

2. Providing conditions for the Department of Veterans Affairs to refer to when waiving requirements or disapproving a course of education

Finally, H.R. 2360 facilitates the approval of certain programs of education for the purposes of enhancing educational assistance provided by the Department of Veteran Affairs.

I am pleased that H.R. 2360 aligns with the significance of legislation I have introduced in the past.

I introduced H.R. 76, Helping to Encourage Real Opportunity for Veterans Transitioning from Battlespace to Workplace Act Of 2015. This bill also enhanced the educational options for veterans by focusing on the necessity to establish opportunities that facilitate the transition for veterans from the hostile armed force environment to school or workplace.

I introduced H.R. 78, New Chance for a New Start in Life Act of 2015. This bill addresses financial awareness pertaining to grants, and employment training programs to assist long-term unemployed persons to re-enter the workforce in areas projected to have the highest rates of demand.

Pertaining to educational institutions providing veterans with non-accredited courses, enforcement of the criteria for state approval of applications allows veterans to benefit from the improvement of the approval process.

H.R. 2360 is the first step toward enforcing this implementation strategy and I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting the "Career-Ready Student Veterans Act of 2015."

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. 2360, as amended.

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

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

LAKE BALDWIN VETERANS AFFAIRS OUTPATIENT CLINIC PROPERTY CONVEYANCE

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 4056) to authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to convey to the Florida Department of Veterans Affairs all right, title, and interest of the United States to the property known as "The Community Living Center" at the Lake Baldwin Veterans Affairs Outpatient Clinic, Orlando, Florida, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 4056

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

SECTION 1. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS LAND CONVEYANCE, LAKE BALDWIN VETERANS AFFAIRS OUTPATIENT CLINIC, ORLANDO, FLORIDA.

(a) CONVEYANCE AUTHORIZED.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall convey to the Florida Department of Veterans Affairs all right, title, and interest of the United States in and to the property known as "The Community Living Center", including any

improvements thereon, which is part of the Lake Baldwin Veterans Affairs Outpatient Clinic, Orlando, Florida, located at 5201 Raymond Street, Orlando, Florida.

(b) CONDITIONS OF CONVEYANCE.—The conveyance under subsection (a) shall be subject to the following conditions:

(1) The recipient shall agree to accept the conveyed real property in its condition at the time of the conveyance.

(2) The recipient shall agree not to apply the small house design model of the Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Construction and Facilities Management Design Guide for Community Living Centers to the conveyed real property.

(c) USE OF PROPERTY.—The deed of conveyance for the parcels of real property conveyed under subsection (a) shall provide that all of the property be used and maintained for the sole purpose of providing nursing home, domiciliary, or adult day health care to veterans.

(d) DESCRIPTION OF PROPERTY.—The exact acreage and legal description of the parcels of real property conveyed under subsection (a) shall be determined by surveys satisfactory to the Secretary.

(e) ADDITIONAL TERMS AND CONDITIONS.—The Secretary may require such additional terms and conditions in connection with the conveyances under subsection (a) as the Secretary considers appropriate to protect the interests of the United States.

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 have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and to add any extraneous material they may have on H.R. 4056, as amended.

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

There was no objection.

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 4056, as amended, which was introduced by my colleague and fellow Floridian, Congressman MICA.

This bill would authorize the Florida Department of Veterans Affairs to convey The Community Living Center on the Lake Baldwin campus in Orlando to the Florida Department of Veterans Affairs.

This conveyance is in line with the VA's plans to repurpose the Lake Baldwin campus and would save VA from expending money, maintaining the property that the Department has no further use for while allowing this parcel of land to continue to be used in the service of our veterans.

I am grateful to Congressman MICA for sponsoring this legislation.

I would urge my colleagues to support it.

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

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

Mr. Speaker, this legislation, H.R. 4056, introduced by my colleague from Florida, Mr. JOHN MICA, will authorize the VA to convey to the Florida Department of Veterans Affairs The Community Living Center at the Lake Baldwin Veterans Affairs Outpatient Clinic in Orlando, Florida.

