

I continue to believe that the threshold for a super construction project should be at least \$250 million. As a member of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, I know how busy the Army Corps is in responding to the projects that the committee requires them to complete. It is important that they do not get bogged down with projects of insufficient complexity. I will continue to watch the construction process and follow the complexity issue to determine if the threshold needs to be increased in the future.

I am pleased this legislation also includes an assistant inspector general for construction. Oversight of the projects needs a person who has the expertise to evaluate the complexity of VA's ongoing construction projects.

I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting this legislation.

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

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. COFFMAN), my good friend, a member of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, and somebody who has been on this from the very, very beginning.

Mr. COFFMAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of the Construction Reform Act of 2016, an important piece of legislation that will further reform VA's severely troubled major construction program.

For decades, the Government Accountability Office has documented hundreds of millions of dollars in cost overruns on mismanaged VA major construction projects. GAO reports from 1981, 1993, 2009, and 2013 all reflect a stunning degree of bureaucratic incompetence in VA's construction management. In my own district, a single VA hospital project is over \$1 billion over budget, and years behind schedule.

VA's construction failures represent billions of wasted tax dollars that should have gone towards VA's core mission: taking care of our Nation's veterans.

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Since 2012, the House Veterans' Affairs Committee has conducted at least six separate hearings exploring the VA's construction failures, and this bill's reforms incorporate many of the committee's findings.

First, it forces the VA to leave hospital construction to the experts—to Federal construction managers like the Army Corps of Engineers. In fact, the contractor on the troubled Aurora, Colorado, project demanded that the Army Corps of Engineers take over the project from the VA before they returned to work on the project.

Previously, in 2014, the House unanimously passed my legislation, which required the Army Corps to take over the VA's most troubled projects, including the project in Aurora. I am pleased that my colleagues in both the House and the Senate are now fully

supportive of this transfer of authority.

Second, this bill introduces a much-needed improvement over the contract change order process. The GAO and the Veterans' Affairs Committee identified the VA's inept change order management as a major driver of both cost increases and project delays.

Third, the bill creates a new, independent assistant inspector general for construction who would be required to report directly to Congress when significant construction problems have been discovered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The time of the gentleman has expired.

Mr. MILLER of Florida. I yield the gentleman an additional 1 minute.

Mr. COFFMAN. As we learned with the project in Aurora, the VA went to great lengths to hide the significant problems with the project from the American people, insisting in congressional hearing after hearing that the project was on time and on budget. It was not until the project's contractor sued the VA—and won on every count in December of 2014—that the VA finally admitted it had significant problems with the Aurora project.

I urge all of my colleagues to support this measure and continue with the long-needed construction reforms in the VA.

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

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I encourage all Members to support H.R. 3106, as amended.

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. 3106, as amended.

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

The title of the bill was amended so as to read: "A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to make certain improvements in the administration of Department medical facility construction projects."

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

#### VETERANS EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION, AND HEALTHCARE IMPROVEMENT ACT

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 3016) to amend title 38, United States Code, to clarify the role of podiatrists in 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. 3016

*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 Employment, Education, and Healthcare Improvement Act".

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

Sec. 1. Short title; table of contents.

#### TITLE I—VETERANS HEALTH CARE

Sec. 101. Role of podiatrists in Department of Veterans Affairs.

Sec. 102. Priority of medal of honor recipients in health care system of Department of Veterans Affairs.

Sec. 103. Improvement of care provided to newborn children.

Sec. 104. Comptroller General audit of budget of Veterans Health Administration.

Sec. 105. Outreach to veterans regarding effect of certain delayed payments by Department of Veterans Affairs Chief Business Office.

Sec. 106. Department of Veterans Affairs pilot program on dog training therapy.

#### TITLE II—VETERANS ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY AND TRANSITION ADMINISTRATION

Sec. 201. Establishment of Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration.

Sec. 202. Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition.

#### TITLE III—EDUCATION ASSISTANCE AND VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

Sec. 301. Modification and improvement of transfer of unused education benefits to family members under Department of Veterans Affairs Post-9/11 Educational Assistance Program.

Sec. 302. Clarification of eligibility for Marine Gunnery Sergeant John David Fry Scholarship.

Sec. 303. Approval of courses of education and training for purposes of the vocational rehabilitation program of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Sec. 304. Authority to prioritize vocational rehabilitation services based on need.

Sec. 305. Recodification and improvement of election process for Post-9/11 Educational Assistance Program.

Sec. 306. Clarification of assistance provided for certain flight training and other programs of education.

Sec. 307. Consideration of certain time spent receiving medical care from Secretary of Defense as active duty for purposes of eligibility for post-9/11 educational assistance.

Sec. 308. Work-study allowance.

Sec. 309. Vocational rehabilitation and education action plan.

Sec. 310. Reduction in redundancy and inefficiencies in vocational rehabilitation claims processing.

#### TITLE IV—ADMINISTRATION OF EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE

Sec. 401. Centralized reporting of veteran enrollment by certain groups, districts, and consortiums of educational institutions.

Sec. 402. Provision of information regarding veteran entitlement to educational assistance.

Sec. 403. Role of State approving agencies.

Sec. 404. Criteria used to approve courses.

Sec. 405. Compliance surveys.

Sec. 406. Survey of individuals using their entitlement to educational assistance under the educational assistance programs administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

Sec. 407. Improvement of information technology of the Veterans Benefits Administration of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Sec. 408. Technical amendment relating to in-State tuition rate for individuals to whom entitlement is transferred under All-Volunteer Force Educational Assistance Program and Post-9/11 Educational Assistance.

#### TITLE V—OTHER MATTERS

Sec. 501. Amount of loan guaranteed under home loan program of Department of Veterans Affairs.

Sec. 502. Longitudinal study of job counseling, training, and placement service for veterans.

Sec. 503. Limitations on subcontracts under contracts with small business concerns owned and controlled by veterans.

Sec. 504. Procedures for provision of certain information to State veterans agencies to facilitate the furnishing of assistance and benefits to veterans.

#### TITLE I—VETERANS HEALTH CARE

##### SEC. 101. ROLE OF PODIATRISTS IN DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

(a) INCLUSION AS PHYSICIAN.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Subchapter I of chapter 74 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new section:

###### “§ 7413. Treatment of podiatrists

“For purposes of this chapter, the term ‘physician’ includes a podiatrist.”

(2) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections at the beginning of such chapter is amended by inserting after the item relating to section 7412 the following new item:

“7413. Treatment of podiatrists.”

(3) CONFORMING AMENDMENT.—Section 7401(1) of such title is amended by striking “Physicians, dentists, podiatrists,” and inserting “Physicians, dentists,”

(b) QUALIFICATIONS.—Section 7402(b) of such title is amended—

(1) in paragraph (1)—

(A) in subparagraph (A), by striking “or of doctor of osteopathy” and inserting “, doctor of osteopathy, or doctor of podiatric medicine”; and

(B) in subparagraph (C), by inserting “podiatry,” after “surgery,”;

(2) by striking paragraph (5); and

(3) by redesignating paragraphs (6) through (14) as paragraphs (5) through (13), respectively.

(c) PERIOD OF APPOINTMENT.—Section 7403(a)(2) of such title is amended—

(1) by striking subparagraph (C); and

(2) by redesignating subparagraphs (D) through (H) as subparagraphs (C) through (G), respectively.

(d) MODIFICATION OF PAY GRADE.—

(1) GRADE.—The list in section 7404(b) of such title is amended by striking “CLINICAL PODIATRIST, CHIROPRACTOR, AND OPTOMETRIST SCHEDULE” and inserting “CLINICAL CHIROPRACTOR AND OPTOMETRIST SCHEDULE”.

(2) APPLICATION.—The amendment made by paragraph (1) shall apply with respect to a pay period of the Department of Veterans Affairs beginning on or after the date that is 30 days after the date of the enactment of this Act.

(e) CONTRACTS FOR SCARCE SERVICES.—Section 7409(a) of such title is amended by striking “podiatrists,”.

(f) PERSONNEL ADMINISTRATION.—Section 7421(b) of such title is amended—

(1) by striking paragraph (3); and

(2) by redesignating paragraphs (4) through (8) as paragraphs (3) through (7), respectively.

(g) MEDICAL DIRECTORS.—Section 7306(a)(4) of such title is amended by inserting “, doctor of podiatric medicine,” after “doctor of medicine”.

(h) APPLICATION.—The amendments made by this section shall apply with respect to podiatrists employed by the Department of Veterans Affairs as of the date of the enactment of this Act or who are appointed on or after such date.

##### SEC. 102. PRIORITY OF MEDAL OF HONOR RECIPIENTS IN HEALTH CARE SYSTEM OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

(a) ENROLLMENT PRIORITY.—Section 1705(a) of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) in paragraph (1), by striking the period at the end and inserting the following: “and veterans who were awarded the medal of honor under section 3741, 6241, or 8741 of title 10 or section 491 of title 14.”; and

(2) in paragraph (3), by striking “veterans who were awarded the medal of honor under section 3741, 6241, or 8741 of title 10 or section 491 of title 14.”.

(b) ELIGIBILITY.—Section 1710(a)(2)(D) of such title is amended by inserting after “war” the following: “, who was awarded the medal of honor under section 3741, 6241, or 8741 of title 10 or section 491 of title 14.”.

(c) EXTENDED CARE SERVICES.—Section 1710B(c)(2) of such title is amended—

(1) in subparagraph (B), by striking “or”;

(2) in subparagraph (C), by striking the period at the end and inserting “; or”;

(3) by adding at the end the following new subparagraph:

“(D) to a veteran who was awarded the medal of honor under section 3741, 6241, or 8741 of title 10 or section 491 of title 14.”.

(d) COPAYMENT FOR MEDICATIONS.—Section 1722A(a)(3) of such title is amended—

(1) in subparagraph (B), by striking “or”;

(2) in subparagraph (C), by striking the period at the end and inserting “; or”;

(3) by adding at the end the following new subparagraph:

“(D) to a veteran who was awarded the medal of honor under section 3741, 6241, or 8741 of title 10 or section 491 of title 14.”.

(e) APPLICATION.—The priority of enrollment of medal of honor recipients pursuant to chapter 17 of title 38, United States Code, as amended by this section, shall apply to each such recipient, regardless of the date on which the medal is awarded.

