

If you have any questions regarding this matter, please contact the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Legislative Affairs. A similar letter is being sent to the Chairmen of the Senate and House Committees on Armed Services.

Sincerely,

CHUCK HAGEL,
Secretary of Defense.

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

I rise in support of H.R. 3304, introduced by my friend and colleague, Mr. DEUTCH of Florida.

H.R. 3304 authorizes the President of the United States to award the Medal of Honor to Bennie G. Adkins, Donald P. Sloat, Melvin Morris, Ardie Copas, Jack Weinstein, Leonard Kravitz, Alfred Nietzel, Donald Schwab, and William Leonard.

These individuals have distinguished themselves in service to our Nation in previous conflicts, ranging from World War II to Vietnam. The individuals were reviewed by the appropriate services, and their nominations were given careful consideration by the Secretary of Defense, and their names have been submitted to the Congress.

Section 3744 of title X, United States Code, requires the Medal of Honor to be awarded within 3 years after the date of the act justifying the award, which is why we are here on the floor—to seek a statutory time waiver to allow the President of the United States to award the Medal of Honor to these particular individuals. So I urge my colleagues to support the passage of this important legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from Florida (Mr. DEUTCH), the author of this bill.

Mr. DEUTCH. I thank my friend, the gentlelady from Guam.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 3304. I was pleased to work with my colleagues, Mr. ROGERS of Alabama, Mr. BRIDENSTINE of Oklahoma, and Mr. ROONEY of Florida, on this bill; and I appreciate the work that they do on behalf of our veterans and the men and women who serve our country today.

This legislation will waive the time limitation to allow the award of the Medal of Honor to two brave men, Bennie G. Adkins, a constituent of Mr. ROGERS', and Donald P. Sloat, a constituent of Mr. BRIDENSTINE's. I sincerely appreciate my colleagues' support and the support of the House Armed Services Committee in the effort to bring this legislation to the floor today.

This legislation will also allow the award of the Medal of Honor to several other deserving veterans. This bill represents the culmination of a long fight to remedy discrimination against Jewish American and Hispanic American veterans of our Armed Forces who, in spite of their acts of valor above and beyond the call of duty, may have been overlooked as being deserving of the Medal of Honor.

Over 12 years ago, this important effort began because Mitch Libman, a

close friend of Leonard Kravitz', made it known that then-Private First Class Kravitz may have been improperly bypassed for the Medal of Honor. After sacrificing his life in combat in Korea, he was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross with the following citation:

Upon order to withdraw, Private Kravitz voluntarily remained to provide protective fire for the retiring elements. Traversing the gun to the left to cover the infiltrating enemy and ignoring the pleadings of his comrades to fall back, he fearlessly maintained his position. Detecting a column of Communist troops moving toward friendly positions, he swept the hostile soldiers with deadly accurate fire, killing the entire group. His destructive retaliation caused the enemy to concentrate vicious fire on his position and enabled the friendly elements to effect a withdrawal.

Leonard Kravitz bravely gave his life for the men fighting at his side and for his country. In spite of his acts of valor above and beyond the call of duty, Kravitz was not awarded the Medal of Honor. In fact, when Mr. Libman came forward to share Mr. Kravitz' story, no Jewish American veteran had been recommended to receive the Medal of Honor for service in Korea. To ensure that this disparity was not the result of discrimination, Congress required each military department to conduct a review of veteran files to identify any deserving veteran who may have been overlooked for the Medal of Honor. This review has ensured that our highest military honor will be awarded based only on the acts of valor and courage displayed in battle and that no veteran will be denied the Medal of Honor as a result of his or her religion, race, or heritage.

I am extremely proud of the long, rich history of Jewish Americans and Hispanic Americans serving in our Armed Forces. Over half a million Jewish Americans fought for the United States in World War II, and 11,000 of them perished while fighting for this country. Jewish Americans have served with distinction in Korea, Vietnam, Operation Desert Storm, and countless other missions around the globe. Hispanic Americans have a proud history of military service stretching back to the Revolutionary War. Over 1 million Latino veterans have served courageously in our Armed Forces. Hispanic Americans and Jewish Americans are among the brave young men and women who have stepped forward to serve our Nation in our most recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Members of both of these communities have fought for America's freedom and have had to fight to ensure that they receive the respect and honor they are owed for their service. The review of hundreds of service records resulted in the recommendation of the award of the Medal of Honor to at least seven veterans, including Mr. Kravitz.

I want to thank all of those at the Department of Defense who diligently reviewed their records to make certain that we properly recognize all of the

brave veterans deserving of the Medal of Honor.

□ 1615

The President of the United States, Mr. Speaker, has awarded the Medal of Honor to 3,471 of our finest Americans over the course of our Nation's history. With the passage of this bill, the President will be authorized to add Bennie G. Adkins, Donald P. Sloat, and at least seven other veterans whose heroic acts can at last receive the highest honor that they richly deserve.

