

\$5,699,668; Committee on Armed Services, \$8,094,170; Committee on the Budget, \$5,190,212; Committee on Education and the Workforce, \$7,146,429; Committee on Energy and Commerce, \$10,265,721; Committee on Ethics, \$3,340,663; Committee on Financial Services, \$8,290,225; Committee on Foreign Affairs, \$7,836,993; Committee on Homeland Security, \$7,503,923; Committee on House Administration, \$5,021,565; Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, \$6,050,000; Committee on the Judiciary, \$7,625,286; Committee on Natural Resources, \$6,879,172; Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, \$9,129,841; Committee on Rules, \$3,230,281; Committee on Science, Space, and Technology, \$5,484,978; Committee on Small Business, \$3,037,400; Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, \$8,655,500; Committee on Veterans' Affairs, \$3,979,031; and Committee on Ways and Means, \$8,954,346.

SEC. 3. SECOND SESSION LIMITATIONS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Of the amount provided for in section 1 for each committee named in subsection (b), not more than the amount specified in such subsection shall be available for expenses incurred during the period beginning at noon on January 3, 2018, and ending immediately before noon on January 3, 2019.

(b) COMMITTEES AND AMOUNTS.—The committees and amounts referred to in subsection (a) are: Committee on Agriculture, \$5,737,849; Committee on Armed Services, \$8,094,170; Committee on the Budget, \$5,190,212; Committee on Education and the Workforce, \$7,307,783; Committee on Energy and Commerce, \$10,265,721; Committee on Ethics, \$3,340,663; Committee on Financial Services, \$8,290,225; Committee on Foreign Affairs, \$7,836,993; Committee on Homeland Security, \$7,503,923; Committee on House Administration, \$5,321,565; Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, \$6,050,000; Committee on the Judiciary, \$7,725,286; Committee on Natural Resources, \$6,879,172; Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, \$9,129,841; Committee on Rules, \$3,230,281; Committee on Science, Space, and Technology, \$5,484,978; Committee on Small Business, \$3,249,637; Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, \$8,760,500; Committee on Veterans' Affairs, \$3,979,031; and Committee on Ways and Means, \$8,986,346.

(c) REVIEW OF USE OF FUNDS IN FIRST SESSION.—

(1) REVIEW.—None of the amounts provided for in section 1 for a committee named in subsection (b) may be available for expenses of the committee after March 15, 2018, unless the chair or ranking minority member of the committee appears and presents testimony at a hearing of the Committee on House Administration held prior to such date to review the committee's use of the amounts provided for in section 1 during the first session of the One Hundred Fifteenth Congress and to determine whether the amount specified in subsection (b) with respect to the committee should be updated on the basis of the review.

(2) WAIVER.—The Committee on House Administration may waive the application of paragraph (1) to any or all of the committees named in subsection (b).

SEC. 4. VOUCHERS.

Payments under this resolution shall be made on vouchers authorized by the committee involved, signed by the chairman of such committee, and approved in the manner directed by the Committee on House Administration.

SEC. 5. REGULATIONS.

Amounts made available under this resolution shall be expended in accordance with regulations prescribed by the Committee on House Administration.

SEC. 6. RESERVE FUND FOR UNANTICIPATED EXPENSES.

(a) ESTABLISHMENT.—There is hereby established a reserve fund for unanticipated expenses of committees for the One Hundred Fifteenth Congress.

(b) AMOUNT.—The reserve fund under this section shall have a balance of \$2,500,000, of which—

(1) \$1,250,000 shall be available for unanticipated expenses incurred during the period beginning at noon on January 3, 2017, and ending immediately before noon on January 3, 2018; and

(2) \$1,250,000 shall be available for unanticipated expenses incurred during the period beginning at noon on January 3, 2018, and ending immediately before noon on January 3, 2019.

(c) ALLOCATION TO COMMITTEES.—Amounts in the reserve fund under this section shall be paid to a committee pursuant to an allocation approved by the Committee on House Administration.

SEC. 7. ADJUSTMENT AUTHORITY.

The Committee on House Administration shall have authority to make adjustments in amounts under section 1, if necessary to comply with an order of the President issued under section 251A or 254 of the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985 or to conform to any change in appropriations for the purposes of such section 1.

Mr. HARPER (during the reading). Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to dispense with the reading of the resolution.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SIMPSON). Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Mississippi?

There was no objection.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman from Mississippi is recognized for 1 hour.

Mr. HARPER. Mr. Speaker, for the purpose of debate only, I yield the customary 30 minutes to the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. BRADY), the ranking member of the Committee on House Administration, pending which I yield myself such time as I may consume. During consideration of this resolution, all time yielded is for the purpose of debate only.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. HARPER. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and to include extraneous material on House Resolution 173.

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

There was no objection.

Mr. HARPER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of House Resolution 173, a resolution which authorizes House Committee budget levels for the 115th Congress.

Each Congress, the House looks to the Committee on House Administration to carry out the responsibility of determining the amount needed to fund standing House committees for this year and next.

Our committee began this process by holding a hearing to receive input from the chairmen and ranking members of the various standing committees.

I thank each of them and their staffs for providing us and our colleagues with the information needed to help our committee determine the appropriate funding levels.

I also want to extend my sincere thanks for the collaborative manner in which the chairmen and ranking members worked together to create a budget request that is really targeted to meet their legislative and important oversight responsibilities.

My colleagues and I took the priorities laid out in the hearing we held into account; and together, our committee passed, by unanimous voice vote, the bipartisan funding resolution that is before us today.

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

Mr. BRADY of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself as much time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of the resolution before us.

The credit for this bipartisan legislation goes to my colleague and friend, the gentleman from Mississippi. I want to thank Chairman HARPER for his bipartisan cooperation in developing this agreeable legislation. All committees should follow our lead.

I also want to thank our staffs, the Democratic and the Republican sides, for putting together the bill that we have on the floor today.

Mr. Speaker, I support this legislation we are considering now.

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

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

I want to express my appreciation to the ranking member of the committee, Mr. BRADY. The cooperation that we have had, I think, is a good model to follow. I thank him for that support.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time, and I move the previous question on the resolution.

The previous question was ordered.

The resolution was agreed to.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

IMPROVING AUTHORITY OF SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS TO HIRE AND RETAIN PHYSICIANS AND OTHER EMPLOYEES

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. HARPER). Pursuant to House Resolution 198 and rule XVIII, the Chair declares the House in the Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union for the further consideration of the bill, H.R. 1367.

Will the gentleman from Idaho (Mr. SIMPSON) kindly take the chair.

□ 0915

IN THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Accordingly, the House resolved itself into the Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union for the further consideration of the bill (H.R. 1367) to improve the authority of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to hire

and retain physicians and other employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes, with Mr. SIMPSON (Acting Chair) in the chair.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The Acting CHAIR. When the Committee of the Whole House rose on Thursday, March 16, 2017, all time for general debate had expired.

Pursuant to the rule, the bill shall be considered for amendment under the 5-minute rule.

It shall be in order to consider as an original bill for the purpose of amendment under the 5-minute rule an amendment in the nature of a substitute consisting of the text of Rules Committee Print 115-6. That amendment in the nature of a substitute shall be considered as read.

The text of the amendment in the nature of a substitute is as follows:

H.R. 1367

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

SECTION 1. TABLE OF CONTENTS.

The table of contents for this Act is as follows:

- Sec. 1. Table of contents.
- Sec. 2. Modification to annual determination of staffing shortages in Veterans Health Administration.
- Sec. 3. Executive management fellowship program.
- Sec. 4. Accountability of leaders for managing the Department of Veterans Affairs.
- Sec. 5. Modification to veterans preference.
- Sec. 6. Reemployment of former employees.
- Sec. 7. Recruiting database.
- Sec. 8. Human resources academy.
- Sec. 9. Promotional opportunities for technical experts.
- Sec. 10. Comptroller General study on succession planning.
- Sec. 11. Information on hiring effectiveness.
- Sec. 12. Employment of students and recent graduates.
- Sec. 13. Exit surveys.

SEC. 2. MODIFICATION TO ANNUAL DETERMINATION OF STAFFING SHORTAGES IN VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION.

Section 7412(a) of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) by striking “the five occupations” and inserting “the five clinical occupations and the five nonclinical occupations”; and

(2) by striking “throughout the Department” and inserting “with respect to each medical center of the Department.”

SEC. 3. EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM.

(a) FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM.—Chapter 7 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new subchapter:

“SUBCHAPTER III—EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM “§ 741. Executive Management Fellowship Program

“(a) FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM.—There is in the Department an Executive Management Fellowship Program. The purpose of the program shall be to provide—

“(1) eligible employees of the Veterans Benefits Administration and the Veterans Health Administration with training and experience in the private sector; and

“(2) eligible employees of a private-sector entity with training and experience in the Department of Veterans Affairs.

“(b) FELLOWSHIP.—(1) A fellowship provided under this section is a one-year fellowship during which—

“(A) with respect to a Department participant, the participant receives training and experience at a private-sector entity that is engaged in the administration and delivery of health care or other services similar to the benefits administered by the Secretary; and

“(B) with respect to a private-sector participant, the participant receives training and experience at the Veterans Benefits Administration or the Veterans Health Administration.

“(2) The Secretary shall enter into such agreements with private-sector entities as are necessary to carry out this section.

“(c) SELECTION OF RECIPIENTS.—(1) In August of each year, the Secretary shall select—

“(A) not fewer than 18 and not more than 30 eligible employees of the Veterans Benefits Administration and the Veterans Health Administration to receive a fellowship under this section; and

“(B) not fewer than 18 and not more than 30 eligible employees of private-sector entities to receive a fellowship under this section.

“(2) To the extent practicable, the Secretary shall select eligible employees under subparagraphs (A) and (B) of paragraph (1) from among eligible employees who are veterans in a manner that is reflective of the demographics of the veteran population of the United States.

“(d) ELIGIBLE EMPLOYEES.—For the purposes of this section, an eligible employee is—

“(1) with respect to an employee of the Veterans Benefits Administration or the Veterans Health Administration, an employee who—

“(A) is compensated at a rate of basic pay not less than the minimum rate of basic pay payable for grade GS-14 of the General Schedule and not more than either the minimum rate of basic pay payable to a member of the Senior Executive Service under section 5382 of title 5, United States Code, or the minimum rate of basic pay payable pursuant to chapter 74 of this title, as the case may be;

“(B) enters into an agreement with the Secretary under subsection (e); and

“(C) submits to the Secretary an application containing such information and assurances as the Secretary may require; and

“(2) with respect to an employee of a private-sector entity, an employee who—

“(A) is employed in a position whose duties and responsibilities are commensurate with an employee of the Department described in paragraph (1);

“(B) enters into an agreement with the Secretary under subsection (e); and

“(C) submits to the Secretary an application containing such information and assurances as the Secretary may require.