##### SEC. 103. IMPROVEMENT OF CARE PROVIDED TO NEWBORN CHILDREN.

Section 1786 of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) in subsection (a), by striking “seven days” and inserting “42 days”; and

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

“(c) ANNUAL REPORT.—Not later than October 31, 2016, and each year thereafter through 2020, the Secretary shall submit to the Committees on Veterans’ Affairs of the House of Representatives and the Senate a report on the health care services provided under subsection (a) during the fiscal year preceding the date of the report, including the number of newborn children who received such services during such fiscal year.”.

##### SEC. 104. COMPTROLLER GENERAL AUDIT OF BUDGET OF VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Subchapter II of chapter 73 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new section:

##### “§ 7330B. Comptroller General audit of VHA budget

“(a) IN GENERAL.—The Comptroller General of the United States shall periodically conduct an audit of elements of the budget of the Veterans Health Administration, including the budget formulation, execution, allocation, and use of funds.

“(b) SELECTION OF ELEMENTS.—(1) In selecting elements of the budget of the Veterans Health Administration for purposes of an audit under subsection (a), the Comptroller General shall take into consideration—

“(A) knowledge of the programs of the Veterans Health Administration;

“(B) current issues;

“(C) national priorities; and

“(D) priorities expressed by the appropriate congressional committees.

“(2) Not later than 30 days before conducting an audit under subsection (a), the Comptroller General shall submit to the appropriate congressional committees notice of the elements selected by the Comptroller General for purposes of the audit.

“(c) APPROPRIATE CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEES.—In this section, the term ‘appropriate congressional committees’ means—

“(1) the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs, the Committee on Appropriations, and the Committee on the Budget of the Senate; and

“(2) the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs, the Committee on Appropriations, and the Committee on the Budget of the House of Representatives.”.

(b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections at the beginning of such chapter is amended by inserting after the item relating to section 7330A the following new item:

“7330B. Comptroller General audit of VHA budget.”.

##### SEC. 105. OUTREACH TO VETERANS REGARDING EFFECT OF CERTAIN DELAYED PAYMENTS BY DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS CHIEF BUSINESS OFFICE.

(a) OUTREACH.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall conduct outreach, including through national and local veterans service organizations, to inform veterans of how to resolve credit issues caused by delayed payment of a claim for emergency hospital care, medical services, or other emergency health care furnished through a non-Department of Veterans Affairs provider. The Secretary shall establish a toll-free telephone number for veterans to report such credit issues to the Chief Business Office of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

(b) ANNUAL REPORT.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—During the five-year period beginning on the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall annually submit to Congress a report on the effectiveness of the Chief Business Office in providing timely payment of proper invoices for emergency hospital care, medical services, or other emergency health care furnished through non-Department of Veterans Affairs providers by the required payment date during both the five-year period preceding the date of the report and the one-year period preceding such date. For any part of the period covered by a report under this subsection that occurred before October 1, 2014, the report shall evaluate the provision of such payments by the Veterans Integrated Service Networks.

(2) MATTERS INCLUDED.—The reports under paragraph (1) shall include, for each period covered by the report, the following:

(A) The number of veterans who contacted the Secretary regarding a delayed payment that negatively affected, or will potentially negatively affect, the credit of the veteran.

(B) The total amount of interest penalties paid by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs

under section 3902 of title 31, United States Code, by reason of a delayed payment.

(C) The number of proper invoices submitted, listed in a table for each quarter and fiscal year of each such period that includes—

(i) the total amount owed by the Secretary under the proper invoices;

(ii) the payment status of each proper invoice, as of the date of the report; and

(iii) the period that elapsed until each proper invoice was paid, including an explanation of any delayed payment.

(D) Any comments regarding delayed payments made by medical providers.

(E) A description of the best practices that the Chief Business Office can carry out to provide timely payment of a proper invoice, including a plan to improve such timely payments.

(C) QUARTERLY REPORTS ON PENDING CLAIMS.—During the five-year period beginning on the date of the enactment of this Act, the Chief Business Office of the Department of Veterans Affairs shall submit to Congress quarterly reports on the number of pending claims for reimbursement for emergency hospital care, medical services, and other emergency health care furnished through non-Department of Veterans Affairs providers. Each such report shall include each of the following:

(1) The total number of such pending claims for each hospital system of the Department, as of the last day of the quarter covered by the report.

(2) The total number of veterans who submitted such a pending claim in each State, as of such day.

(3) The aggregate amount of all such pending claims in each State, as of such day.

(4) As of such day—

(A) the number of such pending claims that have been pending for 30 days or longer;

(B) the number of such pending claims that have been pending for 90 days or longer; and

(C) the number of such pending claims that have been pending for 365 days or longer.

(5) For each hospital system, for the quarter covered by the report—

(A) the number of claims for reimbursement for emergency hospital care, medical services, and other emergency health care furnished through non-Department of Veterans Affairs providers approved during such quarter;

(B) the number of such claims denied during such quarter; and

(C) the number of such claims denied listed by each denial reason group.

(d) COMPTROLLER GENERAL STUDY.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Comptroller General of the United States shall conduct a study that evaluates the effectiveness of the Chief Business Office in providing timely payment of a proper invoice for emergency hospital care, medical services, or other emergency health care furnished through non-Department of Veterans Affairs providers by the required payment date.

(2) SUBMITTAL.—The Comptroller General shall submit to Congress a report on the study conducted under paragraph (1), including the total amount of interest penalties paid by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs under section 3902 of title 31, United States Code, by reason of a delayed payment.

(e) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

(1) The term “delayed payment” means a proper invoice that is not paid by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs until after the required payment date.

(2) The term “proper invoice” has the meaning given that term in section 3901(a) of title 31, United States Code.

(3) The term “required payment date” means the date that payment is due for a

contract pursuant to section 3903(a) of title 31, United States Code.

**SEC. 106. 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 under which the Secretary shall enter into a contract with one or more appropriate non-government entities 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 during the five-year period beginning on the date of the commencement of the pilot program.

(c) LOCATIONS OF PILOT PROGRAM.—In entering into contracts for purposes of the pilot program, the Secretary shall seek to enter into contracts with appropriate non-government entities located in close proximity to at least three but not more than five medical centers of the Department.

(d) APPROPRIATE NON-GOVERNMENT ENTITIES.—For purposes of the pilot program, an appropriate non-government entity is an entity that is certified in the training and handling of service dogs and that has a training area that would be appropriate for use in educating veterans with mental health conditions in the art and science of service 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.

(e) DESIGN OF PILOT PROGRAM.—Each contract entered into under subsection (a) shall provide that the non-government entity shall—

(1) ensure that veterans participating in the program receive training from certified service dog training instructors;

(2) ensure that in selecting assistance dogs for use in the program, dogs residing in animal shelters or foster homes are looked at as an option, if appropriate, and ensure that all dogs used in the program have adequate temperament and health clearances;

(3) ensure that each service dog in training participating in the pilot program is taught all essential commands pertaining to service dog skills;

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

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

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

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

(B) provide well-trained service dogs to veterans with disabilities; and

(7) in hiring service dog training instructors to carry out training under the pilot program, give a preference to veterans who have successfully graduated from post-trau-

matic stress disorder or other residential treatment programs and who have received adequate certification in service dog training.

(f) ADMINISTRATION.—In order to carry out the pilot program under section (a), the Secretary of Veterans Affairs 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 the pilot program; and

(2) establish 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.

(g) VETERAN ELIGIBILITY.—The Secretary shall select veterans for participation in the pilot program. A veteran with post-traumatic stress disorder or other post-deployment mental health condition may volunteer to participate in the pilot program, if the Secretary determines that there are adequate program resources available for such veteran at the pilot program site. Veterans may participate in the pilot program in conjunction with the compensated work therapy program of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

(h) 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;

(8) building relationship skills, including parenting skills;

(9) relaxing the hyper-vigilant survival state;

(10) improving sleep patterns; and

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

(i) 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 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.

(j) 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 service dog training and handling.

## TITLE II—VETERANS ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY AND TRANSITION ADMINISTRATION

### SEC. 201. ESTABLISHMENT OF VETERANS ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY AND TRANSITION ADMINISTRATION.

(a) VETERANS ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY AND TRANSITION ADMINISTRATION.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Part V of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new chapter:

#### “CHAPTER 80—VETERANS ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY AND TRANSITION ADMINISTRATION

“Sec.

“8001. Organization of Administration.

“8002. Functions of Administration.

##### “§ 8001. Organization of Administration

“(a) VETERANS ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY AND TRANSITION ADMINISTRATION.—There is in the Department of Veterans Affairs a Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration. The primary function of the Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration is the administration of the programs of the Department that provide assistance related to economic opportunity to veterans and their dependents and survivors.

“(b) UNDER SECRETARY FOR ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY AND TRANSITION.—The Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration is under the Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition, who is directly responsible to the Secretary for the operations of the Administration.

##### “§ 8002. Functions of Administration

“The Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration is responsible for the administration of the following programs of the Department:

“(1) Vocational rehabilitation and employment programs.

“(2) Educational assistance programs.

“(3) Veterans’ housing loan and related programs.

“(4) The verification of small businesses owned and controlled by veterans pursuant to subsection (f) of section 8127 of this title, including the administration of the database of veteran-owned businesses described in such subsection.

“(5) The Transition Assistance Program under section 1144 of title 10.

“(6) Any other program of the Department that the Secretary determines appropriate.”.

(2) CLERICAL AMENDMENTS.—The tables of chapters at the beginning of title 38, United States Code, and of part V of title 38, United States Code, are each amended by inserting after the item relating to chapter 79 the following new item:

#### “80. Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration ..... 8001”.

(b) EFFECTIVE DATE.—Chapter 80 of title 38, United States Code, as added by subsection (a), shall take effect on October 1, 2017.

(c) FULL-TIME EMPLOYEES.—For fiscal years 2017 and 2018, the total number of full-time equivalent employees authorized for the Veterans Benefits Administration and the Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration, as established under chapter 80 of title 38, United States Code, as added by subsection (a), may not exceed 21,913.