When the Orlando VA center is fully completed, it will include 134 inpatient beds, an outpatient clinic, parking garage, chapel, and central energy plant.

One of the first buildings opened at the Orlando VA Medical Center was the 120-bed Community Living Center and the 60-bed domiciliary. Both are now open and accepting veterans. With the new facilities, it is not necessary for the VA to keep two facilities open in close proximity.

I am pleased that Mr. MICA was able to work with the Florida Department of Veterans Affairs to take over this facility and continue to serve the veterans of central Florida.

Let me just say one other thing. I am just very impressed with the opening of this facility, the domiciliary, and also the clinic. We were able to get that facility open before the hospital opened, and it was taking veterans.

In addition to that, the Department of Defense gave that facility to the Department of Veterans Affairs—institutional memory is very important—and I am just very pleased that we will continue to use this facility for veterans.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank Mr. MICA for bringing this before the House.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I yield 5 minutes to the gentleman from the Seventh District of Florida (Mr. MICA), who authored this piece of legislation.

Mr. MICA. Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to thank Chairman MILLER and also thank Ranking Member BROWN for their strong support in helping to expedite this legislation.

This is a simple measure. It does transfer a vacant 120-bed VA nursing care building in Orlando's VA veteran Baldwin Park facility to the Florida Department of Veterans Affairs, as the chairman described.

As the ranking member mentioned, we actually have opened a 120-bed new facility to the south of Orlando and a 60-bed domiciliary unit also open now for nearly 2 years. Adjacent to that is a new hospital at Lake Nona.

I think Ms. BROWN was with me back in 1999 when this 120-bed nursing care facility was dedicated. The facility is not that old. It was closed 2 years ago when we opened the new facility, and the VA used that building and some of the rooms for transition for training for employment.

Now the new hospital is open. The new 120-bed facility is open to the south and domiciliary unit. We have agreement from the State of Florida to take that facility. You might be interested to know why central Florida would want another veterans facility.

In some areas, there is a declining population. The chief financial officer of the State just announced that we had 1,000 new people come to Florida every day last year. We have now exceeded 20 million. Many of those are veterans, and they are settling in central Florida.

We do have an agreement with the State of Florida to assume this facility. They can open it quicker. They can do it in a cost-effective manner for VA. They can take some of the burden off of the Federal VA, which we know has a full set of challenges right now.

I want to thank VA Secretary McDonald. I also want to thank my colleagues in 2014, the ranking member, Ms. BROWN; Mr. WEBSTER; Mr. GRAYSON; and myself.

We all wrote to Secretary Shinseki, the Secretary at that time, and asked that this be done. It has taken a little bit of time, but we are getting there.

Again, I ask concurrence in passing H.R. 4056. It will expedite and make available the needed nursing homes with our aging veterans population and many thousands of veterans moving to the State of Florida and, particularly, central Florida.

I thank you again for expediting this, and I ask for the House to concur in passing H.R. 4056.

Ms. BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I again thank Mr. MICA for his leadership in this area.

I urge all my colleagues to support H.R. 4056.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I, too, urge my colleagues to support H.R. 4056, 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. 4056, 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 direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to convey to the Florida Department of Veterans Affairs all right, title, and interest of the United States to the property known as 'The Community Living Center' at the Lake Baldwin Veterans Affairs Outpatient Clinic, Orlando, Florida."

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

□ 1600

AMERICAN HEROES COLA ACT OF 2015

Mr. ABRAHAM. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 677) to amend title 38, United States Code, to provide for annual cost-of-living adjustments to be made automatically by law each year in the rates

of disability compensation for veterans with service-connected disabilities and the rates of dependency and indemnity compensation for survivors of certain service-connected disabled veterans, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 677

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 "American Heroes COLA Act of 2015".

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

Sec. 1. Short title; table of contents.

Sec. 2. Expansion of eligibility for medals.

Sec. 3. Definitions relating to claims for benefits under laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

Sec. 4. Quarterly reports on formal and informal claims for benefits under laws administered by Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

Sec. 5. Expedited payment of survivor's benefits.