“(e) AGREEMENTS.—(1) An agreement between the Secretary and a Department participant shall be in writing, shall be signed by the participant, and shall include the following provisions:

“(A) The Secretary’s agreement to provide the participant with a fellowship under this section;

“(B) The participant’s agreement—

“(i) to accept the fellowship;

“(ii) after completion of the fellowship, to serve as a full-time employee in the Veterans Benefits Administration or the Veterans Health Administration for at least two years as specified in the agreement; and

“(iii) that, during the two-year period beginning on the last day of the fellowship, the participant will not accept employment in

the same industry as the industry of the private-sector entity at which the participant accepts the fellowship.

“(C) A provision that any financial obligation of the United States arising out of an agreement entered into under this subchapter, and any obligation of the participant which is conditioned on such agreement, is contingent upon funds being appropriated.

“(D) A statement of the damages to which the United States is entitled under this subchapter for the participant’s breach of the agreement.

“(E) Such other terms as the Secretary determines are required to be included in the agreement.

“(2) An agreement between the Secretary and a private-sector participant shall be in writing, shall be signed by the participant, and shall include the following provisions:

“(A) The Secretary’s agreement to provide the participant with a fellowship under this section.

“(B) The participant’s agreement to accept the fellowship.

“(C) Such other terms as the Secretary determines are required to be included in the agreement.

“(f) TREATMENT OF RECIPIENTS.—(1) A Department participant shall be considered an employee of the Department for all purposes, including for purposes of receiving a salary and benefits, and shall remain eligible for all promotion and incentive programs otherwise available to such an employee.

“(2) A private-sector participant shall be considered an employee of the private-sector entity that employs the participant for all purposes, including for purposes of receiving a salary and benefits, and during the fellowship shall be treated as a contractor of the Department.

“(g) REPORTS.—Not later than 60 days after completing a fellowship under this section, a recipient of the fellowship shall submit to the Secretary a report on the fellowship. Each such report shall describe the duties of the recipient during the fellowship and any recommendations of the recipient for the application by the Secretary of industry processes, technologies, and best practices. Not later than seven days after receiving each such report, the Secretary shall submit to the Committees on Veterans’ Affairs of the Senate and House of Representatives such report without change.

“(h) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

“(1) The term ‘Department participant’ means an employee of the Veterans Benefits Administration or the Veterans Health Administration who is participating in the fellowship under this section.

“(2) The term ‘private-sector entity’ includes an entity operating under a public-private partnership.

“(3) The term ‘private-sector participant’ means an employee of a private-sector entity who is participating in the fellowship under this section.”

(b) DEADLINE FOR IMPLEMENTATION.—Not later than 90 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall implement the Executive Management Fellowship Program required under section 741 of title 38, United States Code, as added by subsection (a).

(c) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections at the beginning of chapter 7 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new items:

“SUBCHAPTER III—EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

“741. Executive Management Fellowship Program.”

SEC. 4. ACCOUNTABILITY OF LEADERS FOR MANAGING THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Chapter 7 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by inserting after section 717 the following new section:

“§ 719. Annual performance plan for political appointees

“(a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall conduct an annual performance plan for each political appointee of the Department that is similar to the annual performance plan conducted for an employee of the Department who is appointed as a career appointee (as that term is defined in section 3132(a)(4) of title 5) within the Senior Executive Service at the Department.

“(b) ELEMENTS OF PLAN.—Each annual performance plan conducted under subsection (a) with respect to a political appointee of the Department shall include an assessment of whether the appointee is meeting the following goals:

“(1) Recruiting, selecting, and retaining well-qualified individuals for employment at the Department.

“(2) Engaging and motivating employees.

“(3) Training and developing employees and preparing those employees for future leadership roles within the Department.

“(4) Holding each employee of the Department that is a manager accountable for addressing issues relating to performance, in particular issues relating to the performance of employees that report to the manager.

“(c) DEFINITION OF POLITICAL APPOINTEE.—In this section, the term ‘political appointee’ means an employee of the Department who holds—

“(1) a position which has been excepted from the competitive service by reason of its confidential, policy-determining, policy-making, or policy-advocating character; or

“(2) a position in the Senior Executive Service as a noncareer appointee (as such term is defined in section 3132(a) of title 5).”

(b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections at the beginning of chapter 7 of such title is amended by inserting after the item relating to section 717 the following new item:

“719. Annual performance plan for political appointees.”

SEC. 5. MODIFICATION TO VETERANS PREFERENCE.

(a) ACTIVE DUTY REQUIREMENT.—Section 2108(1)(B) and (D) of title 5, United States Code, are amended by striking “consecutive” in each instance it appears and inserting “cumulative”.

(b) EXPANSION OF ELIGIBILITY OF RETIRED VETERANS.—Section 2108(4) of title 5, United States Code, is amended to read as follows:

“(4) ‘preference eligible’ includes a retired member of the armed forces; and”.

SEC. 6. REEMPLOYMENT OF FORMER EMPLOYEES.

(a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs may noncompetitively appoint a qualified former employee to any position within the competitive service or any excepted service position under chapter 74 of title 38, United States Code, at the Department of Veterans Affairs that is one grade higher than the grade of the position at the Department most recently occupied by the employee.

(b) LIMITATION.—The Secretary may not appoint a qualified former employee to a position that is more than one grade (or equivalent) higher than the position at the Department most recently occupied by the employee.

(c) DEFINITION OF QUALIFIED FORMER EMPLOYEE.—For purposes of this section, the term “qualified former employee” means any individual who—

(1) formerly occupied any position at the Department of Veterans Affairs within two years before applying for reemployment at the Department;

(2) voluntarily left such position, or was subject to a reduction in force, and had a satisfactory performance record while occupying such position; and

(3) since leaving such position has maintained licensing requirements, related to the position, if any, and gained skill, knowledge, or other factors related to the position.

SEC. 7. RECRUITING DATABASE.

(a) ESTABLISHMENT.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall establish a single database that lists each vacant position in the Department of Veterans Affairs that the Secretary determines is critical to the mission of the Department, difficult to fill, or both.

(b) QUALIFIED APPLICANT.—If the Secretary determines that an applicant for a vacant position listed in the database established under subsection (a) is qualified for such position but does not select the applicant for such position, the Secretary, at the election of the applicant, shall consider the applicant for other similar vacant positions listed in the database for which the applicant is qualified.

(c) PROLONGED VACANCIES.—If the Secretary does not fill a vacant position listed in the database established under subsection (a) after a period determined appropriate by the Secretary, the Secretary—

(1) shall ensure that applicants described in subsection (b) are considered for such position; and

(2) shall use the database established under subsection (a) to assist in filling such position.

(d) REPORT.—Not later than one year after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall submit to Congress a report on the use and efficacy of the database established under subsection (a).

SEC. 8. HUMAN RESOURCES ACADEMY.

(a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall provide to human resources professionals of the Veterans Health Administration of the Department of Veterans Affairs training on how to best recruit and retain employees of the Veterans Health Administration, including with respect to any recruitment and retention matters that are unique to the Veterans Health Administration pursuant to chapter 74 of title 38, United States Code, or other provisions of law. The Secretary shall provide such training in a manner that the Secretary determines appropriate in light of budget, travel, and other constraints.

(b) AMOUNT OF TRAINING.—The Secretary shall ensure that each human resources professional of the Veterans Health Administration receives the training described in subsection (a)—

(1) as soon as practicable after being hired by the Secretary as a human resource professional; and

(2) annually thereafter.

(c) CERTIFICATION.—The Secretary shall require that each human resources professional of the Veterans Health Administration, upon the completion of the training described in subsection (a), certifies that the professional received the training and understands the information provided by the training.

(d) ANNUAL REPORT.—The Secretary shall submit to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Representatives and the Senate an annual report on the training described in subsection (a), including the cost of providing such training and the number of human resources professionals who received such training during the year covered by the report.

SEC. 9. PROMOTIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR TECHNICAL EXPERTS.

Not later than one year after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall establish a promotional track system for employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs that the Secretary determines are technical experts pursuant to regulations prescribed by the Secretary for purposes of carrying out this section. Such system shall—

(1) provide any such employee the opportunity to advance within the Department without being required to transition to a management position; and

(2) for purposes of achieving career advancement—

(A) provide for the establishment of new positions within the Department; and

(B) notwithstanding any other provision of law, provide for increases in pay for any such employee.

SEC. 10. COMPTROLLER GENERAL STUDY ON SUCCESSION PLANNING.

(a) STUDY.—The Comptroller General of the United States shall conduct a study on each of the following:

(1) The succession planning at each medical facility of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

(2) The succession planning at the Veterans Benefits Administration and the National Cemetery Administration of the Department.

(b) ELEMENTS.—The study under subsection (a) shall include, for each entity studied under the study, the following:

(1) A determination of the mission-critical positions within the entity and the vacancy risk of such positions.

(2) An analysis of the future needs for mission-critical positions and gaps within the existing talent pool of the entity.

(3) A description of strategies to close skill gaps through the use of training for existing staff, targeted recruitment, and hiring.

(4) A plan to regularly evaluate progress of staff and update existing succession plans using clear and measurable metrics and benchmarks.

(5) A demonstration of the capacity of the entity to execute succession plans with successful succession management strategies.

(6) Any other matters the Comptroller General determines appropriate.

(c) REPORT.—Not later than one year after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Comptroller General shall submit to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Representatives and the Senate a report containing each study conducted under subsection (a).

SEC. 11. INFORMATION ON HIRING EFFECTIVENESS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall measure and collect information on indicators of hiring effectiveness as follows:

(1) With respect to recruiting and hiring—

(A) the ability to reach and recruit well-qualified talent from diverse talent pools, including sources of candidates for mission-critical occupations;

(B) the use and impact of special hiring authorities and flexibilities to recruit most qualified applicants, including the use of student internships as a talent pool for permanent hires;

(C) the use and impact of special hiring authorities and flexibilities to recruit diverse candidates, including veteran, minority and disabled candidates;

(D) the use and impact of special hiring authorities and flexibilities to recruit candidates for mission-critical occupations and occupations with shortages;

(E) the age, educational level, and source of applicants;

(F) the length of time between the date on which a position is advertised and the date on which a first offer of employment is made;

(G) the length of time between the date on which a first offer of employment for a position is made and the date on which a new hire starts in that position;

(H) the number of internal and external applicants for positions; and

(I) the number of offers accepted compared to the number of offers made for permanent positions.

(2) With respect to the hiring authority—

(A) the satisfaction of the hiring authority with—

(i) the quality of new hires;

(ii) the match between the skills of newly hired individuals and the needs of the Department;

(iii) the hiring process and hiring outcomes after the first year of the employment of a new hire; and

(iv) the length of time that elapses to fill a position and for a new hire to begin working in a new position; and

(B) mission-critical deficiencies filled by new hires and the connection between mission-critical deficiencies and annual agency performance.

(3) Satisfaction of employment applicants with the hiring process, including with respect to the clarity of job announcement, reasons for withdrawal of applications, user-friendliness of the application process, communication regarding status of application, and timeliness of hiring decision.