### SEC. 202. UNDER SECRETARY FOR VETERANS ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY AND TRANSITION.

(a) UNDER SECRETARY.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Chapter 3 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by inserting after section 306 the following new section:

#### “§ 306A. Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition

“(a) UNDER SECRETARY.—There is in the Department an Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition, who is appointed by the President, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate. The Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition shall be appointed without regard to political affiliation or activity and solely on the basis of demonstrated ability in—

“(1) information technology; and

“(2) the administration of programs within the Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration or programs of similar content and scope.

“(b) RESPONSIBILITIES.—The Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition is the head of, and is directly responsible to the Secretary for the operations of, the Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration.

“(c) VACANCIES.—(1) Whenever a vacancy in the position of Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition occurs or is anticipated, the Secretary shall establish a commission to recommend individuals to the President for appointment to the position.

“(2) A commission established under this subsection shall be composed of the following members appointed by the Secretary:

“(A) Three persons representing education and training, vocational rehabilitation, employment, real estate, mortgage finance and related industries, and survivor benefits activities affected by the Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration.

“(B) Two persons representing veterans served by the Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration.

“(C) Two persons who have experience in the management of private sector benefits programs of similar content and scope to the economic opportunity and transition programs of the Department.

“(D) The Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

“(E) The chairman of the Veterans’ Advisory Committee on Education formed under section 3692 of this title.

“(F) One person who has held the position of Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition, if the Secretary determines that it is desirable for such person to be a member of the commission.

“(3) A commission established under this subsection shall recommend at least three individuals for appointment to the position of Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition. The commission shall submit all recommendations to the Secretary. The Secretary shall forward the recommendations to the President and the Committees on Veterans’ Affairs of the Senate and House of Representatives with any comments the Secretary considers appropriate. Thereafter, the President may request the commission to recommend additional individuals for appointment.

“(4) The Assistant Secretary or Deputy Assistant Secretary of Veterans Affairs who performs personnel management and labor relations functions shall serve as the executive secretary of a commission established under this subsection.

“(d) QUALIFICATIONS OF RECOMMENDED INDIVIDUALS.—Each individual recommended to the President by the commission for appointment to the position of Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition shall be an individual who has held a senior level position in the private sector with responsibilities relating to at least one of the following:

“(1) Education policy.

“(2) Vocational rehabilitation.

“(3) Employment.

“(4) Job placement.

“(5) Home loan finance.

“(6) Small business development.”.

(2) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections at the beginning of such chapter is amended by inserting after the item relating to section 306 the following new item:

“306A. Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition.”.

(b) CONFORMING AMENDMENTS.—Title 38, United States Code, is further amended—

(1) in section 306(c)(2), by striking subparagraphs (A) and (E) and redesignating subparagraphs (B), (C), (D), and (F), as subparagraphs (A) through (D), respectively;

(2) in section 317(d)(2), by inserting after “Under Secretary for Benefits,” the following: “the Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition.”;

(3) in section 318(d)(2), by inserting after “Under Secretary for Benefits,” the following: “the Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition.”;

(4) in section 516(e)(2)(C), by striking “Health and the Under Secretary for Benefits” and inserting “Health, the Under Secretary for Benefits, and the Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition”;

(5) in section 541(a)(2)(B), by striking “Health and the Under Secretary for Benefits” and inserting “Health, the Under Secretary for Benefits, and the Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition”;

(6) in section 542(a)(2)(B)(iii), by striking “Health and the Under Secretary for Benefits” and inserting “Health, the Under Secretary for Benefits, and the Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition”;

(7) in section 544(a)(2)(B)(vi), by striking “Health and the Under Secretary for Benefits” and inserting “Health, the Under Secretary for Benefits, and the Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition”;

(8) in section 709(c)(2)(A), by inserting after “Under Secretary for Benefits,” the following: “the Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition.”;

(9) in section 7701(a), by inserting after “assistance” the following: “, other than assistance related to Economic Opportunity and Transition.”; and

(10) in section 7703, by striking paragraphs (2) and (3) and redesignating paragraphs (4) and (5) as paragraphs (2) and (3), respectively.

(c) EFFECTIVE DATE.—Section 306A of title 38, United States Code, as added by subsection (a), and the amendments made by this section, shall take effect on October 1, 2017.

## TITLE III—EDUCATION ASSISTANCE AND VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

### SEC. 301. MODIFICATION AND IMPROVEMENT OF TRANSFER OF UNUSED EDUCATION BENEFITS TO FAMILY MEMBERS UNDER DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS POST-9/11 EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM.

(a) RATE OF PAYMENT.—Subsection (h)(3)(B) of section 3319 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by inserting before the period at the end the following: “, except that the amount of the monthly stipend described in subsection (c)(1)(B) or (g)(3)(A)(ii) of section 3313, as the case may be, shall be payable in an amount equal to 50 percent of

the amount of such stipend that would otherwise be payable under this chapter to the individual making the transfer”.

(b) **APPLICABILITY.**—The amendment made by this section shall apply with respect to an election to transfer entitlement under section 3319 of title 38, United States Code, that is made on or after the date that is 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act.

**SEC. 302. CLARIFICATION OF ELIGIBILITY FOR MARINE GUNNERY SERGEANT JOHN DAVID FRY SCHOLARSHIP.**

(a) **IN GENERAL.**—Section 701(d) of the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014 (Public Law 113-146; 128 Stat. 1796; 38 U.S.C. 3311 note) is amended to read as follows:

“(d) **APPLICABILITY.**—

“(1) **IN GENERAL.**—The amendments made by this section shall apply with respect to a quarter, semester, or term, as applicable, commencing on or after January 1, 2015.

“(2) **DEATHS THAT OCCURRED BETWEEN SEPTEMBER 11, 2001, AND DECEMBER 31, 2005.**—For purposes of section 3311(f)(2) of title 38, United States Code, any member of the Armed Forces who died during the period beginning on September 11, 2001, and ending on December 31, 2005, is deemed to have died on January 1, 2006.”.

(b) **ELECTION ON RECEIPT OF CERTAIN BENEFITS.**—Section 3311(f) of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) in paragraph (3), by striking “A surviving spouse” and inserting “Except as provided in paragraph (4), a surviving spouse”;

(2) by redesignating paragraph (4) as paragraph (5); and

(3) by inserting after paragraph (3) the following new paragraph (4):

“(4) **EXCEPTION FOR CERTAIN ELECTIONS.**—

“(A) **IN GENERAL.**—An election made under paragraph (3) by a spouse described in subparagraph (B) may not be treated as irrevocable if such election occurred before the date of the enactment of this paragraph.

“(B) **ELIGIBLE SURVIVING SPOUSE.**—A spouse described in this subparagraph is an individual—

(i) who is entitled to assistance under subsection (a) pursuant to paragraph (9) of subsection (b); and

(ii) who was the spouse of a member of the Armed Forces who died during the period beginning on September 11, 2001, and ending on December 31, 2005.”.

(c) **TECHNICAL AMENDMENT.**—Paragraph (5) of subsection (f) of section 3311 of title 38, United States Code, as redesignated by subsection (b)(2), is amended by striking “that paragraph” and inserting “paragraph (9) of subsection (b)”.

(d) **YELLOW RIBBON G.I. EDUCATION ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM.**—Section 3317(a) of such title is amended by striking “paragraphs (1) and (2) of section 3311(b)” and inserting “paragraphs (1), (2), and (9) of section 3311(b) of this title”.

**SEC. 303. APPROVAL OF COURSES OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR PURPOSES OF THE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.**

(a) **IN GENERAL.**—Section 3104(b) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new sentence: “To the maximum extent practicable, a course of education or training may be pursued by a veteran as part of a rehabilitation program under this chapter only if the course is approved for purposes of chapter 30 or 33 of this title. The Secretary may waive the requirement under the preceding sentence to the extent the Secretary determines appropriate.”.

(b) **EFFECTIVE DATE.**—The amendment made by subsection (a) shall apply with respect to a course of education or training pursued by a veteran who first begins a pro-

gram of rehabilitation under chapter 31 of title 38, United States Code, on or after the date that is one year after the date of the enactment of this Act.

**SEC. 304. AUTHORITY TO PRIORITIZE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES BASED ON NEED.**

Section 3104 of title 38, United States Code, as amended by section 303, is further amended by adding at the end the following new subsection:

“(c)(1) The Secretary shall have the authority to administer this chapter by prioritizing the provision of services under this chapter based on need, as determined by the Secretary. In evaluating need for purposes of this subsection, the Secretary shall consider disability ratings, the severity of employment handicaps, qualification for a program of independent living, income, and any other factor the Secretary determines appropriate.

“(2) Not later than 90 days before making any changes to the prioritization of the provision of services under this chapter as authorized under paragraph (1), the Secretary shall submit to Congress a plan describing such changes.”.

**SEC. 305. RECODIFICATION AND IMPROVEMENT OF ELECTION PROCESS FOR POST-9/11 EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM.**

(a) **IN GENERAL.**—Subchapter III of chapter 33 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new section:

**“§ 3326. Election to receive educational assistance**

“(a) **INDIVIDUALS ELIGIBLE TO ELECT PARTICIPATION IN POST-9/11 EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE.**—An individual may elect to receive educational assistance under this chapter if such individual—

“(1) as of August 1, 2009—

“(A) is entitled to basic educational assistance under chapter 30 of the title and has used, but retains unused, entitlement under that chapter;

“(B) is entitled to educational assistance under chapter 107, 1606, or 1607 of title 10 and has used, but retains unused, entitlement under the applicable chapter;

“(C) is entitled to basic educational assistance under chapter 30 of this title but has not used any entitlement under that chapter;

“(D) is entitled to educational assistance under chapter 107, 1606, or 1607 of title 10 but has not used any entitlement under such chapter;

“(E) is a member of the Armed Forces who is eligible for receipt of basic educational assistance under chapter 30 this title and is making contributions toward such assistance under section 3011(b) or 3012(c) of this title; or

“(F) is a member of the Armed Forces who is not entitled to basic educational assistance under chapter 30 of this title by reason of an election under section 3011(c)(1) or 3012(d)(1) of this title; and

“(2) as of the date of the individual’s election under this paragraph, meets the requirements for entitlement to educational assistance under this chapter.