I strongly urge my colleagues to support the passage of this legislation.

Mr. ROGERS of Alabama. Mr. Speaker, at this time, I have no further requests to speak, so I am prepared to close with an urging to my colleagues that they vote in favor of this bill.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Ms. BORDALLO. Mr. Speaker, I have no further speakers, but I do want to commend the author of this bill, this very worthwhile piece of legislation, and I urge my colleagues to support it.

I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Alabama (Mr. ROGERS) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 3304.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

VULNERABLE VETERANS HOUSING REFORM ACT OF 2013

Mr. COTTON. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 1742) to exclude from consideration as income under the United States Housing Act of 1937 payments of pension made under section 1521 of title 38, United States Code, to veterans who are in need of regular aid and attendance, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 1742

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 "Vulnerable Veterans Housing Reform Act of 2013".

SEC. 2. EXCLUSION FROM INCOME.

Paragraph (4) of section 3(b) of the United States Housing Act of 1937 (42 U.S.C. 1437a(b)(4)) is amended—

(1) by striking "and any amounts" and inserting "any amounts";

(2) by striking "or any deferred" and inserting "any deferred"; and

(3) by inserting after "prospective monthly amounts" the following: "and any expenses related to aid and attendance as detailed under section 1521 of title 38, United States Code".

SEC. 3. UTILITY ALLOWANCES AND DATA.

Section 8(o) of the United States Housing Act of 1937 (42 U.S.C. 1437f(o)) is amended—

(1) in paragraph (2), by adding at the end the following new subparagraph:

"(D) UTILITY ALLOWANCE.—

“(i) IN GENERAL.—In determining the monthly assistance payment for a family under subparagraphs (A) and (B), the amount allowed for tenant-paid utilities shall not exceed the appropriate utility allowance for the family unit size as determined by the public housing agency regardless of the size of the dwelling unit leased by the family.

“(ii) EXCEPTION FOR CERTAIN FAMILIES.—Notwithstanding subparagraph (A), upon request by a family that includes a person with disabilities, an elderly family, or a family that includes any person who is less than 18 years of age, the public housing agency shall approve a utility allowance that is higher than the applicable amount on the utility allowance schedule, except that in the case of a family that includes a person with disabilities, the agency shall approve such higher amount only if a higher utility allowance is needed as a reasonable accommodation to make the program accessible to and usable by the family member with a disability.”; and

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

“(21) UTILITY DATA.—

“(A) PUBLICATION.—The Secretary shall, to the extent that data can be collected cost effectively, regularly publish such data regarding utility consumption and costs in local areas as the Secretary determines will be useful for the establishment of allowances for tenant-paid utilities for families assisted under this subsection.

“(B) USE OF DATA.—The Secretary shall provide such data in a manner that—

“(i) avoids unnecessary administrative burdens for public housing agencies and owners; and

“(ii) protects families in various unit sizes and building types, and using various utilities, from high rent and utility cost burdens relative to income.”.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. COTTON) and the gentleman from Delaware (Mr. CARNEY) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Arkansas.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. COTTON. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and submit extraneous material for the RECORD on H.R. 1742, currently under consideration.

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

There was no objection.

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

I rise today in strong support of H.R. 1742, the Vulnerable Veterans Housing Reform Act of 2013, bipartisan legislation that ensures fairness in the housing assistance made available to our veterans who have borne the physical costs of service to the country.

First, H.R. 1742 amends current law to exempt expenses related to a veteran's in-home aid and attendance-care payments from qualifying as income when determining their eligibility and payments from HUD programs. The in-home aid and attendance-care benefit is an enhanced pension program provided by the VA to severely disabled wartime veterans who make less than

\$12,256 per year. These pensions are provided out of medical necessity and should not be considered disposable income. Including them in income calculations skews eligibility and wrongly reduces the housing assistance that would otherwise be available to thousands of disabled veterans.

The Vulnerable Veterans Housing Reform Act also improves the way utility allowances are calculated by instructing public housing authorities to base payments on family size—that is, the number of people benefiting from a payment—rather than the current standard of dwelling size. Using this approach ensures, for instance, a family of four living in a one-bedroom apartment will not receive less in utility allowance than a single individual living in a two-bedroom apartment. These housing reforms have broad support from State and local housing agencies, low-income housing advocates, and for-profit and nonprofit affordable housing providers.

Mr. Speaker, many of our current veterans assistance programs are flawed—they spend too much and they help too few. Fortunately, the CBO estimates the reforms in this bill will save almost \$50 million over 5 years while helping thousands of veterans obtain the appropriate housing assistance.