(4) With respect to a newly hired employee—

(A) the satisfaction of the employee with the hiring process as described in paragraph (3);

(B) the satisfaction with the process of joining and becoming oriented with the Department, including with respect to the timeliness of such process after the hiring decision, the orientation process, and being provided with timely and useful new employee information and assistance after the hire is made but before the new hire starts in that position and after the new hire has begun;

(C) attrition and reasons for leaving;

(D) investment in training and development for the employee during the first year of employment; and

(E) significant barriers to the effective recruitment, selection, joining and becoming oriented with the Department, and retention of employees.

(b) DISAGGREGATION OF DATA.—To the extent practicable and in a manner which protects personally identifiable information of applicants and employees, the Secretary shall collect and report data collected under subsection (a) disaggregated by facility or Veterans Integrated Service Network.

(c) REPORTS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—On an annual basis, the Secretary shall submit to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Representatives and the Senate a report of the information collected under subsection (a).

(2) AVAILABILITY OF RECRUITING AND HIRING INFORMATION.—On an annual basis, the Secretary shall make publicly available the information collected under subsection (a) in a consistent and machine-readable format to allow for a comparison of hiring effectiveness and experience by Veterans Integrated Service Network or comparable public or private sector organization.

SEC. 12. EMPLOYMENT OF STUDENTS AND RECENT GRADUATES.

(a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall prescribe regulations to allow for excepted service appointments of students and recent graduates leading to

conversion to career or career conditional employment of a student or recent graduate of a qualifying educational institution, as defined by the Department.

(b) APPLICABILITY.—The conversion authority described in subsection (a) shall be applicable to individuals in good standing who—

(1) are employed in a qualifying internship or fellowship program at the Department;

(2) are employed in the Department in a volunteer capacity and performing substantive duties comparable to those of individuals in internship or fellowship programs and meet the required number of hours for conversion; or

(3) are employed in the Department under a contract or agreement with an external nonprofit organization and performing substantive duties comparable to those of individuals in internship or fellowship programs.

(c) UNIFORMITY.—For the purposes of subsections (b)(2) and (b)(3), hours of work performed by an individual employed shall be considered equal to those performed by an individual employed in a qualifying internship or fellowship program by the Department.

SEC. 13. EXIT SURVEYS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall develop and carry out a standardized exit survey to be voluntarily completed by career and noncareer employees and executives of the Department of Veterans Affairs who voluntarily separate from the Department. Such exit survey shall be developed in consultation with an appropriate non-Department entity with experience developing such surveys.

(b) SURVEY CONTENT.—The survey shall include, at a minimum—

(1) reasons for leaving the Department;

(2) efforts made by the supervisor of the employee to retain the individual;

(3) the extent of job satisfaction and engagement during the employment;

(4) the intent of employee to either remain employed within the Federal Government or to leave employment with the Federal Government; and

(5) such other matters as the Secretary determines appropriate.

(c) ANONYMITY OF SURVEY CONTENT.—The Secretary shall ensure that, to the extent possible, data collected under subsection (a) is anonymized and personally identifiable information is removed.

(d) SHARING OF SURVEY DATA.—The Secretary shall ensure that the results of the survey required by subsection (a) are shared on an annual basis with directors and managers of facilities of the Department and the Veterans Integrated Service Networks.

(e) REPORT.—Not later than one year after the date of the enactment of this Act, and annually thereafter, the Secretary shall submit to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Representatives and the Senate a report containing the aggregate results of the exit survey under subsection (a) covering the year prior to the report. The report shall include—

(1) an analysis of the most common reasons employees choose to leave the Department;

(2) steps the Secretary is taking to improve retention, particularly for mission-critical occupations;

(3) the demographic characteristics of employees choosing to leave the Department;

(4) any legislative barriers to improving employee retention; and

(5) the number of employees who took the exit survey under subsection (a).

The Acting CHAIR. No amendment to that amendment in the nature of a substitute shall be in order except those printed in part B of House Report

115-39. Each such amendment may be offered only in the order printed in the report, by a Member designated in the report, shall be considered as read, shall be debatable for the time specified in the report equally divided and controlled by the proponent and an opponent, shall not be subject to amendment, and shall not be subject to a demand for division of the question.

AMENDMENT NO. 1 OFFERED BY MR. WENSTRUP

The Acting CHAIR. It is now in order to consider amendment No. 1 printed in part B of House Report 115-39.

Mr. WENSTRUP. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will designate the amendment.

The text of the amendment is as follows:

Page 8, line 8, strike "90 days" and insert "one year".

Page 12, line 12, strike "shall" and insert "may".

Page 12, line 19, strike "shall" and insert "may".

Page 12, line 21, strike "shall" and insert "may".

Page 13, strike lines 11 through 13 and insert "such training virtually."

Page 16, line 9, strike "one year" and insert "two years".

Page 16, beginning line 14, strike section 11.

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 198, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. WENSTRUP) and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Ohio.

Mr. WENSTRUP. Mr. Chair, my manager's amendment makes a number of minor technical changes to the reported version of the bill and would significantly reduce discretionary costs while maintaining the overall intent of the bill.

The biggest change that would be made in the manager's amendment is the removal of section 11 of the bill, which would require the Department of Veterans Affairs to track a number of hiring effectiveness metrics.

That section alone scored at \$6 million because the Congressional Budget Office expected that the VA would have to hire an additional employee in each Veterans Integrated Service Network in order to gather that information. I disagree with that assertion and I intend to continue working on that provision to, hopefully, include it in future legislation in some form.

In addition, the manager's amendment would authorize but not require the VA to track and match qualified job applicants for vacant positions using the recruiting database that the bill would establish. The CBO estimated that the VA would have to hire up to 40 additional employees with an average compensation of \$100,000 per year to accomplish that task, meaning that provision in total would cost \$19 million. Again, I disagree with the assertion that such a task could not be accomplished using existing staff.

The Subcommittee on Health, which I am proud to chair, is holding an oversight hearing next week where I intend

to ask the VA how the Department would utilize the recruiting database and whether it would entail additional employees. Should it appear that the VA would not use the recruiting database to identify qualified candidates for open positions in a timely manner and to promptly fill prolonged vacancies, I will certainly reconsider mandating that in future legislation.

The manager's amendment would also stipulate that the additional human resources training that the bill would require be done virtually. Finally, it would extend the timeline to implement the executive management fellowship program from 90 days to 1 year, which would provide the VA additional time to set up this important new leadership development program and would extend the GAO reporting deadline from 1 to 2 years, which would provide the GAO additional time to complete their investigation into the VA succession planning.

Mr. Chair, I urge the adoption of the amendment, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. WALZ. Mr. Chairman, I claim the time in opposition, although I am not opposed to the amendment.

The Acting CHAIR. Without objection, the gentleman from Minnesota is recognized for 5 minutes.

There was no objection.

Mr. WALZ. Mr. Chairman, as mentioned last night during general debate on the underlying bill, the VA has experienced a shortage of medical providers. This shortage impacts not only a veteran's access to care, but also the quality of care a veteran may receive.

Dr. Wenstrup's amendment is smart. It would allow the VA more authority, information, and resources, all of which they need to compete with non-VA facilities. The honorable Member from Ohio has worked hard to ensure that what we are proposing with this legislation is reasonable from all sides. I am grateful for that. I do not object to the various changes he is proposing with this amendment to the timeline, to the GAO reporting deadline, and to the establishment of a recruiting database from a "shall" to a "may" authority. This is exactly what we should be doing, putting forward good pieces of legislation, making sure that the VA gets the best possible people, keeps them there, and care for our veterans. I fully support the gentleman's amendment.

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

Mr. WENSTRUP. Mr. Chairman, I yield back the balance of my time.

The Acting CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. WENSTRUP).

The amendment was agreed to.

AMENDMENT NO. 2 OFFERED BY MS. MENG

The Acting CHAIR. It is now in order to consider amendment No. 2 printed in part B of House Report 115-39.

Ms. MENG. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will designate the amendment.

The text of the amendment is as follows:

Page 2, line 2, strike "the five clinical" and insert "at a minimum, the five clinical".

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 198, the gentlewoman from New York (Ms. MENG) and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from New York.

Ms. MENG. Mr. Chair, I thank Representative WENSTRUP for his thoughtful amendment, and I thank Chairman ROE and Ranking Member WALZ for bringing it to the floor today.

Clearly, there are staffing shortages within the Department of Veterans Affairs, and, clearly, something must be done. Personally, I think this legislation is a good first step toward improving the VA's ability to identify staffing shortages, recruit and retain high-quality employees, and onboard new hires.

The amendment I am offering today speaks to the identification of staffing shortages portion of this bill. Under current law, 38 U.S.C. 7412 to be exact, the inspector general of the VA is required to submit a report to the VA Secretary annually highlighting the five personnel occupations with the largest staffing shortages throughout the Department. After receiving this report, the Secretary is then permitted to recruit and directly appoint qualified individuals to fill those vacancies.

Section 2 of the bill before us does something important to current law. It will require the IG to report on not just the five occupations with the largest staffing shortages, it will require the IG to report on the five clinical and five nonclinical occupations with the largest shortages in the VA. Additionally, it will require this reporting to be done for each medical center. Mr. Chair, I think this is a wonderful change, one that is sorely needed.

What my amendment would do is add to this expanded reporting requirement a simple clarification: the IG must report on, at minimum, the five clinical and nonclinical occupations with the largest staffing shortages at each facility. It would allow the IG to report on more than the five occupations with the largest shortages, should his findings require it.

This amendment is not an additional reporting requirement. It simply makes clear that should the IG find additional staffing shortages, he may highlight those so that the Secretary may fill them more quickly. It is a simple attempt to avoid the necessity of passing similar legislation 2, 3, or even 4 years from now.

Our veterans need the care that they have earned and that they deserve. They need it now. The first step in that endeavor is making sure that the VA staffing levels are adequate.

Again, Mr. Chair, I am pleased to see this amendment on the floor today and to do my small part in ensuring that veterans get the care they need. I urge my colleagues to support this amend-

ment, which would allow the VA inspector general to highlight additional staffing shortages within the Department.

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

Mr. WENSTRUP. Mr. Chairman, I ask unanimous consent to claim the time in opposition, although I am not opposed to the amendment.

The Acting CHAIR. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Ohio?

There was no objection.

The Acting CHAIR. The gentleman from Ohio is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. WENSTRUP. Mr. Chair, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Chairman, I rise in support of Representative MENG's amendment, which would stipulate that the annual determination of Veterans Health Administration staffing shortages must include at least five clinical occupations and five nonclinical occupations within each VA medical center.

This amendment rightfully recognizes that some VA medical centers may have staffing challenges that extend beyond just 10 occupations and provides sufficient flexibility for this reporting requirement—which triggers the VA's direct hiring authority—to accommodate that by reporting more than five clinical and five nonclinical occupations, as needed.