“(b) **CESSATION OF CONTRIBUTIONS TOWARD GI BILL.**—Effective as of the first month beginning on or after the date of an election under subsection (a) of an individual described by paragraph (1)(E) of that subsection, the obligation of the individual to make contributions under section 3011(b) or 3012(c) of this title, as applicable, shall cease, and the requirements of such section shall be deemed to be no longer applicable to the individual.

“(c) **REVOCACTION OF REMAINING TRANSFERRED ENTITLEMENT.**—

“(1) **ELECTION TO REVOKE.**—If, on the date an individual described in paragraph (1)(A) or (1)(C) of subsection (a) makes an election under that subsection, a transfer of the entitlement of the individual to basic educational assistance under section 3020 of this title is in effect and a number of months of the entitlement so transferred remain unutilized, the individual may elect to revoke all or a portion of the entitlement so transferred that remains unutilized.

“(2) **AVAILABILITY OF REVOKED ENTITLEMENT.**—Any entitlement revoked by an individual under this paragraph shall no longer be available to the dependent to whom transferred, but shall be available to the individual instead for educational assistance under chapter 33 of this title in accordance with the provisions of this section.

“(3) **AVAILABILITY OF UNREVOKED ENTITLEMENT.**—Any entitlement described in paragraph (1) that is not revoked by an individual in accordance with that paragraph shall remain available to the dependent or dependents concerned in accordance with the current transfer of such entitlement under section 3020 of this title.

“(d) **POST-9/11 EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE.**—

“(1) **IN GENERAL.**—Subject to paragraph (2) and except as provided in subsection (e), an individual making an election under subsection (a) shall be entitled to educational assistance under this chapter in accordance with the provisions of this chapter, instead of basic educational assistance under chapter 30 this title, or educational assistance under chapter 107, 1606, or 1607 of title 10, as applicable.

“(2) **LIMITATION ON ENTITLEMENT FOR CERTAIN INDIVIDUALS.**—In the case of an individual making an election under subsection (a) who is described by paragraph (1)(A) of that subsection, the number of months of entitlement of the individual to educational assistance under this chapter 33 shall be the number of months equal to—

“(A) the number of months of unused entitlement of the individual under chapter 30 of this title, as of the date of the election, plus

“(B) the number of months, if any, of entitlement revoked by the individual under subsection (c)(1).

“(e) **CONTINUING ENTITLEMENT TO EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE NOT AVAILABLE UNDER 9/11 ASSISTANCE PROGRAM.**—

“(1) **IN GENERAL.**—In the event educational assistance to which an individual making an election under subsection (a) would be entitled under chapter 30 of this title, or chapter 107, 1606, or 1607 of title 10, as applicable, is not authorized to be available to the individual under the provisions of this chapter the individual shall remain entitled to such educational assistance in accordance with the provisions of the applicable chapter.

“(2) **CHARGE FOR USE OF ENTITLEMENT.**—The utilization by an individual of entitlement under paragraph (1) shall be chargeable against the entitlement of the individual to educational assistance under this chapter at the rate of one month of entitlement under this chapter for each month of entitlement utilized by the individual under paragraph (1) (as determined as if such entitlement were utilized under the provisions of chapter 30 of this title, or chapter 107, 1606, or 1607 of title 10, as applicable).

“(f) **ADDITIONAL POST-9/11 ASSISTANCE FOR MEMBERS HAVING MADE CONTRIBUTIONS TOWARD GI BILL.**—

“(1) **ADDITIONAL ASSISTANCE.**—In the case of an individual making an election under subsection (a) who is described by subparagraph (A), (C), or (E) of paragraph (1) of that subsection, the amount of educational assistance payable to the individual under this chapter 33 as a monthly stipend payable under paragraph (1)(B) of section 3313(c) of

this title, or under paragraphs (2) through (7) of that section (as applicable), shall be the amount otherwise payable as a monthly stipend under the applicable paragraph increased by the amount equal to—

“(A) the total amount of contributions toward basic educational assistance made by the individual under section 3011(b) or 3012(c) of this title, as of the date of the election, multiplied by

“(B) the fraction—

“(i) the numerator of which is—

“(I) the number of months of entitlement to basic educational assistance under chapter 30 of this title remaining to the individual at the time of the election; plus

“(II) the number of months, if any, of entitlement under such chapter 30 revoked by the individual under subsection (c)(1); and

“(ii) the denominator of which is 36 months.

“(2) MONTHS OF REMAINING ENTITLEMENT FOR CERTAIN INDIVIDUALS.—In the case of an individual covered by paragraph (1) who is described by subsection (a)(1)(E), the number of months of entitlement to basic educational assistance remaining to the individual for purposes of paragraph (1)(B)(i)(II) shall be 36 months.

“(3) TIMING OF PAYMENT.—The amount payable with respect to an individual under paragraph (1) shall be paid to the individual together with the last payment of the monthly stipend payable to the individual under paragraph (1)(B) of section 3313(c) of this title, or under subsections (b) through (g) of that section (as applicable), before the exhaustion of the individual's entitlement to educational assistance under this chapter.

“(g) CONTINUING ENTITLEMENT TO ADDITIONAL ASSISTANCE FOR CRITICAL SKILLS OR SPECIALTY AND ADDITIONAL SERVICE.—An individual making an election under subsection (a)(1) who, at the time of the election, is entitled to increased educational assistance under section 3015(d) of this title, or section 16131(i) of title 10, or supplemental educational assistance under subchapter III of chapter 30 of this title, shall remain entitled to such increased educational assistance or supplemental educational assistance in the utilization of entitlement to educational assistance under this chapter, in an amount equal to the quarter, semester, or term, as applicable, equivalent of the monthly amount of such increased educational assistance or supplemental educational assistance payable with respect to the individual at the time of the election.

“(h) ALTERNATIVE ELECTION BY SECRETARY.—

“(1) IN GENERAL.—In the case of an individual who, on or after January 1, 2016, submits to the Secretary an election under this section that the Secretary determines is clearly against the interests of the individual, or who fails to make an election under this section, the Secretary may make an alternative election on behalf of the individual that the Secretary determines is in the best interests of the individual.

“(2) NOTICE.—If the Secretary makes an election on behalf of an individual under this subsection, the Secretary shall notify the individual by not later than seven days after making such election and shall provide the individual with a 30-day period, beginning on the date of the individual's receipt of such notice, during which the individual may modify or revoke the election made by the Secretary on the individual's behalf. The Secretary shall include, as part of such notice, a clear statement of why the alternative election made by the Secretary is in the best interests of the individual as compared to the election submitted by the individual. The Secretary shall provide the no-

tice required under this paragraph by electronic means whenever possible.

“(i) IRREVOCABILITY OF ELECTIONS.—An election under subsection (a) or (c)(1) is irrevocable.”

(b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections at the beginning of such chapter is amended by adding at the end the following new item:

“3326. Election to receive educational assistance.”

(c) CONFORMING REPEAL.—Subsection (c) of section 5003 of the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008 (Public Law 110-252; 38 U.S.C. 3301 note) is hereby repealed.

**SEC. 306. CLARIFICATION OF ASSISTANCE PROVIDED FOR CERTAIN FLIGHT TRAINING AND OTHER PROGRAMS OF EDUCATION.**

(a) FLIGHT TRAINING.—Subsection (c)(1)(A) of section 3313 of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) in clause (i)—

(A) by redesignating subclauses (I) and (II) as items (aa) and (bb), respectively;

(B) by striking “In the case of a program of education pursued at a public institution of higher learning” and inserting “(I) Subject to subclause (II), in the case of a program of education pursued at a public institution of higher learning not described in clause (ii)(II)(bb)”; and

(C) by adding at the end the following new subclause:

“(II) In determining the actual net cost for in-State tuition and fees pursuant to subclause (I), the Secretary may not pay for tuition and fees relating to flight training.”; and

(2) in clause (ii)—

(A) in subclause (I), by redesignating items (aa) and (bb) as subitems (AA) and (BB), respectively;

(B) in subclause (II), by redesignating items (aa) and (bb) as subitems (AA) and (BB), respectively;

(C) by redesignating subclauses (I) and (II) as items (aa) and (bb), respectively;

(D) by striking “In the case of a program of education pursued at a non-public or foreign institution of higher learning” and inserting “(I) In the case of a program of education described in subclause (II)”; and

(E) by adding at the end the following new subclause:

“(II) A program of education described in this subclause is any of the following:

“(aa) A program of education pursued at a non-public or foreign institution of higher learning.

“(bb) A program of education pursued at a public institution of higher learning in which flight training is required to earn the degree being pursued (including with respect to a dual major, concentration, or other element of such a degree).”

(b) CERTAIN PROGRAMS OF EDUCATION CARRIED OUT UNDER CONTRACT.—Section 3313(c)(1)(A)(ii)(II) of title 38, United States Code, as added by subsection (a)(2)(E), is amended by adding at the end the following new item:

“(cc) A program of education pursued at a public institution of higher learning in which the public institution of higher learning enters into a contract or agreement with an entity (other than another public institution of higher learning) to provide such program of education or a portion of such program of education.”

(c) APPLICATION.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Except as provided by paragraph (2), the amendments made by subsection (a) and (b) shall apply with respect to a quarter, semester, or term, as applicable, commencing on or after the date of the enactment of this Act.

(2) SPECIAL RULE FOR CURRENT STUDENTS.—In the case of an individual who, as of the date of the enactment of this Act, is using educational assistance under chapter 33 of title 38, United States Code, to pursue a course of education that includes a program of education described in item (bb) or (cc) of section 3313(c)(1)(A)(ii)(II) of title 38, United States Code, as added by subsections (a) and (b), respectively, the amendment made by such subsection shall apply with respect to a quarter, semester, or term, as applicable, commencing on or after the date that is two years after the date of the enactment of this Act.

**SEC. 307. CONSIDERATION OF CERTAIN TIME SPENT RECEIVING MEDICAL CARE FROM SECRETARY OF DEFENSE AS ACTIVE DUTY FOR PURPOSES OF ELIGIBILITY FOR POST-9/11 EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE.**

(a) IN GENERAL.—Section 3301(1)(B) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by inserting “12301(h),” after “12301(g).”

(b) APPLICATION.—The amendment made by subsection (a) shall apply with respect to active duty service by a member of a reserve component covered by section 12301(h) of title 10, United States, beginning on or after the date that is 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act.