Sec. 6. Priority for processing claims of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Sec. 7. Treatment of medical evidence provided by non-Department of Veterans Affairs medical professionals in support of claims for disability compensation.

Sec. 8. Automatic annual increase in rates of disability compensation and dependency and indemnity compensation.

Sec. 9. Improvement of fiduciaries for veterans.

Sec. 10. Board of Veterans' Appeals video hearings.

Sec. 11. Improvements to authority for performance of medical disabilities examinations by contract physicians.

Sec. 12. Pilot program on fully developed appeals.

Sec. 13. Deadline for certification of appeals forms by regional offices of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Sec. 14. Evaluation of backlog of disability claims and appeals of claims of Department of Veterans Affairs.

Sec. 15. Methods for validating certain World War II Merchant Mariner service considered to be active service by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

Sec. 16. Designation of American World War II Cities.

Sec. 17. Sense of Congress regarding American veterans disabled for life.

Sec. 18. Extension of pilot program on counseling in retreat settings for women veterans newly separated from service in the Armed Forces.

SEC. 2. EXPANSION OF ELIGIBILITY FOR MEDALS.

Section 2306(d)(4) of title 38, United States Code, is amended to read as follows:

"(4)(A) In lieu of furnishing a headstone or marker under this subsection to a deceased individual described in subparagraph (B), the Secretary may furnish, upon request, a medallion or other device of a design determined by the Secretary to signify the deceased individual's status as a veteran, to be attached to a headstone or marker furnished at private expense.

"(B) A deceased individual described in this subsection is an individual who—

"(i) served in the Armed Forces on or after April 6, 1917; and

"(ii) is eligible for a headstone or marker furnished under paragraph (1) (or would be so eligible but for the date of the death of the individual)."

SEC. 3. DEFINITIONS RELATING TO CLAIMS FOR BENEFITS UNDER LAWS ADMINISTERED BY THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

(a) DEFINITIONS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Section 5100 of title 38, United States Code, is amended to read as follows:

"§ 5100. Definitions

"In this chapter:

"(1) The term 'claimant' means any individual applying for, or submitting a claim for, any benefit under the laws administered by the Secretary.

"(2) The term 'claim' means a communication in writing requesting a determination of entitlement or evidencing a belief in entitlement to a benefit under the laws administered by the Secretary.

"(3) The term 'formal claim' means a claim submitted on an application form prescribed by the Secretary."

(2) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections at the beginning of chapter 51 of such title is further amended by striking the item relating to section 5100 and inserting the following new item:

"5100. Definitions."

(b) EFFECTIVE DATE.—Section 5100 of title 38, United States Code, as amended by subsection (a), shall take effect on the date of the enactment of this Act and shall apply with respect to a claim submitted on or after such date.

SEC. 4. QUARTERLY REPORTS ON FORMAL AND INFORMAL CLAIMS FOR BENEFITS UNDER LAWS ADMINISTERED BY SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

(a) QUARTERLY REPORTS.—During the five-year period beginning on the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall submit to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and House of Representatives quarterly reports on formal and informal claims submitted to the Secretary. Each such report shall include, for the three-month period covered by the report—

(1) the total number of claims submitted to the Secretary;

(2) the total number of informal claims submitted to the Secretary;

(3) the total number of formal claims submitted to the Secretary;

(4) the total number of forms indicating an intent to file a claim for benefits submitted to the Secretary;

(5) the total number of claims notification letters that included an invitation to the claimant to submit an additional formal claim that was reasonably raised during the adjudication of the claim for which the notification letter is sent;

(6) of the claimants who received notification letters described in paragraph (5), the total number who submitted a formal claim in response to the invitation included in the letter;

(7) the total number of electronically filed claims submitted to the Secretary; and

(8) the total number of fully-developed claims submitted to the Secretary.

(b) SENSE OF CONGRESS.—It is the sense of Congress that the Secretary of Veterans Affairs should develop a designated form for an increase or reopening of a claim that does not require the resubmittal of information previously submitted on a formal claim form.

(c) DEFINITIONS.—In this section: