

HONORING INVESTMENTS IN RECRUITING AND EMPLOYING AMERICAN MILITARY VETERANS ACT OF 2017

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 244) to encourage effective, voluntary private sector investments to recruit, employ, and retain men and women who have served in the United States military with annual presidential awards to private sector employers recognizing such efforts, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 244

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 “Honoring Investments in Recruiting and Employing American Military Veterans Act of 2017” or the “HIRE Vets Act”.

SEC. 2. HIRE VETS MEDALLION AWARD PROGRAM.

(a) PROGRAM ESTABLISHED.—Not later than 2 years after the date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Labor shall establish, by rule, a HIRE Vets Medallion Program to solicit voluntary information from employers for purposes of recognizing, by means of an award to be designated a “HIRE Vets Medallion Award”, verified efforts by such employers—

(1) to recruit, employ, and retain veterans; and

(2) to provide community and charitable services supporting the veteran community.

(b) APPLICATION PROCESS.—Beginning in the calendar year following the calendar year in which the Secretary establishes the program, the Secretary shall annually—

(1) solicit and accept voluntary applications from employers in order to consider whether those employers should receive a HIRE Vets Medallion Award;

(2) review applications received in each calendar year; and

(3) notify such recipients of their awards; and

(4) at a time to coincide with the annual commemoration of Veterans Day—

(A) announce the names of such recipients;

(B) recognize such recipients through publication in the Federal Register; and

(C) issue to each such recipient—

(i) a HIRE Vets Medallion Award of the level determined under section 3; and

(ii) a certificate stating that such employer is entitled to display such HIRE Vets Medallion Award.

(C) TIMING.—

(1) SOLICITATION PERIOD.—The Secretary shall solicit applications not later than January 31st of each calendar year for the Awards to be awarded in November of that calendar year.

(2) END OF ACCEPTANCE PERIOD.—The Secretary shall stop accepting applications not earlier than April 30th of each calendar year for the Awards to be awarded in November of that calendar year.

(3) REVIEW PERIOD.—The Secretary shall finish reviewing applications not later than August 31st of each calendar year for the Awards to be awarded in November of that calendar year.

(4) SELECTION OF RECIPIENTS.—The Secretary shall select the employers to receive HIRE Vets Medallion Awards not later than September 30th of each calendar year for the Awards to be awarded in November of that calendar year.

(5) NOTICE TO RECIPIENTS.—The Secretary shall notify employers who will receive HIRE Vets Medallion Awards not later than October 11th of each calendar year for the Awards to be awarded in November of that calendar year.

(d) LIMITATION.—An employer who receives a HIRE Vets Medallion Award for one calendar year is not eligible to receive a HIRE Vets Medallion Award for the subsequent calendar year.

SEC. 3. SELECTION OF RECIPIENTS.

(a) APPLICATION REVIEW PROCESS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall review all applications received in a calendar year to determine whether an employer should receive a HIRE Vets Medallion Award, and, if so, of what level.

(2) APPLICATION CONTENTS.—The Secretary shall require that all applications provide information on the programs and other efforts of applicant employers during the calendar year prior to that in which the medallion is to be awarded, including the categories and activities governing the level of award for which the applicant is eligible under subsection (b).

(3) VERIFICATION.—The Secretary shall verify all information provided in the applications, to the extent that such information is relevant in determining whether or not an employer should receive a HIRE Vets Medallion Award or in determining the appropriate level of HIRE Vets Medallion Award for that employer to receive, including by requiring the chief executive officer or the chief human relations officer of the employer to attest under penalty of perjury that the employer has met the criteria described in subsection (b) for a particular level of Award.

(b) AWARDS.—

(1) LARGE EMPLOYERS.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall establish two levels of HIRE Vets Medallion Awards to be awarded to employers employing 500 or more employees, to be designated the “Gold HIRE Vets Medallion Award” and the “Platinum HIRE Vets Medallion Award”.