Sadly, homelessness affects over 60,000 veterans nationwide and approximately 1,000 in my home State of Arkansas. These numbers are unacceptable. As a combat veteran of both Iraq and Afghanistan, I understand not only the difficulties faced while serving in the military, but also the struggles that too many encounter upon returning to civilian life—especially with a life-altering disability. These men and women have put their lives on the line for our country; we should be doing all we can to support them—not making it harder for them to obtain assistance.

I am grateful to my colleague and fellow veteran, Congressman JOE HECK, and the Financial Services Committee for their work on this legislation.

I urge my colleagues to support this bill and our disabled veterans.

I reserve the balance of my time.

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

About a year ago, I talked to a young marine from Magnolia, Delaware, in my district. He had been wounded in Afghanistan and was home recovering. I had called him really just to wish him well and to see how he was doing. This marine was not focused on his injuries. All he could think about and talk to me about was getting back to his base.

Mr. Speaker, as Members of Congress, we need to be worthy of this marine's sacrifice, his selflessness, and his dedication to fighting for his country. Our Nation's most sacred obligation is to care for our men and women in uniform, both when they are serving abroad and when they come back home.

Unfortunately, today, we are falling short of this duty. Today, about 60,000

veterans are homeless. Close to 13,000 of these are veterans from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. While veterans represent only 7 percent of the U.S. population, they represent 13 percent of homeless Americans.

These numbers are just unacceptable. That is why I was pleased to join with my colleagues and friends, Mr. HECK and Mr. RENACCI, in introducing the Vulnerable Veterans Housing Reform Act of 2013. We are all part of a bipartisan working group that meets a couple of times a month. We have come up with a number of commonsense ideas just like this bill. Mr. DELANEY and Mr. RENACCI have another bill later on today.

Simply put, the Vulnerable Veterans Housing Reform Act ensures that veterans who need and deserve housing assistance get it. Right now, those veterans who are struggling the most—those who are severely disabled and have virtually no income—receive a benefit from the VA to cover the cost of their care. This benefit goes to caretakers who help our veterans with the daily tasks of living, bathing, eating, maintaining prosthetics, and the list goes on. However, when these same veterans go to apply for housing assistance from the Department of Housing and Urban Development, this aid counts as income, making it harder for them to qualify for housing assistance. This policy just doesn't make sense, and it is hurting our veterans.

H.R. 1742, the Vulnerable Veterans Housing Reform Act, fixes this problem so that our severely disabled veterans aren't victims of homelessness as well. It excludes this aid—meant to address the health and daily living needs of severely disabled veterans—from the calculation of income in the housing assistance program.

Mr. Speaker, often when Members come in through the doors of the House Chamber to vote, we are greeted by members of our military who have been wounded in service of our Nation. Most have lost limbs, and all their lives are irreparably changed. Despite all they have already given, these men and women come to our Nation's Capitol to continue giving back and to inspire and thank us. We should thank them.

As we approach Veterans Day, I hope the House will honor their sacrifice by passing legislation that will make life just a little easier for those who have given so much to protect ours.

I know my colleagues on both sides of the aisle recognize this as a critical issue. A similar version of this bill passed the House by voice vote in the last Congress. I urge my colleagues to pass this bill once again for the sake of our Nation's most vulnerable veterans.

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

Mr. COTTON. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to yield 5 minutes to the gentleman from Nevada, Dr. HECK, the sponsor of this legislation, a colonel in the U.S. Army Reserve and soon to be brigadier general.

Mr. HECK of Nevada. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my brother veteran, the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. COTTON), and my friend from the State of Delaware (Mr. CARNEY) for joining me in support of H.R. 1742, this bipartisan bill, the Vulnerable Veterans Housing Reform Act of 2013.

As has been stated, this bill would remove an unnecessary barrier that prevents our wartime veterans from receiving the housing assistance they so critically need. This body recognized the importance of this issue when it unanimously passed a substantially similar bill, H.R. 6361, the Vulnerable Veterans Housing Reform Act of 2012, which I introduced last year. Unfortunately, that legislation was not considered by the Senate prior to the conclusion of the 112th Congress.

Quite simply, H.R. 1742 prevents the Department of Housing and Urban Development from considering a veteran's "aid and attendance benefits" as income when calculating their need and eligibility for housing assistance.

The aid and attendance benefit is an enhanced pension provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs to our Nation's wartime veterans who are severely disabled and have little or no income. Veterans eligible for this benefit are those requiring the aid of another person in order to perform their activities of daily living.

In order to receive this benefit, a veteran must first establish his or her eligibility for a low-income pension, which requires an annual adjusted gross income of less than \$12,256 for a single veteran with no dependents.

Once eligibility is determined, low-income disabled veterans can receive, roughly, an additional \$8,000 in aid and attendance benefits annually to help defray the cost of their medical care. This is an important point: the aid and attendance benefit is for medical care; it is not discretionary income; it cannot be used for groceries, utilities, or transportation.