I urge all of my colleagues to join me in supporting this amendment. I thank Representative MENG for submitting it.

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

Ms. MENG. Mr. Chairman, I urge support for this amendment, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. WENSTRUP. Mr. Chair, I yield back the balance of my time.

The Acting CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentlewoman from New York (Ms. MENG).

The amendment was agreed to.

AMENDMENT NO. 3 OFFERED BY MS. SEWELL OF ALABAMA

The Acting CHAIR. It is now in order to consider amendment No. 3 printed in part B of House Report 115-39.

Ms. SEWELL of Alabama. Mr. Chair, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will designate the amendment.

The text of the amendment is as follows:

Page 4, line 2, before the period insert the following: "and that whenever practicable provides a preference to such employees who represent or service rural areas".

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 198, the gentlewoman from Alabama (Ms. SEWELL) and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Alabama.

Ms. SEWELL of Alabama. Mr. Chair, today I rise in support of bipartisan work to enhance recruitment and retention strategies at VA medical centers. While we focus on strengthening the VA workforce, we must also

focus on making sure the geographic diversity of our VA workforce is reflective of the veteran patient population and that rural populations are adequately represented.

I thank Chairman ROE and Ranking Member WALZ for working with me on this critically important amendment and for their dedication to our Nation's veterans.

My amendment is simple. It allows the Secretary to select eligible employees for the fellowship program who represent or service rural communities in order to alleviate the systemic burdens of rural healthcare workforce shortages for our Nation's veterans. In order to best serve our Nation's heroes from rural America, we must invest in training VA workers who understand the unique needs of rural America.

This amendment would help ensure that veterans who are serviced by rural VAs have access to the most cutting-edge healthcare industry procedures and practices. My amendment also helps address an issue that is indicative of a larger systemic issue in rural America where healthcare workforce recruitment is a barrier to improved population health. Workforce shortages, especially in health care, permeate every aspect of rural life, aggregating already long driving distances and minimal access to care.

There is significant evidence that increased recruitment and retention of professionals to underserved areas can exist if we recruit people from rural areas to come into our healthcare profession. To help address concerns of veterans' access to care, Congress established the Office of Rural Health within the VA in 2007. This office has done outstanding work over the years to recruit, train, and retain rural healthcare professionals. Everything we do in Congress in relation to the VA workforce must complement that work.

Approximately 25 percent of our Nation's veterans live in rural communities and comprise nearly 11 percent of the adult rural population. Rural veterans account for 36 percent of all VA enrollees. 43 percent of rural veterans earn an annual income of less than \$26,000, and more than 40 percent do not have access to broadband internet. This limits the accessibility of our rural veterans to online healthcare services.

According to the Census, the rates of uninsurance, disability, poverty, and unemployment among veterans all increase as the levels of rurality increase. Four in ten have at least one service-connected disability. The Seventh Congressional District of Alabama is home to more than 36,000 veterans and over 5,000 VA employees at eight facilities. I visited with the VA staff at several of these facilities, and I am always impressed with the work that they do every day on behalf of our Nation's veterans. With all of the negativity surrounding our VA employees over the past several years, I want to

take this opportunity to commend those public servants who rise every morning to help our veterans lead productive and healthy lives.

I hope my colleagues, both urban and rural, will work with me to ensure that rural veterans thrive in their communities and rural Americans are included in this outstanding VA workforce recruitment bill. I urge my colleagues to support this amendment.

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

Mr. WENSTRUP. Mr. Chair, I ask unanimous consent to claim the time in opposition, although I am not opposed to the amendment.

The Acting CHAIR. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Ohio?

There was no objection.

The Acting CHAIR. The gentleman from Ohio is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. WENSTRUP. Mr. Chair, I rise in support of Representative SEWELL's amendment, which would authorize the Secretary in selecting employees to participate in the executive management fellowship program established by section 3 of the bill, to provide a preference for employees in rural areas.

□ 0930

According to VA's Office of Rural Health, there are currently 3 million veterans living in rural communities across the country who rely on the VA healthcare system for their care.

It is critical that VA medical facilities in rural areas are given access to leadership development opportunities like the executive management fellowship program so that rural veterans benefit from them.

I urge all of my colleagues to join me in supporting this amendment, and I thank Representative SEWELL for submitting it.

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

Ms. SEWELL of Alabama. Mr. Chairman, I want to thank the gentleman for supporting this amendment, and I urge all of my colleagues to support it as well.

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

Mr. WENSTRUP. Mr. Chairman, I yield back the balance of my time.

The Acting CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentlewoman from Alabama (Ms. SEWELL). The amendment was agreed to.

AMENDMENT NO. 4 OFFERED BY MS. HANABUSA

The Acting CHAIR. It is now in order to consider amendment No. 4 printed in part B of House Report 115-39.

Ms. HANABUSA. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will designate the amendment.

The text of the amendment is as follows:

Strike section 6.

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 198, the gentlewoman from Hawaii (Ms. HANABUSA) and a

Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Hawaii.

Ms. HANABUSA. Mr. Chairman, I rise to speak on my amendment to strike Section 6, Reemployment of Former Employees.

Mr. Chairman, I understand the value of rehiring competent and capable former employees who left and want to return to serve our veterans at the Department of Veterans Affairs. However, the current text would allow the Secretary to rehire a former employee without the former employee going through any competitive process. And the current text allows the Secretary to hire them at a grade higher than when they were previously in the department.

So, I asked my colleagues, what about the hardworking, competent employees who chose not to leave the Department of Veterans Affairs and who dedicated their lives to serving veterans? Is it fair to them for former employees to reenter civil service without going through the competitive selection process and be rewarded with an automatic pay grade increase?

My amendment supports the retention of a Federal hiring process that is fair and time-tested.

Mr. Chairman, I urge my colleagues to support my amendment, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. WENSTRUP. Mr. Chairman, I claim the time in opposition.

The Acting CHAIR. The gentleman from Ohio is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. WENSTRUP. Mr. Chairman, I rise in opposition to Representative HANABUSA's amendment, which would strike section 6 of the bill.

Section 6 would allow the VA to non-competitively reappoint a former VA employee to a position not more than one grade higher than their former position, as long as the employee left voluntarily within the prior 2 years, had a satisfactory performance record, and maintained necessary licensures and credentials.

The former employees who would be helped by this section had performed admirably, left voluntarily, and gone on to gain relevant education or experience that the VA needs. They should be encouraged to come back to the VA and put their new skills to work for our veterans, not required to go through a lengthy competitive selection process at the VA for the second time.

Striking this provision would deprive the VA of an authority that could be used to address access and other challenges by recruiting high-performing former employees back to VA employment.

I urge all of my colleagues to join me in opposing this amendment, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The Acting CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentlewoman from Hawaii (Ms. HANABUSA).

The amendment was rejected.

AMENDMENT NO. 5 OFFERED BY MR. BUCK

The Acting CHAIR. It is now in order to consider amendment No. 5 printed in part B of House Report 115-39.

Mr. BUCK. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will designate the amendment.

The text of the amendment is as follows:

Page 11, line 2, strike "The Secretary" and insert "Notwithstanding sections 3309 through 3318 of title 5, United States Code, the Secretary".

Page 11, line 3, insert "career or career conditional" after "former".

Page 11, beginning on line 4, strike "or any excepted service position under chapter 74 of title 38, United States Code,".

Page 11, line 7, insert "or equivalent" after "grade" both places it appears.

Page 11, line 16, insert "career or career conditional" before "position".

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 198, the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. BUCK) and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Colorado.

Mr. BUCK. Mr. Chairman, I rise today in support of my amendment to H.R. 1367.

First, I thank Chairman ROE and Representative WENSTRUP for bringing this bill before us today and for consideration of my amendment.

As Americans, as Members of Congress, our job is to serve and care for our veterans once they return home. That is what H.R. 1367 does.

My amendment strengthens this important bill, guaranteeing that the Department of Veterans Affairs can employ the best people to care for our veterans.

My amendment makes clear that former political appointees at the VA are not eligible for direct hire authority for competitively selected positions without first going through the proper civil service hiring process.

America's veterans deserve the top care from people who are devoted to serving them. The VA is run by hard-working civil servants, men and women hired in a competitive, merit-based process that assessed their skill and their passion for serving our Nation's veterans.

Political appointees, on the other hand, are meant to serve their appointing President's agenda for a temporary period of time. Part of their duty to the Nation is to know when it is time to step down from their position of power.

My amendment prevents former VA political appointees from using their political connections to jump ahead of other qualified individuals, burrowing into a high-paying career position at the VA.

Along with my friend and colleague Representative LIEU, I have already introduced a bill to address the problem of political burrowing.

H.R. 1132 would prevent political appointees from burrowing into the civil

service across the government for 2 years after leaving their political position. Until that bill is enacted, this amendment will ensure that the most qualified workers are filling the crucial jobs at the VA, providing our veterans the treatment they deserve.

We must protect the independence of our merit-based civil service, we must employ the best people in the VA, and we must guard our veterans from the failed policies and practices of administrations past.

I urge a "yes" vote on my amendment, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. WALZ. Mr. Chairman, I claim the time in opposition, even though I am not opposed to the amendment.

The Acting CHAIR. Without objection, the gentleman from Minnesota is recognized for 5 minutes.

There was no objection.

Mr. WALZ. Mr. Chairman, we must enable the VA to recruit and retain the most capable people to serve our Nation's veterans.

We also know that one size does not fit all when considering an applicant's background and experience. If an individual has gained valuable experience over many years at an agency, we don't want to eliminate them as an option. Federal hiring officials need the most complete list of options available to select the most highly qualified employees.

I do not object to requiring former political appointees at the VA go through the proper selection process when they apply for nonpolitical, competitively selected positions.

I truly appreciate the spirit and intent of the gentleman from Colorado's amendment. I support it, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. BUCK. Mr. Chairman, I yield 1 minute to the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. WENSTRUP), my friend and colleague.

Mr. WENSTRUP. Mr. Chairman, I rise in support of Representative BUCK's amendment, which would prevent former VA political appointees from receiving nonpolitical, competitively selected positions pursuant to section 6 of the bill without going through the proper competitive selection process.

This amendment would prevent political appointees from inappropriately burrowing in across VA, and I am in full support of it.

I thank Representative BUCK for submitting this amendment, and I urge all of my colleagues to join me in supporting it.

Mr. BUCK. Mr. Chairman, I yield back the balance of my time.

The Acting CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. BUCK).

The amendment was agreed to.

AMENDMENT NO. 6 OFFERED BY MS. SHEA-PORTER

The Acting CHAIR. It is now in order to consider amendment No. 6 printed in part B of House Report 115-39.

Ms. SHEA-PORTER. Mr. Chairman, I rise today to offer an amendment to H.R. 1367.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will designate the amendment.