(B) GOLD HIRE VETS MEDALLION AWARD.—No employer shall be eligible to receive a Gold HIRE Vets Medallion Award in a given calendar year unless—

(i) veterans constitute not less than 7 percent of all employees hired by such employer during the prior calendar year;

(ii) such employer has retained not less than 75 percent of the veteran employees hired during the calendar year preceding the preceding calendar year for a period of at least 12 months from the date on which the employees were hired;

(iii) such employer has established an employee veteran organization or resource group to assist new veteran employees with integration, including coaching and mentoring; and

(iv) such employer has established programs to enhance the leadership skills of veteran employees during their employment.

(C) PLATINUM HIRE VETS MEDALLION AWARD.—No employer shall be eligible to receive a Platinum HIRE Vets Medallion Award in a given calendar year unless—

(i) the employer meets all the requirements for eligibility for a Gold HIRE Vets Medallion Award under subparagraph (B);

(ii) veterans constitute not less than 10 percent of all employees hired by such employer during the prior calendar year;

(iii) such employer has retained not less than 85 percent of the veteran employees hired during the calendar year preceding the preceding calendar year for a period of at least 12 months from the date on which the employees were hired;

(iv) such employer employs dedicated human resources professionals to support

hiring and retention of veteran employees, including efforts focused on veteran hiring and training;

(v) such employer provides each of its employees serving on active duty in the United States National Guard or Reserve with compensation sufficient, in combination with the employee's active duty pay, to achieve a combined level of income commensurate with the employee's salary prior to undertaking active duty; and

(vi) such employer has a tuition assistance program to support veteran employees' attendance in postsecondary education during the term of their employment.

(D) EXEMPTION FOR SMALLER EMPLOYERS.—An employer shall be deemed to meet the requirements of subparagraph (C)(iv) if such employer—

(i) employs 5,000 or fewer employees; and

(ii) employs at least one human resources professional whose regular work duties include those described under subparagraph (C)(iv).

(E) ADDITIONAL CRITERIA.—The Secretary may provide, by rule, additional criteria with which to determine qualifications for receipt of each level of HIRE Vets Medallion Award.

(2) SMALL- AND MEDIUM-SIZED EMPLOYERS.—The Secretary shall establish similar awards in order to recognize achievements in supporting veterans by—

(A) employers with 50 or fewer employees; and

(B) employers with more than 50 but fewer than 500 employees.

(c) DESIGN BY SECRETARY.—The Secretary shall establish the shape, form, and design of each HIRE Vets Medallion Award, except that the Award shall be in the form of a certificate and shall state the year for which it was awarded.

SEC. 4. DISPLAY OF AWARD.

(a) IN GENERAL.—The recipient of a HIRE Vets Medallion Award may—

(1) publicly display such Award through the end of the calendar year following receipt of such Award; and

(2) publicly display the HIRE Vets Medallion Award Certificate issued in conjunction with such Award.

(b) UNLAWFUL DISPLAY PROHIBITED.—It is unlawful for any employer to publicly display a HIRE Vets Medallion Award, in connection with, or as a part of, any advertisement, solicitation, business activity, or product—

(1) for the purpose of conveying, or in a manner reasonably calculated to convey, a false impression that the employer received the Award through the HIRE Vets Medallion Award Program, if such employer did not receive such Award through the HIRE Vets Medallion Award Program; or

(2) for the purpose of conveying, or in a manner reasonably calculated to convey, a false impression that the employer received the Award through the HIRE Vets Medallion Award Program for a year for which such employer did not receive such Award.

SEC. 5. APPLICATION FEE AND FUNDING.

(a) FUND ESTABLISHED.—There is established in the Treasury of the United States a fund to be designated the “HIRE Vets Medallion Award Fund”. Amounts appropriated to the fund pursuant to subsection (c) shall remain available until expended.

