congress that will help resolve the million veterans that are out there right now in backlog waiting for their disability claims.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and submit extraneous material on the manager's amendment to H.R. 1484, as amended.

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

There was no objection.

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Once again, I encourage all Members to support the manager's amendment to H.R. 1484, as amended, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MILLER) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 1484, 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. MILLER of Florida. 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.

□ 1800

ESTABLISHING VETSTAR AWARD PROGRAM

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass

the bill (H.R. 802) to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a VetStar Award Program, as amended. The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 802

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

SECTION 1. VETSTAR AWARD PROGRAM.

(a) *IN GENERAL.*—Section 532 of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) by striking “The Secretary may” and inserting “(a) ADVERTISING IN NATIONAL MEDIA.—The Secretary may”; and

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

“(b) **VETSTAR AWARD PROGRAM.**—(1) The Secretary shall establish an award program, to be known as the ‘VetStar Award Program’, to annually recognize businesses for their contributions to veterans’ employment.

“(2) The Secretary shall establish a process for the administration of the award program, including criteria for—

“(A) categories and sectors of businesses eligible for recognition each year; and

“(B) objective measures to be used in selecting businesses to receive the award.”.

(b) *CLERICAL AMENDMENTS.*—

(1) *SECTION HEADING.*—The heading of such section is amended by adding at the end the following: “; **VETSTAR AWARD PROGRAM**”.

(2) *TABLE OF SECTIONS.*—The table of sections at the beginning of chapter 5 of such title is amended by striking the item relating to section 532 and inserting the following new item:

“532. Authority to advertise in national media; VetStar Award Program.”.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MILLER) and the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Florida.

Mr. MILLER of Florida. I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 802, as amended, a bill introduced by Ranking Mr. FILNER to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a “VetStar Award Program.”

Mr. Speaker, the VetStar Award Program would recognize private sector businesses which excel in promoting the hiring of veterans.

In the tough economy that we’re in, unemployment among veterans is too high. According to the Department of Labor, 11 percent of veterans from the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan were unemployed during the month of April. I’m confident that you and all of the Members would agree that we need to use every tool at our disposal to bring that number down.

Our Nation’s veterans bring a unique set of qualifications and skills to any job. And while many in the private sector understand their value, more must be done. H.R. 802, as amended, would recognize businesses who have done their part and promoted veterans for employment. This is a great no-cost way of recognizing those employers who have already stepped up to the plate and helped our veterans.

I want to thank the ranking member, Mr. FILNER, for this bill and urge all of

my colleagues to support H.R. 802, as amended.

I reserve the balance of my time.

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

Again, I want to thank the chair of our VA Committee for the incredible cooperative effort we have devoted so far in this Congress. He mentioned on the last bill that we are united to try to find a way to cut through these intolerable and inexcusable delays in the disability claims process. And we are working together as a top priority to make sure that those who have served this Nation have a job when they get back because that, of course, leads to everything else good in our society. A good job is what is needed, and we are united in saying to our veterans this is going to be our top priority.

What we have done here in H.R. 802 is again a small step which will highlight efforts and create an incentive for businesses to hire veterans by directing the VA to develop a very low-cost annual award program to recognize businesses who contribute to veterans’ employment, the award to be displayed by business owners as a recognition of the business owner’s commitment to the veteran community.

I think the First Lady and the Second Lady of this country are doing much to promote what our Nation is doing for families of veterans. The White House might convene a summit of those who are both helping and will pledge to help hire veterans and highlight this issue more for all Americans.

This bill would authorize the VA to advertise the program in the national media and allow the public to be educated on those businesses that support the employment of veterans.

Again, I thank the chairman for scheduling the bill. It’s part of our Memorial Day tribute to our veterans. I ask that our colleagues support the legislation.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I am happy to yield as much time as he may consume to the chairman of the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity, Mr. STUTZMAN from the great State of Indiana.

Mr. STUTZMAN. I thank the chairman.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of H.R. 802, as amended, as this bill would require the Department of Veterans Affairs to establish an award program to recognize businesses that excel in hiring veterans.

We all know the unemployment problems facing many of our veterans. Our youngest groups of veterans have the highest unemployment rates among all the veterans, while older veterans between the ages of 35 and 64 make up two-thirds of the unemployed veteran population.

As we look for ways to increase veteran employment rates, it is absolutely appropriate that we honor those businesses that make the effort to hire veterans and to emphasize and to recog-

nize their efforts. This award not only highlights employers who currently hire veterans, but it is my hope that it will also serve as an incentive for other employers to hire more veterans as well.

At the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity legislative hearing on the bill, some witnesses suggested that the program would be appropriately sponsored by the Veterans Employment and Training Service. While not required by the bill, I hope that the VA will consult with the Department of Labor during the selection process.

I can tell you as a small business owner and one that highly values the service of our veterans to our country, I believe that this is a wonderful measure to recognize those businesses that not only go out of their way but make it a priority to hire veterans to work at their businesses.

So, Mr. Speaker, highlighting businesses for their support of veterans seeking employment is the right thing to do, and I urge my colleagues to support Ranking Member Mr. FILNER’s bill, and I appreciate him bringing the bill forward.

Mr. FILNER. I would again urge support of the bill, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Again, I thank the ranking member for bringing this bill to the floor. I would add that tomorrow morning the full committee will be having a hearing at 10 a.m. entitled: “Putting American Veterans Back to Work.”

I would also please ask my friend, the ranking member, not to give all of the good ideas to the White House because you and I are going to be working together on a summit that will bring together those individuals who are wanting good employees to hire and highlight the veterans community to them for employment in their companies.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Once again, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days to revise and extend and add any extraneous material on H.R. 802, as amended.

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

There was no objection.

Mr. MILLER of Florida. I encourage all Members to support H.R. 802, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MILLER) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 802, as amended.

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. MILLER of Florida. 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.

SMALL BUSINESS ADDITIONAL TEMPORARY EXTENSION ACT OF 2011

Mr. GRAVES of Missouri. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (S. 1082) to provide for an additional temporary extension of programs under the Small Business Act and the Small Business Investment Act of 1958, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

S. 1082

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 “Small Business Additional Temporary Extension Act of 2011”.

SEC. 2. ADDITIONAL TEMPORARY EXTENSION OF AUTHORIZATION OF PROGRAMS UNDER THE SMALL BUSINESS ACT AND THE SMALL BUSINESS INVESTMENT ACT OF 1958.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Section 1 of the Act entitled “An Act to extend temporarily certain authorities of the Small Business Administration”, approved October 10, 2006 (Public Law 109–316; 120 Stat. 1742), as most recently amended by section 1 of Public Law 112–1 (125 Stat. 3), is amended—

(1) by striking “Any” and inserting “Except as provided in section 3 of the Small Business Additional Temporary Extension Act of 2011, any”; and

(2) by striking “May 31, 2011” each place it appears and inserting “July 31, 2011”.

(b) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendments made by subsection (a) shall take effect on May 30, 2011.

SEC. 3. EXTENSION OF SBIR AND STTR TERMINATION DATES.

(a) SBIR.—Section 9(m) of the Small Business Act (15 U.S.C. 638(m)) is amended—

(1) by striking “TERMINATION.—” and all that follows through “the authorization” and inserting “TERMINATION.—The authorization”;

(2) by striking “2008” and inserting “2011”; and

(3) by striking paragraph (2).

(b) STTR.—Section 9(n)(1)(A) of the Small Business Act (15 U.S.C. 638(n)(1)(A)) is amended—

(1) by striking “IN GENERAL.—” and all that follows through “with respect” and inserting “IN GENERAL.—With respect”;

(2) by striking “2009” and inserting “2011”; and

(3) by striking clause (ii).

(c) COMMERCIALIZATION PILOT PROGRAM.—Section 9(y)(6) of the Small Business Act (15 U.S.C. 638(y)(6)) is amended by striking “2010” and inserting “2011”.

SEC. 4. COMPETITIVE SELECTION PROCEDURES FOR SBIR AND STTR PROGRAMS.