The text of the amendment is as follows:

Page 12, strike lines 2 through 6 and insert the following:

(a) ESTABLISHMENT.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall establish a single database that lists—

(1) each vacant position in the Department of Veterans Affairs that the Secretary determines is critical to the mission of the Department, difficult to fill, or both; and

(2) each vacant position in the Department of Veterans Affairs for a mental health professional.

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 198, the gentlewoman from New Hampshire (Ms. SHEA-PORTER) and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from New Hampshire.

Ms. SHEA-PORTER. Mr. Chairman, under this legislation, the VA would create a database to help match qualified job applicants to critical open positions in order to more quickly fill those vacancies.

My amendment is simple. It requires the VA to include mental health positions in that database, allowing it to better serve veterans with critical needs by ensuring that the VA uses all available tools to recruit and hire qualified mental health professionals in a timely and effective manner.

The VA faces a critical shortage of mental health professionals, including psychiatrists, psychologists, mental health counselors, and peer support specialists. These providers care for our veterans with behavioral health needs that include post-traumatic stress disorder, military sexual trauma, and substance use disorder. Too many of our veterans must wait to receive the mental health care we have promised to them, and some might never receive needed care at all.

In my home State of New Hampshire, we are fighting a fentanyl, heroin, and prescription opioid crisis that is disproportionately affecting the veteran community. Rates of opioid-use disorder among veterans rose 55 percent between 2010 and 2015, and overdose rates for prescription opioids are twice as high as the national average among veterans getting care at the VA. Increasing mental health provider capacity will allow more of these veterans to enter treatment and, ultimately, recover.

Our veterans deserve to be treated by professionals who fully understand the veteran experience and veteran-specific mental health conditions. That is why it is so important for veterans to have the option to receive specialized mental health care from VA mental health professionals who have the training that will allow them to build trust.

In fact, only 13 percent of non-VA mental health providers meet the criteria to deliver veteran-centric mental

health care, according to RAND. That is why it is so important to hire and retain mental health professionals within the VA.

Right now, there are several open mental health positions at our local VA Medical Center. They seek to hire clinical staff and a mental health service line manager, but are finding it hard to locate qualified applicants. My amendment will make it easier for the VA to find such applicants and match them with the open positions that we need filled.

There is an urgent need to address this problem. Every day, 20 veterans commit suicide. MST, opioid, PTSD—these are all crises we need to address. The time to act is now. Please vote “yes” on this amendment.

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

Mr. WENSTRUP. Mr. Chairman, I ask unanimous consent to claim the time in opposition, although I am not opposed.

The Acting CHAIR. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Ohio?

There was no objection.

The Acting CHAIR. The gentleman from Ohio is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. WENSTRUP. Mr. Chairman, I rise in support of Representative SHEA-PORTER's amendment, which would require the VA to ensure that the recruiting database established by section 7 of the bill includes a list of open mental health positions.

Though I am glad to report that, as of January, only 3,469 of VA's 45,360 vacant positions were specific to mental health, it is critical that the VA closely track to mental health vacancies on an ongoing basis so that they can be prioritized and filled to prevent any disruptions in care to our most vulnerable veterans.

I am fully supportive of this amendment and grateful to Representative SHEA-PORTER for submitting it.

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

Ms. SHEA-PORTER. Mr. Chairman, I yield back the balance of my time.

The Acting CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentlewoman from New Hampshire (Ms. SHEA-PORTER).

The amendment was agreed to.

AMENDMENT NO. 7 OFFERED BY MS. BROWNLEY OF CALIFORNIA

The Acting CHAIR. It is now in order to consider amendment No. 7 printed in part B of House Report 115–39.

Ms. BROWNLEY of California. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will designate the amendment.

The text of the amendment is as follows:

Page 15, line 9, insert “, including each medical center, domiciliary facility, outpatient clinic, community-based outpatient clinic, and vet center” after “Affairs”.

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 198, the gentlewoman

from California (Ms. BROWNLEY) and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from California.

Ms. BROWNLEY of California. Mr. Chairman, I rise to offer an amendment to H.R. 1367.

I thank my friend and colleague, the chairman of the Subcommittee on Health, for introducing this bill to make important reforms to the VA's hiring and retention systems.

My amendment makes a small, but important, change to clarify a provision in the bill.

As long as I have served on the Veterans' Affairs Committee, we have seen and heard that retaining high-quality candidates has been a real challenge. I can speak from experience on this.

In the greater Los Angeles region, which serves my constituents, there has been significant turnover of senior leadership at all of our local facilities, including our community clinic in Oxnard. These changes and uncertainty have, in my view, been harmful to the quality of care that our veterans receive.

That is why I am so pleased the bill directs the Comptroller General to review succession planning at VA medical facilities.

Effective succession planning, understanding what positions are mission critical, ensuring better training, and closing the skills gap will help the VA become a healthier organization, and help ensure that the VA accomplishes its mission—serving our Nation's veterans.

My amendment clarifies that a medical facility includes all VHA facilities, including medical centers, outpatient clinics, community-based outpatient clinics, and vet centers.

We must ensure each local facility has a strong workforce and a succession plan for the future. Because without strong leadership, we cannot provide the high-quality care that veterans have earned and deserve.

I urge my colleagues to support this commonsense amendment, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. WENSTRUP. Mr. Chairman, I ask unanimous consent to claim the time in opposition, although I am not opposed.

The Acting CHAIR. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Ohio?

There was no objection.

The Acting CHAIR. The gentleman from Ohio is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. WENSTRUP. Mr. Chairman, I rise in support of Representative BROWNLEY's amendment, which would stipulate that the Government Accountability Office report on VA succession planning should include an assessment of succession planning at VA medical centers, domiciliary facilities, outpatient clinics, community-based outpatient clinics, and vet centers.

I appreciate this clarifying amendment and my friend and colleague Rep-

resentative BROWNLEY, the ranking member of the Subcommittee on Health, for submitting it.

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

Ms. BROWNLEY of California. Mr. Chairman, I thank the Chair for accepting my amendment, and I look forward to our continued bipartisan work together to provide high-quality care for our veterans.

I yield back the balance of my time.

□ 0945

Mr. WENSTRUP. Mr. Chair, I yield back the balance of my time.

The Acting CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentlewoman from California (Ms. BROWNLEY).

The amendment was agreed to.

AMENDMENT NO. 8 OFFERED BY MR. WELCH

The Acting CHAIR. It is now in order to consider amendment No. 8 printed in part B of House Report 115–39.

Mr. WELCH. Mr. Chair, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will designate the amendment.

The text of the amendment is as follows:

Page 16, after line 6, insert the following:

(6) An analysis of succession planning and hiring as it relates to rural areas.

Page 16, line 7, strike “(6)” and insert “(7)”.

Page 17, line 21, strike “and”.

Page 17, line 24, strike the period and insert “; and”.

Page 17, after line 24, insert the following: (J) the ability to recruit and hire in rural areas.

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 198, the gentleman from Vermont (Mr. WELCH) and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Vermont.

Mr. WELCH. Mr. Chair, my amendment has one goal: to ensure that rural America is very much a part of the conversation on improving the Veterans Administration.

This very good, bipartisan bill that is before us will help the VA improve its ability to recruit, hire, train, promote, and retain physicians and other employees at the VA, but it could be slightly changed to help veterans in rural America. And, by the way, a significant number of veterans are in rural America, including Vermont.

My amendment would add two provisions. First, the underlying bill requires the GAO to conduct a study on succession planning at the VA. That is intended to try to better understand the problem the agency has to have a pipeline of qualified candidates to assume critical roles that are open.

My amendment would require the GAO to study and analyze succession planning and hiring in rural areas. The vast majority of our country is rural, so we have got to put an emphasis on that. The challenges in rural America are different than in the urban areas.

Second, the underlying bill also requires the VA to collect information on

hiring effectiveness: the time it takes to fill a vacant position, the attrition rate, the reason staff leaves, investment in training and development, and other barriers to recruitment and training. My amendment would require that study to focus on the rural challenges that are different, significantly, than in the urban areas.

The lack of qualified candidates that the VA can recruit and, ultimately, fill open positions with is a real problem. But we have to recognize that that is even more difficult in rural America.

In Vermont, we have 50,000 veterans living in the State and only nine VA facilities to help them. These are some of the satellite facilities that are quite small. Our largest facility is White River Junction, the VA Medical Center there that we are very proud of. It provided medical care for over 26,000 of those veterans in 2016. The director there has indicated to me that it is a real struggle to find qualified candidates to fill mission-critical positions.

We had, at that facility, a wonderful neuropsychologist—desperately needed—but that person was married, had children, and due to the inability of her husband to find a job within his field of work, they have left the VA there to go to an urban area. This is one variation of the problem we face—to recruit, to hire, and to retain critical personnel—that needs to be addressed in rural areas.

My amendment will help us better understand the unique challenges rural America faces dealing with the critical staff shortages at our veterans facilities and sets the stage for us to fix the problem.

Mr. Chair, I ask Members to support my amendment, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. WENSTRUP. Mr. Chairman, I ask unanimous consent to claim the time in opposition, although I am not opposed.

The Acting CHAIR. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Ohio?

There was no objection.

The Acting CHAIR. The gentleman from Ohio is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. WENSTRUP. Mr. Chair, I rise in support of Representative WELCH's amendment, which would ensure that the GAO report on VA succession planning includes an analysis of succession planning in rural areas.

Rural facilities undoubtedly face unique challenges in recruiting and retaining employees and in planning effectively to ensure leadership continuity as employees retire or depart. I am glad that, with the adoption of this amendment, GAO will be reviewing these issues specifically and will be able to offer recommendations as to how VA can improve succession planning in rural areas where approximately 40 percent of our veterans reside.

I appreciate Representative WELCH for submitting this amendment, and I

ask all of my colleagues to join me in supporting it.

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

The Acting CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Vermont (Mr. WELCH).

The amendment was agreed to.

AMENDMENT NO. 9 OFFERED BY MR. GOTTHEIMER
The Acting CHAIR. It is now in order to consider amendment No. 9 printed in part B of House Report 115-39.

Mr. GOTTHEIMER. Mr. Chair, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will designate the amendment.

The text of the amendment is as follows:

Page 21, line 10, strike "or".

Page 21, line 15, strike the period and insert a semicolon.

Page 21, insert after line 15 the following:

(4) have received educational assistance under chapter 33 of title 38, United States Code; or

(5) graduated from a qualifying educational institution, as defined by the Department, and have not reached 30 years of age.

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 198, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. GOTTHEIMER) and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New Jersey.

Mr. GOTTHEIMER. Mr. Chairman, I want to thank the chairman and ranking member of the Veterans' Affairs Committee and Representative WENSTRUP for their work on this important bill.

This legislation empowers the Secretary of Veterans Affairs with the authority to hire the best and brightest employees.

We can all agree that you can't have a top-notch VA without employing young veterans who want to continue serving their country after they return from the front lines. Each and every day, our brave men and women in uniform put their lives on the line for us, and we owe it to them to ensure that, when they return home, they have the best care at the VA and that they also have the best career opportunities available to them.