(b) FEE AUTHORIZED.—The Secretary may assess a reasonable fee on employers that apply for receipt of a HIRE Vets Medallion Award and the Secretary shall deposit such fees into the HIRE Vets Medallion Award Fund. The Secretary shall establish the amount of the fee such that the amounts collected as fees and deposited into the Fund are sufficient to cover the costs associated with carrying out this Act.

(c) **USE OF FUNDS.**—Amounts in the HIRE Vets Medallion Award Fund shall be available, subject to appropriation, to the Secretary to carry out the HIRE Vets Medallion Award Program.

SEC. 6. INITIAL IMPLEMENTATION.

The HIRE Vets Medallion Program shall begin to solicit applications on January 31 of the year that is two fiscal years after the fiscal year during which funds are first appropriated to carry out this Act.

SEC. 7. REPORT TO CONGRESS.

(a) **REPORTS.**—Beginning not later than 2 years after the date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall submit to Congress annual reports on—

(1) the fees collected from applicants for HIRE Vets Medallion Awards in the prior year and any changes in fees to be proposed in the present year;

(2) the cost of administering the HIRE Vets Medallion Award Program in the prior year;

(3) the number of applications for HIRE Vets Medallion Awards received in the prior year; and

(4) the HIRE Vets Medallion Awards awarded in the prior year, including the name of each employer to whom a HIRE Vets Medallion Award was awarded and the level of medallion awarded to each such employer.

(b) **COMMITTEES.**—The Secretary shall provide the reports required under subsection (a) to the Chairman and Ranking Member of—

(1) the Committees on Education and the Workforce and Veterans' Affairs of the House of Representatives; and

(2) the Committees on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions and Veterans' Affairs of the Senate.

SEC. 8. Definitions.

In this Act:

(a) The term “employer” means any person, institution, organization, or other entity that pays salary or wages for work performed or that has control over employee opportunities, except that such term does not include—

(1) the Federal Government; or

(2) any State government, as defined in such section.

(b) The term “Secretary” means the Secretary of Labor.

(c) The term “veteran” has the meaning given such term under section 101 of title 38, United States Code.

The **SPEAKER** pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. BILIRAKIS) and the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. WALZ) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Florida.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and to add extraneous materials.

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

There was no objection.

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

H.R. 244, as amended, would require the Department of Labor to establish a HIRE Vets Medallion Program to recognize and award employers with a HIRE Vets Medallion for their efforts to recruit, employ, and retain veterans, as well as their work to provide community and charitable services to veterans and their local communities.

While we still have work to do, it is important to note that the veteran unemployment rate has continued to decrease over recent years and, as of last month, was at the low rate of 4.5 percent. Again, we have more work to do. While many factors have led to the continued reduction of the unemployment rate for the men and women who have served, our Nation's employers in both the public and private sectors deserve a lot of credit, and it is important that we highlight the work that these companies have done and that we publicly recognize their commitment to hiring our veterans—hiring our true American heroes. I commend them so much.

With this idea in mind, H.R. 244, as amended, would authorize the Secretary of Labor to create the HIRE Vets Medallion Program, which would recognize employers who hire and retain veterans as well as companies that provide support services to the veterans and their communities.

Employers would earn either platinum or gold status based on requirements that are related to the number of veterans hired each year, providing pay equity for guardsmen and Reserve employees who were called up to active military service and other requirements. Once these employers have earned HIRE Vets Medallions, they would be able to publicly display their awards to illustrate the work they have done on behalf of our veterans and the priorities they place on hiring veterans within their workforces.

As we work to continue to decrease the national unemployment rate among our men and women who have served, it is vital that we highlight and thank the employers who have stepped up and have recognized the benefits of hiring a veteran, and there are many benefits as their work ethic is outstanding—their dedication, their integrity. They are really outstanding people, and I am glad that our employers have stepped up.

I thank the staff of the Department of Labor and the Trump administration for working with us to make improvements to the legislation from what was passed last year.

I also thank Colonel PAUL COOK of California for introducing and advocating for this bill, which, again, has my full support.

I urge all of my colleagues to join me in supporting H.R. 244, as amended.