As you can imagine, these low-income veterans struggle daily to keep the lights on, put food on the table, and to keep a roof over their heads. Add to that the costs of paying for a personal care attendant and it becomes increasingly difficult for them to stay in their homes.

The Department of Housing and Urban Development operates a number of programs to assist these veterans. However, current regulations require that the aid and attendance benefit be counted as income when determining eligibility for housing assistance.

Mr. Speaker, this makes no sense. The VA provides this benefit to ensure that our low-income disabled wartime vets have the necessary resources to receive the medical care they need and that they have earned. While \$8,000 per year may seem like a substantial amount of money, it doesn't fully cover the cost of a full-time aide, but it is much more cost effective than placing the veteran in a nursing home or assisted living facility.

Continuing to count the aid and attendance benefit as income does nothing more than to reduce the housing assistance available to our low-income disabled vets and jeopardizes their ability to live independently.

Mr. Speaker, it is its stated goal of both this House and this administration to reduce homelessness in our veteran population. The need for this legislative fix is just as strong today as it was last year. Most recent statistics estimate that approximately 63,000 veterans across America are homeless. Mr. Speaker, H.R. 1742 will go a long way toward preventing homelessness for our Nation's veterans.

I urge my colleagues to support this critical legislation.

Mr. CARNEY. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time. I just would like to thank the sponsors, Mr. HECK, Mr. RENACCI, and other veterans, Mr. COTTON, the Members from the Democratic side who cosponsored this, and all the Members of the House who supported this the last time.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. COTTON. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the gentleman from Delaware, as well as the gentleman from Nevada, and everybody in this institution that helps serve our veterans every single day.

I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. COTTON) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 1742.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

□ 1630

ESTABLISHING COMMISSION OR TASK FORCE TO EVALUATE THE BACKLOG OF DISABILITY CLAIMS

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 2189) to establish a commission or task force to evaluate the backlog of disability claims of 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. 2189

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

SECTION 1. TABLE OF CONTENTS.

The table of contents for this Act is as follows:

Sec. 1. Table of contents.

Sec. 2. Scoring of budgetary effects.

TITLE I—IMPROVEMENT OF CLAIMS PROCESSING

Sec. 101. Evaluation of backlog of disability claims and appeals of claims of Department of Veterans Affairs.

- Sec. 102. Supplemental reports to the Strategic Plan to Eliminate the Compensation Claims Backlog.
- Sec. 103. Expedition of transfer of certain records.
- Sec. 104. Claims processors training.
- Sec. 105. Report by Comptroller General of the United States.
- Sec. 106. Priority for processing claims of the Department of Veterans Affairs.
- Sec. 107. Public availability of certain information about pending and completed claims for compensation under the laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.
- Sec. 108. Annual report on processing of claims.
- Sec. 109. Department of Veterans Affairs notice of average times for processing claims and percentage of claims approved.
- Sec. 110. Claim defined.

TITLE II—COMPENSATION AND PENSIONS

- Sec. 201. Improvements to authority for performance of medical disabilities examinations by contract physicians.
- Sec. 202. Consideration by Secretary of Veterans Affairs of resources disposed of for less than fair market value by individuals applying for pension.
- Sec. 203. Bifurcated payments of compensation benefits under laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.
- Sec. 204. Pension for certain veterans covered by Medicaid plans for services furnished by nursing facilities.

TITLE III—OTHER MATTERS

- Sec. 301. Review of operation of certain ships during the Vietnam Era.
- Sec. 302. Methods for validating certain service considered to be active service by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.
- Sec. 303. Designation of American World War II Cities.
- Sec. 304. Observance of Veterans Day.

SEC. 2. SCORING OF BUDGETARY EFFECTS.

The budgetary effects of this Act, for the purpose of complying with the Statutory Pay-As-You-Go Act of 2010, shall be determined by reference to the latest statement titled "Budgetary Effects of PAYGO Legislation" for this Act, submitted for printing in the Congressional Record by the Chairman of the House Budget Committee, provided that such statement has been submitted prior to the vote on passage.

TITLE I—IMPROVEMENT OF CLAIMS PROCESSING

SEC. 101. EVALUATION OF BACKLOG OF DISABILITY CLAIMS AND APPEALS OF CLAIMS OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—There is established a commission or task force to evaluate the backlog of claims within the Department of Veterans Affairs and the appeals process of claims.

(b) STUDIES.—

(1) BACKLOG STUDY.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—The Commission or Task Force, acting through the subcommittee described in subsection (d)(2)(A), shall carry out a study on the backlog of claims, including the current process the Secretary of Veterans Affairs uses to evaluate claims and appeals and the laws and regulations applicable to such claims and appeals. Such study shall be a comprehensive evaluation and assessment of the backlog of claims, an analysis of