**SEC. 308. WORK-STUDY ALLOWANCE.**

Section 3485(a)(4) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by striking “June 30, 2013” each place it appears and inserting “June 30, 2013, or the period beginning on June 30, 2016, and ending on June 30, 2021”.

**SEC. 309. VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION AND EDUCATION ACTION PLAN.**

Not later than 270 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall develop and publish an action plan for improving the services and assistance provided under chapter 31 of title 38, United States Code. Such plan shall include each of the following:

(1) A comprehensive analysis of, and recommendations and a proposed implementation plan for remedying workload management challenges at regional offices of the Department of Veterans Affairs, including steps to reduce counselor caseloads of veterans participating in a rehabilitation program under such chapter, particularly for counselors who are assisting veterans with traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress disorder and counselors with educational and vocational counseling workloads.

(2) A comprehensive analysis of the reasons for the disproportionately low percentage of veterans with service-connected disabilities who served in the Armed Forces after September 11, 2001, who opt to participate in a rehabilitation program under such chapter relative to the percentage of such veterans who use their entitlement to educational assistance under chapter 33 of title 38, United States Code, including an analysis of barriers to timely enrollment in rehabilitation programs under chapter 31 of such title and of any barriers to a veteran enrolling in the program of that veteran's choice.

(3) Recommendations and a proposed implementation plan for encouraging more veterans with service-connected disabilities who served in the Armed Forces after September 11, 2001, to participate in rehabilitation programs under chapter 31 of such title.

(4) A national staff training program for vocational rehabilitation counselors of the Department that includes the provision of—

(A) training to assist counselors in understanding the very profound disorientation experienced by warriors whose lives and life-plans have been upended and out of their control because of their injury;

(B) training to assist counselors in working in partnership with veterans on individual rehabilitation plans; and

(C) training on post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental health conditions and on moderate to severe traumatic brain injury that is designed to improve the ability of such counselors to assist veterans with these conditions, including by providing information on the broad spectrum of such conditions and the effect of such conditions on an individual's abilities and functional limitations.

**SEC. 310. REDUCTION IN REDUNDANCY AND INEFFICIENCIES IN VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION CLAIMS PROCESSING.**

(a) VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION CLAIMS.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall reduce redundancy and inefficiencies in the use of information technology to process claims for rehabilitation programs under chapter 31 of title 38, United States Code, by—

(1) ensuring that all payments for and on behalf of veterans participating in a rehabilitation program under such chapter are only processed and paid out of one corporate information technology system, in order to eliminate the redundancy of multiple information technology payment systems; and

(2) enhancing the information technology system supporting veterans participating in such a program to support more accurate accounting of services and outcomes for such veterans.

(b) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is authorized to be appropriated to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs for fiscal year 2016 \$10,000,000 to carry out this section.

(c) REPORT.—Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to Congress a report on the changes made pursuant to subsection (a).

**TITLE IV—ADMINISTRATION OF EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE**

**SEC. 401. CENTRALIZED REPORTING OF VETERAN ENROLLMENT BY CERTAIN GROUPS, DISTRICTS, AND CONSORTIUMS OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS.**

(a) IN GENERAL.—Section 3684(a) of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) in paragraph (1), by inserting “32, 33,” after “31,”; and

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

“(4) For purposes of this subsection, the term ‘educational institution’ may include a group, district, or consortium of separately accredited educational institutions located in the same State that are organized in a manner that facilitates the centralized reporting of the enrollments in such group, district, or consortium of institutions.”

(b) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendments made by subsection (a) shall apply with respect to reports submitted on or after the date of the enactment of this Act.

**SEC. 402. PROVISION OF INFORMATION REGARDING VETERAN ENTITLEMENT TO EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE.**

(a) IN GENERAL.—Subchapter II of chapter 36 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new section:

**“§ 3699. Provision of certain information to educational institutions**

“For each veteran or other individual pursuing a course of education that has been approved under this chapter using educational assistance to which the veteran or other individual is entitled under chapter 30, 32, 33, or 35 of this title, the Secretary shall make available to the educational institution offering the course information about the amount of such educational assistance to which the veteran or other individual is enti-

tled. Such information shall be provided to such educational institution through a secure information technology system accessible by the educational institution and shall be regularly updated to reflect any amounts used by the veteran or other individual.”

(b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections at the beginning of such chapter is amended by inserting after the item relating to section 3698 the following new item:

“3699. Provision of certain information to educational institutions.”

**SEC. 403. ROLE OF STATE APPROVING AGENCIES.**

(a) APPROVAL OF CERTAIN COURSES.—Section 3672(b)(2)(A) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by striking “the following” and all that follows through the colon and inserting the following: “a program of education is deemed to be approved for purposes of this chapter if a State approving agency determines that the program is one of the following programs:”

(b) APPROVAL OF OTHER COURSES.—Section 3675 of such title is amended—

(1) in subsection (a)(1)—

(A) by striking “The Secretary or a State approving agency” and inserting “A State approving agency, or the Secretary when acting in the role of a State approving agency,”; and

(B) by striking “offered by proprietary for-profit educational institutions” and inserting “not covered by section 3672 of this title”; and

(2) in subsection (b), by striking “the Secretary or the State approving agency” each place it appears and inserting “the State approving agency, or the Secretary when acting in the role of a State approving agency.”

**SEC. 404. CRITERIA USED TO APPROVE COURSES.**

(a) NONACCREDITED COURSES.—Section 3676(c)(14) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by inserting before the period the following: “if the Secretary, in consultation with the State approving agency and pursuant to regulations prescribed to carry out this paragraph, determines such criteria are necessary and treat public, private, and proprietary for-profit educational institutions equitably”

(b) ACCREDITED COURSES.—Section 3675(b)(3) of such title is amended by striking “and (3)” and inserting “(3), and (14)”.

(c) APPLICATION.—The amendment made by subsection (a) shall apply with respect to—

(1) criteria developed pursuant to paragraph (14) of subsection (c) of section 3676 of title 38, United States Code, on or after January 1, 2013; and

(2) an investigation conducted under such subsection that is covered by a reimbursement of expenses paid by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to a State pursuant to section 3674 of such title on or after October 1, 2015.

**SEC. 405. COMPLIANCE SURVEYS.**

(a) IN GENERAL.—Section 3693 of such title is amended—

(1) by striking subsection (a) and inserting the following new subsection (a):

“(a)(1) Except as provided in subsection (b), the Secretary shall conduct an annual compliance survey of educational institutions and training establishments offering one or more courses approved for the enrollment of eligible veterans or persons if at least 20 such veterans or persons are enrolled in any such course. The Secretary shall—

“(A) design the compliance surveys to ensure that such institutions or establishments, as the case may be, and approved courses are in compliance with all applicable provisions of chapters 30 through 36 of this title;

“(B) survey each such educational institution and training establishment not less than once during every two-year period; and

“(C) assign not fewer than one education compliance specialist to work on compliance surveys in any year for each 40 compliance surveys required to be made under this section for such year.

“(2) The Secretary, in consultation with the State approving agencies, shall—

“(A) annually determine the parameters of the surveys required under paragraph (1); and

“(B) not later than September 1 of each year, make available to the State approving agencies a list of the educational institutions and training establishments that will be surveyed during the fiscal year following the date of making such list available.”; and

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

“(c) In this section, the terms ‘educational institution’ and ‘training establishment’ have the meaning given such terms in section 3452 of this title.”

(b) CONFORMING AMENDMENTS.—Subsection (b) of such section is amended—

(1) by striking “subsection (a) of this section for an annual compliance survey” and inserting “subsection (a)(1) for a compliance survey”; and

(2) by striking “institution” and inserting “educational institution or training establishment”; and

(3) by striking “institution’s demonstrated record of compliance” and inserting “record of compliance of such institution or establishment”.

**SEC. 406. SURVEY OF INDIVIDUALS USING THEIR ENTITLEMENT TO EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE UNDER THE EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS ADMINISTERED BY THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.**

(a) SURVEY REQUIRED.—By not later than 270 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall enter into a contract with a non-government entity for the conduct of a survey of a statistically valid sample of individuals who have used or are using their entitlement to educational assistance under chapters 30, 32, 33, and 35 of title 38, United States Code, to pursue a program of education or training. The contract shall provide that—

(1) not later than one month before the collection of data under the survey begins, the survey shall be submitted to the Committees on Veterans’ Affairs of the Senate and House of Representatives;

(2) the non-government entity shall complete the survey and submit to the Secretary the results of the survey by not later than 180 days after entering into the contract; and

(3) the survey shall be conducted by electronic means and by any other means the non-government entity determines appropriate.

(b) INFORMATION TO BE COLLECTED.—The contract under subsection (a) shall provide that the survey shall be designed to collect the following types of information about each individual surveyed, where applicable:

(1) Demographic information, including the highest level of education completed by the individual, the military occupational specialty or specialties of the individual while serving on active duty as a member of the Armed Forces or as a member of the National Guard or of a Reserve Component of the Armed Forces, and whether the individual has a service-connected disability.

(2) The opinion of the individual regarding participation in the transition assistance program under section 1144 of title 10, United States Code, and the effectiveness of the program, including instruction on the use of the benefits under laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

(3) The resources the individual used to help the individual—

(A) decide to use the individual's entitlement to educational assistance to enroll in a program of education or training; and

(B) choose the program of education or training the individual pursued.

(4) The individual's goal when the individual enrolled in the program of education or training.

(5) The nature of the individual's experience with the education benefits processing system of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

(6) The nature of the individual's experience with the school certifying official of the educational institution where the individual pursued the program of education or training who processed the individual's claim.

(7) Any services or benefits the educational institution or program of education or training provided to veterans while the individual pursued the program of education or training.

(8) The type of educational institution at which the individual pursued the program of education or training.

(9) Whether the individual completed the program of education or training or the number of credit hours completed by the individual as of the time of the survey, and, if applicable, any degree or certificate obtained by the individual for completing the program.

(10) The employment status of the individual and whether such employment status differs from the employment status of the individual prior to enrolling in the program of education or training.

(11) Whether the individual is or was enrolled in a program of education on a full-time or part-time basis.

(12) The opinion of the individual on the effectiveness of the educational assistance program of the Department of Veterans Affairs under which the individual was entitled to educational assistance.