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

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

I rise in support of H.R. 244, as amended, the HIRE Vets Act.

I give a special thank-you to my colleague from California, Colonel COOK, who, himself, is a Vietnam veteran. Since the first day he got into Congress, he has been our veterans' staunchest supporter, and I appreciate that.

Mr. Speaker, this is an innovative, bipartisan piece of legislation. The HIRE Vets Act directs the Department

of Labor, or DOL VETS, to establish a HIRE Vets Medallion Program. This program solicits voluntary information from private sector employers, which we know they want to give—and we know they are out there hiring folks—and allows these employers to display, with other marketing materials, a recognized medallion as a symbol of their support and willingness to make sure we hire veterans. Employers who provide community and charitable services that support veterans will also be eligible.

Hiring veterans isn't just the right thing to do because it is morally and ethically right; it makes good business sense, and our folks know that.

The men and women who have served in our military have received invaluable training and experience that has proven to help them thrive in post-military employment. What they need is a foot in the door. Fortunately, we have been seeing encouraging trends in veterans' employment. Thanks to the hard work of DOL VETS, combined with efforts within the private sector and Federal and State governments, the veterans' unemployment rate in January of 2017 was 4.5 percent, which is lower than the national average. We also know that the unemployment rate for post-9/11 veterans remains unacceptably high at 8 percent.

We must remain vigilant to make sure that the men and women who signed up to defend our Nation enjoy opportunities for growth when they return home. The HIRE Vets Medallion Program represents an additional incentive for employers to hire and retain veterans, which is something we can all get behind.

Again, I thank Colonel COOK for offering this bipartisan legislation. Thank you to the vice chairman for bringing this up and throwing his support behind it. I am certainly proud to stand in support of this legislation.

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

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from California (Mr. COOK), a good friend and a great veterans' advocate. I thank him for his service.

Mr. COOK. I thank Mr. BILIRAKIS for yielding.

Mr. Speaker, as a combat veteran, I am deeply concerned that the men and women of our Armed Forces continue to struggle to find jobs upon their return to civilian life. These individuals have not only displayed great courage in serving their country, but have acquired certain skills that make them ideal candidates for employment.

I am not going to go over many of the things that were said about how the program is an incentive, as I think that has already been covered. I just want to underscore the fact that this is a problem. It is not a new problem. You can have the statistics, but one has to ask oneself: Why do we have a lower percentage of veterans who are getting the jobs?

As was already mentioned, I am a product of the Vietnam war; and the veterans who were getting out there, a lot of people were afraid to hire them. They didn't know whether they would be recalled back into the service, and they didn't know whether they had post-traumatic stress disorder. They were not going to take a chance on them, and that was sad. That was many, many years ago, but the stats don't lie.

I am very, very supportive. I get passionate about these programs because the bottom line is we have to make sure that we take care of the troops, and this is a bill that, with the cooperation of private industry, has those incentives built in there. I am optimistic. We had bipartisan support the last time. We went all the way up there and were waiting the last time for the Senate—holding our breath. Everybody knows you don't always get what you want. I am not going to give up and neither will the people who have been supporting this bill because we are all very, very passionate about veterans.

I thank Chairman ROE. I thank Ranking Member WALZ for his great support and military service. I thank Representative TULSI GABBARD for, once again, being the original cosponsor of this important legislation and for always being there for the veterans and the military. I also thank Congressman BILIRAKIS for his great support.

Once again, this passed out of the House last November and had unanimous support. I urge my colleagues to once again vote in favor of this bill.

Mr. WALZ. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentlewoman from Hawaii (Ms. GABBARD), who still serves this Nation in uniform.

Ms. GABBARD. Mr. Speaker, I stand in strong support of H.R. 244, the HIRE Vets Act, which I am so proud and honored to have worked on with my colleague and fellow veteran, Colonel PAUL COOK from California.