This legislation is about veterans serving veterans. Young veterans in the Fifth District of New Jersey, where I live, tell me that they face significant challenges when they return home, even though many of them have a desire to help serve other veterans.

I was lucky enough to hire one such veteran on my team, Mike DeVilliers, who served in the U.S. Army. Mike is committed to helping other veterans and has, at a local community college, where he ran a program for student veterans. He now serves my constituents, including our veterans and across the four counties in the Fifth District.

We should be encouraging talented and qualified young veterans like Mike to put their skills to use and give back to their fellow servicemen and -women. The VA is one place those skills are

sorely needed to best serve the 473,000 veterans who live in New Jersey and the many other veterans across our country.

Mr. Chairman, approximately 60 percent of VA employees are over the age of 45, and the Department has struggled to develop an adequate pipeline for younger employees and emerging leaders to fill crucial and critical roles. We have seen the negative effects of not having the right team in place to support our veterans. While programs like Pathways at the VA are a step in the right direction, we can do more to improve the process and give a leg up to all veterans who wish to bring their skills to the VA.

More than half of the post-9/11 veterans are 34 years of age or younger, and approximately 30 percent have bachelor's or advanced degrees; yet the Department of Labor reported that post-9/11 vets face a higher unemployment rate than other veterans. That is simply unacceptable.

The VA should draw from their excellent source of talent to strengthen the care all of our veterans receive by considering more young veterans for excepted service appointments. That is why my amendment would make sure that the VA Secretary includes recipients of the post-9/11 GI Bill and younger veterans who have recently graduated from college as a distinct category qualifying for excepted service appointments to the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Mr. Chairman, the mission statement of the VA is inscribed outside the Department's headquarters. It reads: "To care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan." This is President Lincoln's promise to serving and honoring the men and women who are America's heroes, and it should and must be our same commitment today. I know of no one who stands more willing and able to serve fellow veterans and their brothers and sisters in arms than the veterans themselves.

There is nothing partisan about serving our veterans. This is a common-sense solution without any new costs, and it is a perfect example of working across party lines to help get the backs of those who have served our country.

I urge my colleagues to join me in standing up for our veterans by supporting this win-win solution.

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

Mr. WENSTRUP. Mr. Chairman, I ask unanimous consent to claim the time in opposition, although I am not opposed.

The Acting CHAIR. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Ohio?

There was no objection.

The Acting CHAIR. The gentleman from Ohio is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. WENSTRUP. Mr. Chair, I rise in support of Representative GOTTHEIMER's amendments which would ensure that veterans who are recent graduates and/or recipients of the

post-9/11 GI Bill are also eligible for accepted service appointments under section 12 of the bill.

As a veteran and as the former chairman of the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity, there are few things I support as strongly as assisting veterans in seeking and receiving employment opportunities, particularly in the Federal Government.

The skill sets and commitment to service that veterans display while in uniform often make them particularly suited to government work once they transition to civilian life. The adoption of this amendment would provide yet another tool to support veterans looking to continue their service to our Nation, and I am grateful to Representative GOTTHEIMER for submitting it.

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

The Acting CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. GOTTHEIMER).

The amendment was agreed to.

AMENDMENT NO. 10 OFFERED BY MS. HERRERA BEUTLER

The Acting CHAIR. It is now in order to consider amendment No. 10 printed in part B of House Report 115-39.

Ms. HERRERA BEUTLER. Mr. Chair, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will designate the amendment.

The text of the amendment is as follows:

Page 22, line 18, strike “, to the extent possible,”.

Page 22, beginning on line 19, strike “and personally identifiable information is removed” and insert “, including through the use of a location that allows for privacy, is not directly visible by another employee, and does not require the departing employee to input any personally identifiable data”.

Page 22, line 23, insert “are aggregated at the Veterans Integrated Service Network level and” after “subsection (a)”.

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 198, the gentlewoman from Washington (Ms. HERRERA BEUTLER) and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Washington.

Ms. HERRERA BEUTLER. Mr. Chairman, I want to commend Dr. WENSTRUP and the chairman and ranking member for their work on this bill.

Today I am offering this amendment that will help get to the root of one of the big problems within the VA that leads to high turnover by providers and compromises care for our veteran heroes. Specifically, my amendment strengthens anonymity protections for VA employees who fill out exit surveys and requires that this exit survey data be more localized so that the agency can better solve region-specific problems.

High staff turnover is an ongoing problem in our VA and it negatively affects our veterans. High turnover leads to staff shortages and results in veterans having to wait longer to see their doctor or their specialist, and it also

means that there are issues with continuity of care for veterans.

Over the last few years, I have asked the VA why healthcare providers are leaving. The VA took some educated guesses as to why but could not provide hard data or facts.

Two years ago I inserted a directive into the MILCON VA approps bill requiring the VA to begin offering exit surveys to collect data on why healthcare providers are leaving. I also required that the VA develop a detailed plan to address the primary reasons these providers were leaving. While that report has provided some insights, we found that it is failing to take a few important steps that would make sure we are receiving honest feedback from these exiting providers.

For instance, the Portland VA employees who fill out the survey have to fill it out at a kiosk in the HR office where the HR staff can see them doing it. While the survey, itself, is anonymous, departing employees have to log into the kiosk with their employee identification number. The fear of being identified is a big deterrent for providers filling out this voluntary but critical survey. Only if VA providers are telling the honest truth about what they saw, heard, and experienced in their workplace can the VA then fix the problems that plague its facilities.

Therefore, we have to make this exit survey as easy and confidential to fill out as possible, and that is what my amendment requires. It requires these surveys to be conducted at a location that allows for privacy, not directly visible by another VA employee, and it does not require the departing employee to put in any personal, identifiable information. It also requires the exit survey data to be compiled at the regional level to identify and acknowledge local needs.

What needs to be changed in southwest Washington may not be the same as what is happening in Texas or Virginia or Florida, and this amendment will help the VA identify the right region-specific solutions.

With that, I urge Members to support my amendment so we can better serve and support our veterans by retaining their healthcare providers.

Mr. Chair, I yield the balance of my time to the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. WALZ).

Mr. WALZ. Mr. Chairman, I do not oppose this amendment. It is smart.

I have seen how important employee exit surveys can be in facilitating and understanding how an organization can be improved, made more efficient, or take constructive criticism. It makes absolute sense that employees filling them out know that they can provide honest responses because their anonymity will be protected by law, not by a promise or regulation.

Ensuring that exit data is collected on the VISN level will give VA leadership the most accurate look at where in the country higher retention policies are working and where they are not. That is just good, best practice.

Mr. Chair, I support the gentlewoman's smart amendment.

Ms. HERRERA BEUTLER. Mr. Chair, I yield back the balance of my time.

The Acting CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentlewoman from Washington (Ms. HERRERA BEUTLER).

The amendment was agreed to.

□ 1000

AMENDMENT NO. 11 OFFERED BY MS. HANABUSA
The Acting CHAIR (Mr. HULTGREN). It is now in order to consider amendment No. 11 printed in part B of House Report 115-39.

Ms. HANABUSA. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will designate the amendment.

The text of the amendment is as follows:

Page 23, line 16, strike “the number of employees who” and insert the following: “the total number of employees who voluntarily separated from the Department and the number and percentage of whom”.

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 198, the gentlewoman from Hawaii (Ms. HANABUSA) and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Hawaii.

Ms. HANABUSA. Mr. Chairman, I rise to speak on my amendment to ensure certain types of information are added to the Department of Veterans Affairs survey data that this bill requires the Department to create and report to the House and Senate Committees on Veterans' Affairs.

This bill instructs the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to develop and carry out a standardized exit survey to be voluntarily completed by career and noncareer employees and executives of the Department of Veterans Affairs who voluntarily separate from the Department.

The bill currently requires the Department to report to Congress the following types of information on an annual basis: first, an analysis of the most common reasons employees choose to leave; second, steps the Secretary is taking to improve retention; third, the demographic characteristics of employees choosing to leave; fourth, the legislative barriers to improving employee retention; and, fifth, the number of employees who took the survey.

Mr. Chairman, there is important information missing that must be gathered by the Department: one, the total number of employees who voluntarily exited the Department during the reporting period; and, two, the percentage of those employees who actually responded to the survey.

Without this critical information, Congress will be unable to assess the value of the reported data relative to the total number of employees who departed the Department.

Mr. Chairman, I am asking that we get a full picture, and my amendment will help us do that.

I urge my colleagues to support my amendment.

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

Mr. WENSTRUP. Mr. Chairman, I ask unanimous consent to claim the time in opposition, although I am not opposed to the amendment.

The Acting CHAIR. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Ohio?

There was no objection.

The Acting CHAIR. The gentleman from Ohio is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. WENSTRUP. Mr. Chair, I rise in support of Representative HANABUSA's amendment, which would tweak the report on exit surveys the VA is required to submit in section 13 of the bill to stipulate the VA provide the total number of employees who voluntarily separated from VA service and the percentage of those who took an exit survey.

This information will be very helpful for Congress to receive in order to track how many employees are choosing to voluntarily leave the VA and are taking advantage of the opportunity to complete an exit survey prior to their departure.

I urge all my colleagues to join me in supporting this amendment, and I am grateful to Representative HANABUSA for submitting it.

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

The Acting CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentlewoman from Hawaii (Ms. HANABUSA).

The question was taken; and the Acting Chair announced that the ayes appeared to have it.

Mr. WALZ. Mr. Chairman, I demand a recorded vote.

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to clause 6 of rule XVIII, further proceedings on the amendment offered by the gentlewoman from Hawaii will be postponed.

AMENDMENT NO. 12 OFFERED BY MS. MENG

The Acting CHAIR. It is now in order to consider amendment No. 12 printed in part B of House Report 115-39.

Ms. MENG. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will designate the amendment.

The text of the amendment is as follows:

At the end of the bill insert the following:

SEC. 14. ENCOURAGING TRANSITION OF MILITARY MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS INTO EMPLOYMENT WITH VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION.

The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall establish a program to encourage an individual who serves in the Armed Forces with a military occupational specialty relating to the provision of health care to seek employment with the Veterans Health Administration when the individual has been discharged or released from service in the Armed Forces or is contemplating separating from such service.

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 198, the gentlewoman from New York (Ms. MENG) and a Mem-

ber opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from New York.

Ms. MENG. Mr. Chairman, this amendment would require the VA Secretary to establish a program encouraging members of our Armed Forces serving as health professionals to pursue jobs with the Veterans Health Administration upon discharge or separation from the military.

As we all know, the VHA has existing shortages of health professionals. We also know that our servicemen and -women sometimes have difficulty transitioning back to civilian life after serving.

What would be better than having a servicemember with healthcare training and experience transition into employment with the VHA serving their brothers and sisters?

Mr. Chair, I believe that everyone wins with this amendment. This program would be completely optional to participate in, would help reduce staffing shortages at the VHA, and would provide job opportunities to recently discharged servicemembers.