(13) Whether the individual was ever entitled to a rehabilitation under chapter 31 of title 38, United States Code, and whether the individual participated in such a program.

(14) A description of any circumstances that prevented the individual from using the individual's entitlement to educational assistance to pursue a desired career path or degree.

(15) Whether the individual is using the individual's entitlement to educational assistance to pursue a program of education or training or has transferred such an entitlement to a dependent.

(16) Such other matters as the Secretary determines appropriate.

(c) REPORT.—Not later than 90 days after receiving the results of the survey required under this section, the Secretary shall submit to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and House of Representatives a report on the results of the survey and any recommendations of the Secretary relating to such results. Such report shall also include an unedited version of the results of the survey submitted by the non-government entity that conducted the study.

**SEC. 407. IMPROVEMENT OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY OF THE VETERANS BENEFITS ADMINISTRATION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.**

(a) PROCESSING OF CERTAIN EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE CLAIMS.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall, to the maximum extent possible, make such changes and improvements to the information technology system of the Veterans Benefits Administration of the Department of Veterans Affairs to ensure that—

(1) to the maximum extent possible, all original and supplemental claims for educational assistance under chapter 33 of title

38, United States Code, are adjudicated electronically; and

(2) rules-based processing is used to make decisions with respect to such claims with little human intervention.

(b) IMPLEMENTATION PLAN.—Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to Congress a plan to implement the changes and improvements described in subsection (a).

(c) REPORT.—Not later than one year after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to Congress a report on the implementation of the changes and improvements described in subsection (a).

(d) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is authorized to be appropriated to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs \$30,000,000 to carry out this section during fiscal years 2016 and 2017.

**SEC. 408. TECHNICAL AMENDMENT RELATING TO IN-STATE TUITION RATE FOR INDIVIDUALS TO WHOM ENTITLEMENT IS TRANSFERRED UNDER ALL-VOLUNTEER FORCE EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM AND POST-9/11 EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE.**

(a) TECHNICAL AMENDMENT.—Section 3679(c)(2)(B) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by striking "or 3319 of this title" and all that follows and inserting "of this title or to whom educational assistance is transferred under section 3319 of this title."

(b) APPLICABILITY.—The amendment made by subsection (a) shall apply with respect to a course, semester, or term that begins after July 1, 2016.

**TITLE V—OTHER MATTERS**

**SEC. 501. AMOUNT OF LOAN GUARANTEED UNDER HOME LOAN PROGRAM OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.**

(a) ADJUSTMENT OF LOAN LIMIT.—Section 3703(a)(1) of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) in subparagraph (A)(i)(IV)—  
(A) by striking "the lesser of"; and  
(B) by striking "or 25 percent of the loan"; and

(2) in subparagraph (C), by striking "Freddie Mac" and all that follows through the period at the end and inserting "amount of the loan."

(b) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendments made by this section shall apply with respect to a loan guaranteed under section 3710 of title 38, United States Code, on or after the date that is 30 days after the date of the enactment of this Act.

**SEC. 502. LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF JOB COUNSELING, TRAINING, AND PLACEMENT SERVICE FOR VETERANS.**

(a) IN GENERAL.—Chapter 41 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new section:

**"§4115. Longitudinal study of job counseling, training, and placement service for veterans**

"(a) STUDY REQUIRED.—(1) The Secretary shall enter into a contract with a non-government entity to conduct a longitudinal study of a statistically valid sample of each of the groups of individuals described in paragraph (2). The contract shall provide for the study of each such group over a period of at least five years.

"(2) The groups of individuals described in this paragraph are the following:

"(A) Veterans who have received intensive services.

"(B) Veterans who did not receive intensive services but who otherwise received services under this chapter.

"(C) Veterans who did not seek or receive services under this chapter.

"(3) The study required by this subsection shall include the collection of the following information for each individual who participates in the study:

"(A) The average number of months such individual served on active duty.

"(B) The distribution of disability ratings of such individual.

"(C) Any unemployment benefits received by such individual.

"(D) The average number of months such individual was employed during the year covered by the report.

"(E) The average annual starting and ending salaries of any such individual who was employed during the year covered by the report.

"(F) The average annual income of such individual.

"(G) The average total household income of such individual for the year covered by the report.

"(H) The percentage of such individuals who own their principal residences.

"(I) The employment status of such individual.

"(J) In the case of such an individual who received services under this chapter, whether the individual believes that any service provided by a disabled veterans' outreach specialist or local veterans' employment representative helped the individual to become employed.

"(K) In the case of such an individual who believes such a service helped the individual to become employed, whether—

"(i) the individual retained the position of employment for a period of one year or longer; and

"(ii) the individual believes such a service helped the individual to secure a higher wage or salary.

"(L) The conditions under which such individual was discharged or released from the Armed Forces.

"(M) Whether such individual has used any educational assistance to which the individual is entitled under this title.

"(N) Whether such individual has participated in a rehabilitation program under chapter 31 of this title.

"(O) Demographic information about such individual.

"(P) Such other information as the Secretary determines appropriate.

"(b) ANNUAL REPORTS.—(1) By not later than July 1 of each year covered by the study required under subsection (a), the Secretary shall submit to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and House of Representatives a report on the outcomes of the study during the preceding year.

"(2) The Secretary shall include in each annual report submitted under paragraph (1) any information the Secretary determines is necessary to determine the long-term outcomes of the individuals in the groups described in subsection (a)(2)."

(b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections at the beginning of such chapter is amended by adding at the end the following new item:

"4115. Longitudinal study of job counseling, training, and placement service for veterans."

**SEC. 503. LIMITATIONS ON SUBCONTRACTS UNDER CONTRACTS WITH SMALL BUSINESS CONCERNS OWNED AND CONTROLLED BY VETERANS.**

(a) IN GENERAL.—Section 8127 of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) by redesignating subsection (l) as subsection (m); and

(2) by inserting after subsection (k) the following new subsection (l):

"(l) LIMITATIONS ON SUBCONTRACTING.—(1)(A) The requirements applicable to a covered small business concern under section 46



of the Small Business Act (15 U.S.C. 657s) shall apply with respect to a small business concern owned and controlled by a veteran with a service-connected disability or a small business concern owned and controlled by a veteran that is awarded a contract that is counted for purposes of meeting the goals under subsection (a).

“(B) For purposes of applying the requirements of section 46 of the Small Business Act (15 U.S.C. 657s) pursuant to subparagraph (A), the term ‘similarly situated entity’ used in such section 46 includes a subcontractor for a small business concern owned and controlled by a veteran with a service-connected disability or a small business concern owned and controlled by a veteran described in such subparagraph (A).

“(2) Before awarding a contract that is counted for purposes of meeting the goals under subsection (a), the Secretary shall obtain from an offeror a certification that the offeror will comply with the requirements described in paragraph (1)(A) if awarded the contract. Such certification shall—

“(A) specify the exact performance requirements applicable under such paragraph; and

“(B) explicitly acknowledge that the certification is subject to section 1001 of title 18.

“(3) If the Secretary determines that a small business concern that is awarded a contract that is counted for purposes of meeting the goals under subsection (a) did not act in good faith with respect to the requirements described in paragraph (1)(A), the small business concern shall be subject to the penalties specified in—

“(A) section 16(g)(1) of the Small Business Act (15 U.S.C. 645(g)(1)); and

“(B) section 1001 of title 18.

“(4)(A) The Director of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization for the Department, established pursuant to section 15(k) of the Small Business Act (15 U.S.C. 644(k)), and the Chief Acquisition Officer of the Department, established pursuant to section 1702 of title 41, shall jointly implement a process using the systems described in section 16(g)(2) of the Small Business Act (15 U.S.C. 645(g)(2)), or any other systems available, to monitor compliance with this subsection. The Chief Acquisition Officer shall refer any violations of this subsection to the Inspector General of the Department.

“(B) Not later than November 30 of each year, the Inspector General shall submit to the Committees on Veterans’ Affairs of the Senate and House of Representatives a report for the fiscal year preceding the fiscal year during which the report is submitted that includes, for the fiscal year covered by the report—

“(i) the number of referred violations received under subparagraph (A); and

“(ii) the disposition of such referred violations, including the number of small business concerns suspended or debarred from Federal contracting or referred to the Attorney General for prosecution.”

(b) EFFECTIVE DATE.—Subsection (l) of section 8127 of title 38, United States Code, as added by subsection (a) shall apply with respect to a contract entered into after the date of the enactment of this Act.

**SEC. 504. PROCEDURES FOR PROVISION OF CERTAIN INFORMATION TO STATE VETERANS AGENCIES TO FACILITATE THE FURNISHING OF ASSISTANCE AND BENEFITS TO VETERANS.**

(a) PROCEDURES REQUIRED.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall develop procedures to share the information described in subsection (b) regarding veterans with State veterans agencies in electronic data format as a means of facilitating the furnishing of assistance and benefits to veterans.

(b) COVERED INFORMATION.—The information shared with State veterans agencies

under subsection (a) regarding a veteran shall include the following:

(1) Military service and separation data.

(2) A personal email address.

(3) A personal telephone number.

(4) A mailing address.

(c) OPT-OUT ELECTION.—A veteran may elect to prevent their information from being shared with State veterans agencies under subsection (a) pursuant to a process that the Secretary shall establish for purposes of this subsection.

(d) USE OF INFORMATION.—The Secretary shall ensure that the information shared with State veterans agencies in accordance with the procedures developed under subsection (a) is only shared by such agencies with county government veterans service offices for such purposes as the Secretary shall specify for the administration and delivery of assistance and benefits.

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

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Florida.

**GENERAL LEAVE**

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and to add any extraneous materials on H.R. 3016, 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. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I rise in support of H.R. 3016, as amended, the Veterans Employment, Education, and Healthcare Improvement Act.

This bill, which was introduced by the chairman of our Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity, Congressman WENSTRUP of Ohio, includes a number of provisions relating to veterans’ health care, education, and employment benefits.

One provision of the bill would authorize the Department of Veterans Affairs to create a new fourth administration to streamline the oversight of the many VA programs and benefits that assist veterans with transition and that promote their economic welfare. These benefits include vocational rehabilitation and employment, GI Bill education benefits, the verification of veteran-owned small businesses, the VA’s portion of the Transition Assistance Program, and the home loan guaranty program.