This is personal for us. This is about our brothers and sisters in uniform—from different generations—who have been honored and thanked for their service in uniform but who, unfortunately, are often forgotten about when they lay that uniform down. Most people aren't aware that every single day roughly 500 veterans are transitioning from military life to civilian life, joining more than 2.9 million veterans who have returned home since 9/11 alone. Through their service and training, these are men and women who are highly trained, who have experience in leading, in making decisions under pressure, in acting and working well as members of a team, and in accomplishing the mission.

Data show that veterans are civic assets in our communities. They have higher rates of voting, of engaging with local governments and community organizations, of participating actively in community service, and more. To-

gether, these qualities make our veterans especially valuable to employers, whether it be in the private sector, in the public sector, or in the nonprofit sector.

Unfortunately, for them, returning to a civilian job market is not as easy as it should be. They often face an unfriendly job market or even an unfriendly culture that doesn't fully understand them and what they bring to the table. Many people don't understand that our veterans are not seeking pity or a handout but are simply looking for an opportunity to continue to serve—to continue to contribute to our communities and to our country.

This legislation is focused on encouraging employers to hire more veterans. We have seen different programs and initiatives in my home State of Hawaii and in States across the country that focus on recruiting and retaining veterans, but the fact is that there are still more than 400,000 unemployed veterans across the country. We need to do more.

This legislation, the HIRE Vets Act, gets directly at this need by setting up an incentive system to encourage employers to hire and retain veterans. It creates a standard of recognition for employers who go the extra mile to recruit and retain veterans and provide services that support our veteran community.

We came together at the end of last year and passed this legislation unanimously. I am hopeful that my colleagues will once again stand and pass this important legislation and move it along through the Senate and to the President's desk for his signature.

Mr. WALZ. Mr. Speaker, I have no further speakers. I encourage my colleagues to support H.R. 244, as amended.

I yield back the balance of my time. Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I urge all Members to support this legislation.

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. BILIRAKIS) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 244, as amended. The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds being in the affirmative, the ayes have it.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

BOOSTING RATES OF AMERICAN VETERAN EMPLOYMENT ACT

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 974) to amend title 38, United States Code, to authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, in awarding a contract for the procurement of goods or services, to give a preference to offerors that employ veterans.

The Clerk read the title of the bill. The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 974

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 “Boosting Rates of American Veteran Employment Act” or the “BRAVE Act”.

SEC. 2. PREFERENCE FOR OFFERORS EMPLOYING VETERANS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Subchapter II of chapter 81 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding after section 8128 the following new section:

“§ 8129. Preference for offerors employing veterans

“(a) PREFERENCE.—In awarding a contract for the procurement of goods or services, the Secretary may give a preference to offerors that employ veterans on a full-time basis. The Secretary shall determine such preference based on the percentage of the full-time employees of the offeror who are veterans.

“(b) ENFORCEMENT PENALTIES FOR MISREPRESENTATION.—(1) Any offeror that is determined by the Secretary to have willfully and intentionally misrepresented the veteran status of the employees of the offeror for purposes of subsection (a) may be debarred from contracting with the Department for a period of not less than five years.

“(2) If the Secretary carries out a debarment under paragraph (1), the Secretary shall commence debarment action against the offeror by not later than 30 days after determining that the offeror willfully and intentionally misrepresented the veteran status of the employees of the offeror as described in paragraph (1) and shall complete debarment actions against such offeror by not later than 90 days after such determination.

“(3) The debarment of an offeror under paragraph (1) includes the debarment of all principals in the offeror for a period of not less than five years.”.

(b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections at the beginning of such chapter is amended by inserting after the item relating to section 8128 the following new item:

“8129. Preference for offerors employing veterans.”.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. BILIRAKIS) and the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. WALZ) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Florida.

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GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. BILIRAKIS. I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks.

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

There was no objection.

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

Mr. Speaker, to improve employment opportunities for veterans and business opportunities for the companies that employ them, H.R. 974 would authorize the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs to consider how many veterans an offeror employs during a