I urge support for this commonsense amendment, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. WENSTRUP. Mr. Chairman, I ask unanimous consent to claim the time in opposition, although I am not opposed to the amendment.

The Acting CHAIR. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Ohio?

There was no objection.

The Acting CHAIR. The gentleman from Ohio is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. WENSTRUP. Mr. Chairman, I rise in support of Representative MENG's amendment, which would encourage military medical professionals who are transitioning out of the Armed Forces to seek employment within the Veterans Health Administration.

Wherever possible, the VA should be filling vacant positions at VA medical facilities with eligible, qualified veterans. And I am fully supportive of any amendment like this one that recognizes the highly specialized skills that many veterans gained while in uniform, skills that, in this case, could be used in service to fellow veterans by addressing access to care challenges across the country.

I am grateful to Representative MENG for this important amendment, and I urge all of my colleagues to join me in supporting it.

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

The Acting CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentlewoman from New York (Ms. MENG). The amendment was agreed to.

AMENDMENT NO. 13 OFFERED BY MR. BOST

The Acting CHAIR. It is now in order to consider amendment No. 13 printed in part B of House Report 115-39.

Mr. BOST. Mr. Chair, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will designate the amendment.

The text of the amendment is as follows:

Add at the end the following new section:

SEC. 14. PLAN TO HIRE DIRECTORS OF MEDICAL CENTERS OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

(a) PLAN.—Not later than 120 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall develop and implement a plan to hire highly qualified directors for each medical center of the Department of Veterans Affairs that lacks a permanent director as of the date of the plan. The Secretary shall prioritize the hiring of such directors for the medical centers that have not had a permanent director for the longest periods.

(b) MATTERS INCLUDED.—The plan developed under subsection (a) shall include the following:

(1) A deadline to hire the directors of the medical centers of the Department as described in such subsection.

(2) Identification of the possible impediments to such hiring.

(3) Identification of opportunities to promote and train candidates from within the Department to senior executive positions in the Department, including as directors of medical centers.

(c) SUBMISSION.—Not later than 120 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall submit to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Representatives and the Senate the plan developed under subsection (a).

(d) SEMIANNUAL REPORTS.—Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, and each 180-day period thereafter until January 1, 2018, the Secretary shall submit to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Representatives and the Senate a list of each medical center of the Department that lacks a permanent director as of the date of the report.

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 198, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. BOST) and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Illinois.

Mr. BOST. Mr. Chair, I rise today in support of my amendment to H.R. 1367.

My simple and straightforward amendment would require the Department of Veterans Affairs to develop and implement a plan to hire permanent directors for each medical center of the VA. It also specifies that the Secretary should prioritize the hiring of directors for locations that have spent the longest amount of time without one.

Mr. Chairman, last Congress it was brought to my attention that the VA medical center that many of my constituents utilize had not had a permanent director in almost 3 years. This is simply unacceptable when we have veterans needing quality care and are demanding reform to the current healthcare system.

After reaching out to the Department, I came to realize that this is a common problem around the country, which led to my introduction of the amendment.

Under the current VA system, the Secretary is allowed to appoint an interim director at facilities, but those individuals can only serve a maximum of 240 days. This is simply far too short

a period of time to properly get to know the staff at the centers and the needs of the location, let alone implement new reforms.

This commonsense bipartisan amendment is identical to a bill I introduced earlier in this Congress with Members of both parties supporting the legislation. It is also identical to legislation that this body passed last Congress with strong bipartisan support.

Mr. Chairman, I urge my colleagues to support this commonsense amendment, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. WALZ. Mr. Chairman, I claim the time in opposition, although I am not opposed to the amendment.

The Acting CHAIR. Without objection, the gentleman from Minnesota is recognized for 5 minutes.

There was no objection.

Mr. WALZ. Mr. Chair, every Member of Congress has heard directly from their constituents who receive health care from the VA that it is understaffed. This is true at all levels, but it is vital to both the workforce and the veterans served that each medical center have permanent leadership.

I think all of us know—and there is an old saying—if you have been to one VA facility, you have been to one VA facility. Again, it may seem like the easiest thing to say that leadership matters at these facilities. Nothing matters more.

When a VA facility is moving in the right direction, it can always be traced to strong, directed leadership. In almost every case each one of us has worked on, whether it is weak leadership or lack of leadership, those situations go awry.

I have a situation in Minnesota where we have been waiting for leadership for a year. We were notified, I believe, a week or so ago that we are finally getting that.

I enthusiastically endorse Mr. BOST's amendment, which would require the Department to get these things done, develop and implement a plan within 120 days of enactment to hire a permanent director for each medical center which does not have one.

As the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. BOST) says in his amendment, a new director may well be identified from senior executives already within the Department, or he or she may be someone from outside the agency who meets the qualifications and wants to work at the VA.

What is necessary is that filling these open directorships be made a priority. Requiring the VA to show us the plan to do so and provide regular updates as that plan is implemented is a way to set this priority.

I commend the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. BOST) for getting at the heart of this. This will be about accountability. It will put the right people in place to make the right decisions and get the care for our veterans.

Mr. Chairman, I strongly support it, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. BOST. Mr. Chair, I yield 1 minute to the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. WENSTRUP).

Mr. WENSTRUP. Mr. Chairman, I rise in support of Representative BOST's amendment, which would require the Department of Veterans Affairs to develop and implement a plan to hire directors at each VA medical center that lacks a permanent director.

Twenty-five percent of current VA medical center directors are eligible to retire, and the VA testified last year that it can take more than 6 months and multiple reannouncements to recruit new VA medical center directors.

The VA must begin planning now to ensure that leadership at VA medical centers across the country remain stable and that medical center director vacancies are closely monitored and prioritized.

The text of this amendment passed the House last year with unanimous support, and I am grateful to Representative BOST for submitting this amendment again this year to H.R. 1367.

I urge all of my colleagues to join me in supporting it.

Mr. BOST. Mr. Chair, I yield back the balance of my time.

The Acting CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. BOST).

The amendment was agreed to.

AMENDMENT NO. 14 OFFERED BY MR. O'ROURKE

The Acting CHAIR. It is now in order to consider amendment No. 14 printed in part B of House Report 115-39.

Mr. O'ROURKE. Mr. Chair, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will designate the amendment.

The text of the amendment is as follows:

Add at the end the following new section:
SEC. 14. RECRUITMENT OF PHYSICIANS IN DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Section 7402(b)(1) of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) by inserting “or to be offered a contingent appointment to such position,” after “position,”; and

(2) by striking subparagraph (B) and inserting the following new subparagraph (B):

“(B)(i) have completed a residency program satisfactory to the Secretary; or

“(ii) with respect to an offer for a contingent appointment upon the completion of a post-graduate training program, complete such a residency program by not later than two years after the date of such offer; and”.

(b) OVERSIGHT OF GRADUATE MEDICAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS.—The Secretary shall—

(1) ensure that a recruiter or other similar official of each Veterans Integrated Service Network visits, not less than annually, each allopathic and osteopathic teaching institution with a graduate medical education program within the Network to recruit individuals to be appointed to positions in the Veterans Health Administration; and

(2) submit to Congress an annual report on the implementation of paragraph (1), including the success of such recruiting efforts.

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 198, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. O'ROURKE) and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas.

Mr. O'ROURKE. Mr. Chairman, I would like to begin by recognizing the incredibly important work of my colleague from Ohio (Mr. WENSTRUP) in ensuring that we bring more physicians and care providers into the VA so that more veterans can get access to quality, timely care, producing better outcomes for them.

Of course, our veterans have served this country so honorably and have put their lives on the line, and now it is our turn to fulfill our obligation. Dr. Wenstrup's underlying legislation is going to ensure that we get a step closer to doing that. He will agree with me, I hope, that one of our challenges is recruiting the right talent into the VA out of residency programs across the country.

Right now, the VA is operating with one hand tied behind its back because it limits itself to the last year of a medical residency before it begins talking to that resident to try to recruit them to serve at the VA.

Meanwhile, most residents begin making career decisions a year or two earlier than that. And private sector clinics, hospitals, other public institutions are talking to those residents, trying to recruit them, and successfully bringing them to places other than the VA.

This amendment will allow the VA to begin recruiting and offering conditional job offers with 2 years left in a residency. It will help us to address the fact that today there are 43,000 authorized funded positions that are open in the VA where we don't have the doctors, the psychiatrists, the primary care providers, the medical professionals we need to provide the care that veterans need.

We need to begin recruiting earlier, more effectively, and more successfully. This amendment to the underlying legislation will allow us to do that.

I hope that I will have the support of my friend from Ohio (Mr. WENSTRUP), of the ranking member of the full committee, and of my colleagues here in the Chamber.

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

Mr. WENSTRUP. Mr. Chairman, I ask unanimous consent to claim the time in opposition, although I am not opposed to the amendment.

The Acting CHAIR. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Ohio?

There was no objection.

The Acting CHAIR. The gentleman from Ohio is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. WENSTRUP. Mr. Chairman, I rise in support of Representative O'ROURKE's amendment, which would allow the VA to offer physicians conditional job offers 2 years prior to the completion of their residency, and also require VA recruiters or other officials to visit each teaching institution with a residency program at least once a

year. It is a great idea and one that I greatly appreciate.

The VA's existing workforce is increasingly retirement-eligible, and, historically, the VA has performed poorly in comparison to other Federal agencies when it comes to hiring younger employees.

By creating a pipeline of young, up-and-coming physicians willing to practice in VA medical facilities and committed to VA service, this amendment would help ensure that the VA healthcare system is fully staffed to care for our veterans for years to come.

The text of this amendment passed the House last year as an amendment to H.R. 5620, and I am grateful to Representative O'ROURKE for submitting it as an amendment to H.R. 1367 today.

I urge all of my colleagues to join me in supporting this amendment.

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

The Acting CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Texas (Mr. O'ROURKE).

The amendment was agreed to.

Mr. WENSTRUP. Mr. Chairman, I move that the Committee do now rise. The motion was agreed to.

Accordingly, the Committee rose;

and the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. COLLINS of Georgia) having assumed the chair, Mr. HULTGREN, Acting Chair of the Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union, reported that that Committee, having had under consideration the bill (H.R. 1367) to improve the authority of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to hire and retain physicians and other employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes, had come to no resolution thereon.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess subject to the call of the Chair.

Accordingly (at 10 o'clock and 15 minutes a.m.), the House stood in recess.

□ 1102

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. SIMPSON) at 11 o'clock and 2 minutes a.m.

IMPROVING AUTHORITY OF SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS TO HIRE AND RETAIN PHYSICIANS AND OTHER EMPLOYEES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to House Resolution 198 and rule XVIII, the Chair declares the House in the Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union for the further consideration of the bill, H.R. 1367.

Will the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. HULTGREN) kindly resume the chair.