Section 9 of the Small Business Act (15 U.S.C. 638) is amended by inserting after subsection (r) the following:

“(s) COMPETITIVE SELECTION PROCEDURES FOR SBIR AND STTR PROGRAMS.—All funds awarded, appropriated, or otherwise made available in accordance with subsection (f) or (n) must be awarded pursuant to competitive and merit-based selection procedures.”.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. GRAVES) and the gentlewoman from New York (Ms. VELÁZQUEZ) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Missouri.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. GRAVES of Missouri. I ask unanimous consent that all Members shall have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on the bill under consideration.

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

There was no objection.

Mr. GRAVES of Missouri. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

The legislation we have before us is a short-term extension of programs that helps our Nation’s small businesses. Last week, the House passed the bill by voice vote to extend these programs for 4 months until the end of the fiscal year. Unfortunately, that bill was used as a vehicle to pass the PATRIOT Act authorization. So we have a new bill before us today.

Like the bill the House passed last week, this legislation extends the authorization of the Small Business Innovative Research and Small Business Technology Transfer programs until the end of the fiscal year. These two programs provide R&D dollars to small businesses to create jobs, spur innovative ideas to the market, and solve Federal agency problems, all at no additional cost to the government.

Secondly, the bill extends for 2 months, until July 31, 2011, the authorization of several other programs of the Small Business Administration. Among them is the pre-disaster mitigation program that provides loans to small businesses so they can implement technology that will reduce the impact of disasters on their operations.

□ 1810

With the recent devastation we have seen in the Midwest, including in my home State of Missouri, and with the hurricane season right around the corner, it’s imperative that this program continue for small firms who wish to bolster their disaster plans.

Mr. Speaker, this is bipartisan legislation that has the support of the administration, as well as the leadership of both parties on the other side of the Capitol. It is important that we do not let these programs lapse, because they will expire if we do not pass this legislation today. This is the last day.

I urge my colleagues to support our Nation’s small businesses and vote “yes” on S. 1082.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. VELÁZQUEZ. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself as much time as I may consume.

The role of small businesses in moving the economy forward has never been more important. Making up over 99 percent of all U.S. firms, they are critical to innovation, wealth creation, and, most importantly, employment gains. Many look to the SBA for assistance, using its loan, contracting, and training programs to start up or expand.

Unfortunately, the legislation before us, while seemingly uncontroversial, could make it harder for small businesses to access these very tools and resources. This bill, if passed, will break with long-standing House precedent and choose winners and losers among SBA programs. By doing so, it will create confusion among small firms seeking to use the agency’s initiatives.

As many of you know, since September 30, 2006, the SBA has been operating under a series of 12 temporary extensions. While these extensions have varied in length, they have always treated all of the agency’s programs and initiatives equally. This has resulted in all of the SBA’s programs operating unimpeded, ensuring that small businesses have ready access to the tools and resources they need.

Unfortunately, S. 1082 takes the unprecedented step of setting different authorization periods for certain SBA programs, creating a maze of confusing dates and deadlines for small businesses. During a time when efforts are being made to reduce regulatory burden, Congress should make certain that it is not adding to it by its own unnecessary actions.

Given the extraordinary nature of S. 1082, it should not be considered and fast-tracked on the suspension calendar, which is typically reserved for uncontroversial measures. Instead, such a unique and precedent-setting measure should go through regular order, where Members will have an opportunity to amend this unexpected and highly unusual piece of legislation. At a minimum, this would enable Members to have more time to understand the detrimental impact this legislation could have on small businesses. Small businesses, such as those represented by the U.S. Women’s Chamber of Commerce, also oppose this legislation.

Voting against this extension will not affect any agency program in a meaningful way. Small businesses will still be able to secure financing, receive contracts, and access training through the agency’s initiatives. What a vote against this legislation will do, however, is ensure that we produce a more equitable piece of legislation that treats all agency initiatives fairly. If parties are serious about helping small businesses, they will reject this measure and work expeditiously to approve a more responsible extension.

I urge my colleagues to vote “no.”

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

Mr. GRAVES of Missouri. I thank the ranking member.

In closing, just let me reiterate this is a simple, short-term extension of programs that are very important to our Nation’s small businesses. We aren’t changing any policy here. We are just extending them until hopefully we can work out the differences with the other body on the other side of the Capitol.