Another provision of the bill would make needed improvements to education and vocational rehabilitation and employment benefits by, among other things, closing a costly loophole that has allowed some contracted-out flight schools to charge the VA hundreds of thousands of dollars in excessive tuition and fee payments.

Still other provisions would improve the administration of benefits and expand opportunities for the use of the home loan benefit by eliminating the

loan limit that caps the amount of money the VA will guarantee under the home loan program. This would help tens of thousands of veterans who are living in high-cost areas to realize the dream that many Americans strive for.

Health-related provisions of the bill would elevate the role of podiatrists in the VA medical facilities, improve care for the newborn children of female veterans, create a pilot program on service dog training for veterans with post-traumatic stress, and require the Government Accountability Office to conduct period audits of the VA’s budget.

I am grateful to Dr. WENSTRUP, to Dr. ROE, and to the many other sponsors of these provisions for their hard work and leadership in crafting and in developing this legislation, and I urge all of my colleagues to support it.

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

Ms. BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I rise in support of H.R. 3016, as amended, the VA Provider Equity Act.

The provisions of title I directly affect the health of veterans by making podiatrists equal to other doctors in the VA, by making Medal of Honor recipients a top priority in receiving health care at the VA, and by making the newborn babies of servicemembers eligible for VA health care in the first 6 weeks of life, to follow their mothers’ eligibility at the VA.

The legislation authorizes a GAO audit of the Veterans Health Administration’s budget. I feel that the Veterans Health Administration has been more responsive under the leadership of Dr. David Shulkin, but I agree that everyone would be better informed of how the VHA is working if we are all starting on the same page. I am also pleased that a successful dog training program will be expanded to other parts of the country to help veterans who are recovering from TBI and PTSD.

I am particularly pleased to support provisions in H.R. 3016 which improve the veterans’ education and rehabilitation program and which increase limits on the veterans’ home loan program while maintaining the VA’s strict lending requirements.

H.R. 3016 also contains several important improvements in education and employment programs for veterans. Representative TAKANO will have more to say because he has taken the lead on these as the ranking member of the Economic Opportunity Subcommittee.

I also want to thank Chairman MILLER for compromising on the establishment of a new administration within the VA, called the Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration.

While I appreciate the chairman’s attempt to compromise on another key provision, I want to make it clear that I oppose the policy to cut in half the living stipend for the children of servicemembers who have received their

parents' transferred GI Bill benefits. We promised the men and women who signed up to serve in our Nation's military that they would be able to transfer their entire GI Bill benefits to a dependent spouse or child. It is unfair that we are now breaking part of that promise. While I understand that this change pays for the other essential provisions in this bill, I would have preferred that we would have kept the promise we made to servicemembers while finding other ways to pay for this package.

As this legislation moves forward, I will continue to work with my colleagues to find a different way to pay for these provisions that does not violate the promise we made to our veterans.

I had hoped our Republican colleagues would have brought this bill to the floor under an open rule so as to have given us the opportunity to propose amendments and to debate ways to improve the more controversial provisions of this bill. I am disappointed that we are not able to offer amendments to improve the bill today. Yet I will support this bill overall due to the number of positive improvements.

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

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from the Second District of Ohio (Mr. WENSTRUP), the chairman of the Economic Opportunity Subcommittee and a combat veteran, himself.

Mr. WENSTRUP. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 3016, the Veterans Employment, Education, and Healthcare Improvement Act, as amended.

I am proud to sponsor this bill and am glad to be joined by veteran service organizations in their support, like the VFW and the DAV. It will help ensure that the veterans receive the benefits they have earned.

This veterans' legislation contains over 30 provisions from over a dozen Members of Congress and is the result of countless hours of work amongst the members of the committee. I want to highlight three specific provisions in the bill that improve the benefits our veterans receive.

First is the VA Provider Equity Act, which would strengthen access to the comprehensive, first-class health care that veterans deserve. We all know wait times for health care at the VA remain somewhat unacceptable in many places. This is true, in part, because the VA struggles to employ enough healthcare specialists to meet the needs of veterans.

The VA Provider Equity Act responds to this issue by aligning outdated VA standards more closely with the private sector practices of today. When introduced, every doctor on the Committee on Veterans' Affairs joined as an original cosponsor, understanding that we need to make it easier for the VA to recruit and retain the specialists our veterans so desperately need.

The bill also includes H.R. 2344, the Veterans Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Improvement Act of 2015, which I introduced earlier this year. The VA's Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment program helps disabled veterans to prepare for employment or to live as independently as possible. If a veteran chooses to pursue education or training through this program, current law does not require the courses to be approved for GI benefits. My provision would tighten this requirement to provide additional oversight and protections for our veterans.

We also include the GI Bill Quality Enhancement Act. By giving State Approving Agencies the increased oversight of GI Bill programs, this provision would provide veterans with the information they need to make good choices about education and training programs that offer the best quality.

The Veterans Employment, Education, and Healthcare Improvement Act would make important progress in streamlining veterans' access to their earned benefits. It is one simple step we can take to ensure that our veterans receive the benefits they have earned.

I thank Representative TAKANO for his help in moving this forward, and I urge my colleagues to support it.

Ms. BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I yield 4 minutes to the gentleman from California (Mr. TAKANO).

Mr. TAKANO. I thank Ranking Member CORRINE BROWN for yielding time.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 3016.

While there are parts of this bill that I hope to see changed as it moves forward, it includes numerous provisions that will have a positive impact on our Nation's veteran population, including several provisions I authored.

Section 307 of this bill is the language from my GI Bill Fairness Act, bipartisan legislation to close a gap faced by our National Guardsmen and Reservists who have been repeatedly called to war throughout operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Currently, members of the Guard and Reserve who are wounded in combat are sometimes placed on Active Duty for their recovery, treatment, and rehabilitation. Unfortunately, current Federal law does not recognize such Active Duty orders as eligible for Post-9/11 GI Bill education assistance, meaning that, unlike other members of the military, those who serve in the Guard and Reserve may actually lose benefits for being injured in the line of duty. This provision in H.R. 3016 would end unequal treatment and ensure these guardsmen and reservists are able to accrue GI Bill benefits, when ordered to Active Duty, for the purposes of receiving medical care.

H.R. 3016 also includes my Work-Study for Student Veterans Act, which would reinstate certain VA work-study activities that expired on June 30, 2013. The VA's Student Work-Study Allowance Program allows qualifying stu-

dent veterans who are in college degree programs or in vocational or professional programs to be paid for working in a variety of capacities on campus, at VA facilities, or at other veteran-centered organizations to assist fellow veterans. The work-study program achieves two important goals: offering student veterans a way to earn a little extra money and providing transitioning veterans with the guidance and assistance of fellow veterans who know firsthand what that transition is like.

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I also strongly support section 306 of the bill, which caps the amount of post-9/11 GI Bill funds available to flight schools—private flight schools—that contract with community colleges at the same amount that the GI Bill caps funds available to private universities.

Due to a current loophole in the GI Bill, student veterans have been able to take pilot training classes with questionable job placement prospects at exorbitant cost to the taxpayers. According to the Los Angeles Times, one flight company charged 12 student veterans over \$500,000 each in GI Bill funds.

While it is true that flight training can be more expensive than other vocational or academic programs, VA data shows that while the number of student veterans taking flight training increased by only 9 percent between fiscal years '13 and '14, the total cost to taxpayers for this program grew by 87 percent during this same period, costing \$37 million in taxpayer dollars.

The drafters of the GI Bill never intended to create this windfall for the flight school industry. What's more, VFW and the American Legion support the cap, agreeing that this loophole is a disservice to student veterans who would be better served by one of the many flight school programs that cost well under the cap.

I do have serious reservations about section 301 of this legislation, which would cut by half the monthly housing allowance provided to children of servicemembers who will have post-9/11 GI Bill benefits transferred to them. I don't believe that we should be paying for the great provisions in this bill by cutting benefits.

Furthermore, the bill on the House floor today does not include a grandfather clause. That means that some current servicemembers will see the terms that they agreed to when they signed up changed. As this bill advances, I strongly urge the chairman and ranking member to find another pay-for and eliminate section 301.

With that being said, I believe overall, with some tweaks, this legislation will provide valuable support for our veterans, and I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 3016.

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1½ minutes to the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. ABRAHAM), who is

from the Fifth District of Louisiana and is a fine member of our Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

Mr. ABRAHAM. Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank Chairman MILLER, Ranking Member BROWN, Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs Ranking Member TITUS, and all Members who worked so hard to bring this bill to the floor.

There are many provisions in H.R. 677, as amended, that would help improve services for veterans and their families, but I want to focus my remarks on a section that I am proud to have authored.

First, the bill would authorize an automatic COLA for beneficiaries who receive the VA disability compensation. Although the Congress generally approves COLA legislation every year, veterans have to wait until Congress actually acts.

Ms. BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I yield 4 minutes to the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. WALZ).

Mr. WALZ. Mr. Speaker, as you have heard, I associate myself with the remarks of the positive nature of the provisions in this bill. It has been the House Veterans' Affairs Committee that has been in the forefront of improving veterans care, from the post-9/11 GI Bill, to healthcare changes, to job placements. We have been at the forefront of VA improvements, accountability, and reform.

While this bill continues in that vein, as you have heard here, there is one provision in it that, for me personally, I cannot cross. To pay for these programs, an offset has to be found. That is a noble and correct principle; meaning, if we add anything, we need to find the pay-for somewhere else to not add to the debt.

In the case of this, to pay for these absolutely wonderful programs, many which I helped write, we went back and we took a benefit. I am not going to debate whether that benefit was overly generous. I am not going to debate how many are using it.

If one veteran signed up, served this Nation, went overseas and fought for our defense and they were promised a benefit, to pull it back at this time is an egregious breach of trust. At a time when the VA is hurting, at a time when the faith in government is hurting, the faith in the media, our soldiers need to know there are some things that will not be crossed.

So I want to be very clear on this. The motives of the people who worked on this should never be questioned. I have never seen people with more integrity and more care for our veterans. Thought goes into this. Improvements try to be made. And when the American people are frustrated and they see nothing gets done, this committee and the bipartisanship of the care of our veterans is absolutely paramount.

This is a devilish situation. How do we find the pay-for? My question is—and, yes, perhaps it is a chip on my shoulder of an enlisted soldier—why

come to the soldiers first? There is nowhere else in the Federal Government that we can find this.