□ 1103

IN THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Accordingly, the House resolved itself into the Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union for the further consideration of the bill (H.R. 1367) to improve the authority of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to hire and retain physicians and other employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes, with Mr. HULTGREN (Acting Chair) in the chair.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The Acting CHAIR. When the Committee of the Whole rose earlier today, amendment No. 14 printed in part B of House Report 115-39, offered by the gentleman from Texas (Mr. O'ROURKE), had been disposed of.

AMENDMENT NO. 11 OFFERED BY MS. HANABUSA

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to clause 6 of rule XVIII, the unfinished business is the demand for a recorded vote on amendment No. 11 printed in part B of House Report 115-39 offered by the gentlewoman from Hawaii (Ms. HANABUSA) on which further proceedings were postponed and on which the ayes prevailed by voice vote.

The Clerk will redesignate the amendment.

The Clerk redesignated the amendment.

RECORDED VOTE

The Acting CHAIR. A recorded vote has been demanded.

A recorded vote was ordered.

The vote was taken by electronic device, and there were—ayes 400, noes 8, not voting 21, as follows:

[Roll No. 170]

AYES—400

- Abraham, Adams, Aderholt, Aguilar, Allen, Amash, Amodei, Arrington, Babin, Bacon, Banks (IN), Barletta, Barr, Barton, Bass, Beatty, Bera, Bergman, Beyer, Biggs, Bilirakis, Bishop (GA), Bishop (MI), Bishop (UT), Black, Blackburn, Blum, Blumenauer, Blunt Rochester, Bonamici, Bost, Boyle, Brendan F., Brady (PA), Brady (TX), Brat, Bridenstine, Brooks (AL), Brooks (IN), Brown (MD), Brownley (CA), Buchanan, Buck, Bucshon, Budd, Burgess, Bustos, Butterfield, Byrne, Calvert, Capuano, Carbajal, Cárdenas, Carson (IN), Carter (GA), Carter (TX), Cartwright, Castor (FL), Castro (TX), Chabot, Chaffetz, Cheney, Chu, Judy, Cicilline, Clark (MA), Clarke (NY), Clay, Cleaver, Clyburn, Coffman, Cohen, Cole, Collins (GA), Collins (NY), Comer, Comstock, Conaway, Connolly, Conyers, Cook, Cooper, Correa, Costa, Costello (PA), Courtney, Cramer, Crawford, Crist, Cuellar, Culberson, Cummings, Curbelo (FL), Davidson, Davis (CA), Davis, Rodney, DeFazio, DeGette, Delaney, DeLauro, DelBene, Demings, Denham, Dent, DeSantis, DeSaulnier, DesJarlais, Diaz-Balart, Dingell, Doggett, Donovan, Doyle, Michael F., Duffy, Duncan (SC), Duncan (TN), Dunn, Ellison, Emmer, Engel, Eshoo, Espallat, Esty, Evans, Farenthold, Faso, Ferguson, Garamendi, Garrett, Gibbs, Gohmert, Goodlatte, Gosar, Gottheimer, Gowdy, Granger, Graves (GA), Graves (LA), Graves (MO), Green, Al, Green, Gene, Griffith, Grijalva, Grothman, Guthrie, Hanabusa, Harper, Hartzler, Hastings, Heck, Hensarling, Herrera Beutler, Hice, Jody B., Higgins (LA), Hill, Himes, Holding, Hollingsworth, Hoyer, Hudson, Huffman, Huizenga, Hultgren, Hunter, Hurd, Issa, Jayapal, Jenkins (KS), Jenkins (WV), Johnson (GA), Johnson (LA), Johnson (OH), Johnson, E. B., Johnson, Sam, Jones, Joyce (OH), Kaptur, Katko, Keating, Kelly (IL), Kelly (MS), Kennedy, Khanna, Kihuen, Kildee, Kilmer, Kind, King (IA), King (NY), Kinzinger, Knight, Krishnamoorthi, Kuster (NH), Kustoff (TN), Labrador, LaHood, LaMalfa, Lamborn, Lance, Langevin, Larsen (WA), Larson (CT), Latta, Lawrence, Lawson (FL), Lee, Levin, Lewis (GA), Lewis (MN), Lieu, Ted, Lipinski, LoBiondo, Loebsock, Lofgren, Long, Loudermilk, Love, Lowenthal, Lowey, Lucas, Luetkemeyer, Lujan Grisham, M., Luján, Ben Ray, Lynch, MacArthur, Maloney, Carolyn B., Maloney, Sean, Marchant, Marshall, Massie, Mast, Matsui, McCarthy, McClintock, McCollum, McGovern, McHenry, McKinley, McMorris, Rodgers, McNeerney, McSally, Meadows, Meehan, Meeks, Meng, Messer, Mitchell, Moolenaar, Mooney (WV), Moore, Moulton, Mullin, Murphy (FL), Murphy (PA), Nadler, Napolitano, Neal, Newhouse, Noem, Nolan, Norcross, Nunes, O'Halleran, O'Rourke, Olson, Palazzo, Pallone, Palmer, Panetta, Pascrell, Paulsen, Pearce, Perlmutter, Peters, Peterson, Pingree, Pittenger, Pocan, Poliquin, Polis, Posey, Price (NC), Quigley, Raskin, Ratcliffe, Reed, Reichert, Renacci, Rice (NY), Rice (SC), Richmond, Roby, Roe (TN), Rogers (KY), Rohrabacher, Rokita, Rooney, Francis, Rooney, Thomas J., Ros-Lehtinen, Rosen, Roskam, Ross, Rothfus, Rouzer, Royce (CA), Ruiz, Ruppertsberger, Russell, Rutherford, Ryan (OH), Sánchez, Sanford, Sarbanes, Scalise, Schiff, Schneider, Schrader, Schweikert, Scott (VA), Scott, Austin, Scott, David, Sensenbrenner, Sessions, Sewell (AL), Shea-Porter, Sherman, Shimkus, Shuster, Simpson, Sinema, Sires, Smith (MO), Smith (NE), Smith (NJ), Smith (TX), Smith (WA), Snucker, Soto, Speier, Stefanik, Stivers, Suozzi, Swalwell (CA), Takano, Tenney, Thompson (CA), Thompson (MS), Thompson (PA), Thornberry, Tiberi, Tipton, Titus, Tonko, Torres, Trott, Tsongas, Turner, Upton, Valadao, Veasey, Vela, Velázquez, Vislosky, Wagner, Walberg, Walden, Walker, Walorski, Pittenger, Walz, Wasserman, Schultz, Waters, Maxine, Watson Coleman, Weber (TX), Webster (FL), Welch, Wenstrup, Westerman, Williams, Wilson (FL), Wilson (SC), Wittman, Womack, Woodall, Yarmuth, Yoder, Yoho, Young (AK), Young (IA), Zeldin

- Fitzpatrick, Fleischmann, Flores, Fortenberry, Foster, Foy, Frankel (FL), Franks (AZ), Frelinghuysen, Fudge, Gabbard, Gallagher, Gallego, Garamendi, Garrett, Gibbs, Gohmert, Goodlatte, Gosar, Gottheimer, Gowdy, Granger, Graves (GA), Graves (LA), Graves (MO), Green, Al, Green, Gene, Griffith, Grijalva, Grothman, Guthrie, Hanabusa, Harper, Hartzler, Hastings, Heck, Hensarling, Herrera Beutler, Hice, Jody B., Higgins (LA), Hill, Himes, Holding, Hollingsworth, Hoyer, Hudson, Huffman, Huizenga, Hultgren, Hunter, Hurd, Issa, Jayapal, Jenkins (KS), Jenkins (WV), Johnson (GA), Johnson (LA), Johnson (OH), Johnson, E. B., Johnson, Sam, Jones, Joyce (OH), Kaptur, Katko, Keating, Kelly (IL), Kelly (MS), Kennedy, Khanna, Kihuen, Kildee, Kilmer, Kind, King (IA), King (NY), Kinzinger, Knight, Krishnamoorthi, Kuster (NH), Kustoff (TN), Labrador, LaHood, LaMalfa, Lamborn, Lance, Langevin, Larsen (WA), Larson (CT), Latta, Lawrence, Lawson (FL), Lee, Levin, Lewis (GA), Lewis (MN), Lieu, Ted, Lipinski, LoBiondo, Loebsock, Lofgren, Long, Loudermilk, Love, Lowenthal, Lowey, Lucas, Luetkemeyer, Lujan Grisham, M., Luján, Ben Ray, Lynch, MacArthur, Maloney, Carolyn B., Maloney, Sean, Marchant, Marshall, Massie, Mast, Matsui, McCarthy, McClintock, McCollum, McGovern, McHenry, McKinley, McMorris, Rodgers, McNeerney, McSally, Meadows, Meehan, Meeks, Meng, Messer, Mitchell, Moolenaar, Mooney (WV), Moore, Moulton, Mullin, Murphy (FL), Murphy (PA), Nadler, Napolitano, Neal, Newhouse, Noem, Nolan, Norcross, Nunes, O'Halleran, O'Rourke, Olson, Palazzo, Pallone, Palmer, Panetta, Pascrell, Paulsen, Pearce, Perlmutter, Peters, Peterson, Pingree, Pittenger, Pocan, Poliquin, Polis, Posey, Price (NC), Quigley, Raskin, Ratcliffe, Reed, Reichert, Renacci, Rice (NY), Rice (SC), Richmond, Roby, Roe (TN), Rogers (KY), Rohrabacher, Rokita, Rooney, Francis, Rooney, Thomas J., Ros-Lehtinen, Rosen, Roskam, Ross, Rothfus, Rouzer, Royce (CA), Ruiz, Ruppertsberger, Russell, Rutherford, Ryan (OH), Sánchez, Sanford, Sarbanes, Scalise, Schiff, Schneider, Schrader, Schweikert, Scott (VA), Scott, Austin, Scott, David, Sensenbrenner, Sessions, Sewell (AL), Shea-Porter, Sherman, Shimkus, Shuster, Simpson, Sinema, Sires, Smith (MO), Smith (NE), Smith (NJ), Smith (TX), Smith (WA), Snucker, Soto, Speier, Stefanik, Stivers, Suozzi, Swalwell (CA), Takano, Tenney, Thompson (CA), Thompson (MS), Thompson (PA), Thornberry, Tiberi, Tipton, Titus, Tonko, Torres, Trott, Tsongas, Turner, Upton, Valadao, Veasey, Vela, Velázquez, Vislosky, Wagner, Walberg, Walden, Walker, Walorski, Pittenger, Walz, Wasserman, Schultz, Waters, Maxine, Watson Coleman, Weber (TX), Webster (FL), Welch, Wenstrup, Westerman, Williams, Wilson (FL), Wilson (SC), Wittman, Womack, Woodall, Yarmuth, Yoder, Yoho, Young (AK), Young (IA), Zeldin

NOES—8

- Gaetz, Harris, McCaul, Perry, Poe (TX), Rogers (AL), Stewart, Taylor