The chairman rightfully pointed out today another egregious waste of money in decorating and bonuses to VA officials who are not fulfilling their duty. My question is: can't we find some way to at least get the people through who were there and, if we want to make the changes, do so? I know every effort in good faith has been made to do that. Yes, it can be argued that this was overly generous and should not have been there in the first place, but it was. It was signed up for and people went. I have stood in front of troops who said: You promised it to me, and I am counting on using it.

It seems to me that as Representatives of the American people, I can go back and ask my constituents, and they will agree on almost nothing. If I ask them, "Should we do everything necessary to care for our veterans," the answer is "yes." If we can't find the offset, then let's have the courage to go back and ask them what would they be willing to do.

I myself will be voting "no" on this piece of legislation, but I just urge my colleagues to have to weigh this. I hope over the years that I have proven I am not a person who would get in the way of having the perfect get in the way of the good or not trying to work for compromises. It is a line that I feel, if we cross, the trust gets breached, and it is very difficult to gain it back.

I thank all Members who worked on this.

Ms. BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I have no other speakers at this time.

I yield back the balance of my time.

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

Mr. Speaker, to my good friend from Minnesota (Mr. WALZ), who is a stalwart supporter of veterans on our committee and brings many, many good issues to the forefront for both sides of the aisle to be able to work on together, I do not question his motives in his negative vote against this bill.

I would say that any child who has already had their parents' post-9/11 child benefits transferred to them will not be affected by this change. They would still receive 100 percent of their current living stipend.

It also gives 180 days after enactment before it begins to take effect. So any servicemembers who are eligible to transfer their benefits but have not done so would have 180 days to do so, so their child would still receive 100 percent of their monthly stipend.

I yield 1 minute to the gentleman from the 15th Congressional District of Ohio (Mr. STIVERS).

Mr. STIVERS. Mr. Speaker, I thank the chairman and the folks on the committee for their great work on this bill. I stand today to support the bill and also to recognize one of the sections is the Veterans Dog Therapy Act, which was rolled into H.R. 3016.

We lose 22 of our former servicemembers every day to suicide. This legisla-

tion will create a pilot program at three to five of our VA facilities, which is modeled on the Warrior Canine Connection program for getting access to service dogs for our veterans.

Veterans enrolled in this program with service dogs have seen improvements in their PTSD and TBI-related symptoms. Additionally, it is shown that veterans who own service dogs have fewer symptoms of depression, better interpersonal skills, a lowered risk of substance abuse, and better overall mental health. While no one thing can help cure our suicide epidemic among veterans, this is a good start.

I want to thank TIM WALZ for being my cosponsor on this bill. I am glad it is rolled in.

I urge my colleagues to support this provision as well as the entire bill.

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from the Ninth Congressional District of Georgia (Mr. COLLINS).

Mr. COLLINS of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, today I rise in support of H.R. 3016, the Veterans Employment, Education, and Healthcare Improvement Act.

I want to thank the chairman for yielding and his leadership. As we have heard today, this is something that truly does bring us together. As someone who continues to serve in the Air Force and looking at my brothers and sisters in arms, this is something we should be about.

I want to thank my colleague from Ohio (Mr. WENSTRUP) for bringing this important legislation to the floor, including language from my legislation, H.R. 423, concerning VA post-delivery care services.

I also want to thank Dr. ROE from Tennessee for his amendment that would extend the coverage for a female veteran's post-delivery care to 42 days.

Female veterans face unique challenges, especially when many of the services available to them are designed for males. One of the most significant problems female veterans face is access to health care.

Currently, the VA is authorized to provide up to 7 days of post-delivery care for a female veteran's newborn baby. Mr. ROE's amendment will expand coverage to 42 days, the length that the VA currently provides for mothers.

Females represent the fastest growing group of veterans who are enrolling in VA health care, and many of them are mothers or soon will be. It is past time for the VA to expand its care and services to meet the needs of the female veteran. These women have risked their lives to protect our Nation, and our responsibility to them doesn't end when they are no longer serving on Active Duty. In fact, their service to our country may jeopardize the very lives of their future children, meaning our responsibility to them is even greater.

Research shows that having PTSD in the year before delivery increases a

woman's risk of premature delivery by 35 percent. Premature infants typically need longer hospitalizations after they are born. I know what it is like to be the parent of a little baby who needed intensive medical care for an extended period of time from the moment she was born. By the way, she is getting ready to turn 24 right now.

Any new mother who has given selflessly to her country shouldn't have to worry about Congress standing in her way as she tries to give selflessly to her own child.

I thank my colleague and Chairman MILLER for their leadership on this issue, and I would urge the passage of this bill.

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I have no more speakers at this time.

I would encourage all my colleagues to support H.R. 3016, as amended.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of H.R. 3016, "Veterans Employment, Education, and Healthcare Improvement."

I support this bill because it will benefit our veterans who have suffered debilitating injuries to their lower extremities as a result of their service to the United States.

Specifically, this bill clarifies the role of podiatrists in the Department of Veteran Affairs and increases their pay grade to match other VA physician compensation.

There is a need in the Department of Veteran Affairs to classify podiatrists as physicians.

Our veterans continue to suffer from a variety of foot and lower leg conditions as a direct result of their honorable service which can result from both traumatic and progressive etiologies.

A growing number of our veterans have diabetes, which puts them at risk for other disorders and even amputation.

The VA Podiatry Program Office spends a great deal of its time collaborating with a number of other programs developing and implementing initiatives relative to the prevention and treatment of diabetes and disorders related to diabetes.

Houston, Texas is home to the Michael E. DeBakey Veterans Affairs Medical Center, in one of the nation's greatest medical centers; the MEDMC has 837 medical providers, but no board certified podiatrists.

Our veterans need and deserve specialized treatment and assistance for foot injuries.

My congressional district is home to over 25,000 veterans and as an avid supporter of Veteran Affairs I strongly support this bill.

As a supporter and co-sponsor of numerous bills to assist veterans, such as H.R. 90, the Healthcare Improvement Act, I strongly believe it is our duty to give our veterans the best care when they return home.

It is important we recognize podiatrists, who change the lives of our veterans, to be defined as physicians by the Department of Veteran Affairs, and increase their pay grade to reflect other VA physician compensation.

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. 3016, as amended.

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

The title of the bill was amended so as to read: "A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to make certain improvements in the laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs relating to health care, educational assistance, and vocational rehabilitation, to establish the Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration, and for other purposes."

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

#### CAREER-READY STUDENT VETERANS ACT

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 2360) to amend title 38, United States Code, to improve the approval of certain programs of education for purposes of educational assistance provided 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. 2360

*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 "Career-Ready Student Veterans Act".*

#### SEC. 2. APPROVAL OF COURSES FOR PURPOSES OF EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS ADMINISTERED BY SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

(a) APPROVAL OF NON-ACCREDITED COURSES.—Subsection (c) of section 3676 of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) by redesignating paragraph (14) as paragraph (16); and

(2) by inserting after paragraph (13) the following new paragraphs:

"(14) In the case of a program designed to prepare an individual for licensure or certification in a State, the program meets any instructional curriculum licensure or certification requirements of such State.

"(15) In the case of a program designed to prepare an individual for employment pursuant to standards developed by a board or agency of a State in an occupation that requires approval or licensure, the program is approved or licensed by such board or agency of the State."

(b) EXCEPTIONS.—Such section is further amended by adding at the end the following new subsection:

"(f)(1) The Secretary may waive the requirements of paragraph (14) or (15) of subsection (c) in the case of a program of education offered by an educational institution if the Secretary determines all of the following:

"(A) The educational institution is not accredited by an agency or association recognized by the Secretary of Education.

"(B) The program did not meet the requirements of such paragraph at any time during the two-year period preceding the date of the waiver.

"(C) The waiver furthers the purposes of the educational assistance programs administered by the Secretary or would further the education interests of individuals eligible for assistance under such programs.

"(D) The educational institution does not provide any commission, bonus, or other incentive payment based directly or indirectly on success in securing enrollments or financial aid to any

persons or entities engaged in any student recruiting or admission activities or in making decisions regarding the award of student financial assistance, except for the recruitment of foreign students residing in foreign countries who are not eligible to receive Federal student assistance.

"(2) Not later than 30 days after the Secretary issues a waiver under paragraph (1), the Secretary shall submit to Congress notice of the waiver and the justification of the Secretary for issuing the waiver."

(c) APPROVAL OF ACCREDITED PROGRAMS.—Section 3675(b)(3) of such title is amended—

(1) by striking "and (3)" and inserting "(3), (14), and (15)"; and

(2) by inserting before the period at the end the following: "(or, with respect to such paragraphs (14) and (15), the requirements under such paragraphs are waived pursuant to subsection (f) of section 3676)".

(d) DISAPPROVAL OF COURSES.—Section 3679 of such title is amended by adding at the end the following new subsection:

"(d) Notwithstanding any other provision of this chapter, the Secretary shall disapprove a course of education described in section 3676(c)(14) or (15) unless the educational institution providing the course of education publicly discloses any conditions or additional requirements, including training, experience, or exams, required to obtain the license, certification, or approval for which the course of education is designed to provide preparation."

(e) CONFORMING AMENDMENT.—Section 3672(b)(2)(A)(i) of such title is amended by striking "An accredited" and inserting "Except as provided in paragraphs (14) and (15) of section 3676(c) of this title, an accredited".

(f) APPLICABILITY.—If after enrollment in a course of education that is subject to disapproval by reason of an amendment made by this Act, an individual pursues one or more courses of education at the same educational institution while remaining continuously enrolled (other than during regularly scheduled breaks between courses, semesters or terms) at that institution, any course so pursued by the individual at that institution while so continuously enrolled shall not be subject to disapproval by reason of such amendment.

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

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Florida.

#### GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and to include any extraneous material they may have on H.R. 2360, as amended, in the RECORD.

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

There was no objection.

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

The post-9/11 GI Bill provides student veterans with a wonderful opportunity to educate themselves for a job in the new economy. Thousands of training programs and schools have been approved for use of this program, which has benefited millions of veterans.

Unfortunately, there are some schools that are not simply providing quality education or training that sufficiently prepares students for jobs in their field of study.