

Mrs. BEATTY. Mr. Speaker, first let me say I certainly want to join my colleague, Congressman STEVE STIVERS, in thanking Congressman BILIRAKIS and Congressman WALZ for all of their work in allowing us to make this possible to be here today.

Mr. Speaker, I am honored to rise to offer my enthusiastic support for the National Veterans Memorial and Museum Act, H.R. 1900, designating it as a public museum for the exclusive purpose of sharing the experience and voices of veterans across all eras, conflicts, and branches of the military.

As you have heard, it will be housed in my district, so I am especially pleased that it is being built in a partnership with private pay, a partnership with government, and a partnership that is blessed by the veterans of central Ohio and across the Nation.

The museum concept was the brainchild of the Nation's good friend: World War II veteran, legendary astronaut, and former U.S. Senator from Ohio, John Glenn, who was a dear friend and one of my constituents. John also chaired the Veterans Committee.

Mr. Speaker, if Senator Glenn were here today, he would share with us how this museum will honor, connect, inspire, and educate all Americans about the unified service and sacrifices of our Nation's more than 40 million veterans.

I salute this Congress and my community for recognizing the need for veterans of all eras to have a museum to collectively call their own.

Mr. Speaker, I could not stand here without again thanking my colleague and veteran, Congressman STEVE STIVERS, for his relentless work, for his leadership, and his partnership throughout the development of this project.

This project certainly shares with us what bipartisan work can do.

Mr. Speaker, I also would like to thank Congressman TIBERI for joining us. I greatly appreciate and want to personally thank the leadership of Chairman ROE and Ranking Member WALZ, and also the subcommittee leadership, because they expressed their concerns. We addressed the concerns in a very constructive way. That is what partnerships and leadership is all about. Because of their good work, it has strengthened the operations of the project and the viability of the project.

H.R. 1900 has the support of The American Legion, the Paralyzed Veterans of America, and the VFW.

Mr. Speaker, today I ask my colleagues to support this legislation and to come to Columbus when it is open to see it in person and how it honors the stories and the sacrifices of our Nation's veterans.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. DAVIDSON).

Mr. DAVIDSON. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding.

Mr. Speaker, as an Army veteran and former Army Ranger, I am proud to join Representative STIVERS, Rep-

resentative BEATTY, and really the Ohio delegation in today's designation of the Veterans Memorial and Museum in Columbus, Ohio, as the National Veterans Memorial and Museum. I am thankful to all my colleagues and the work of the committee to do this not just as something for Ohio, but something for our Nation and for our Nation's veterans.

This museum is squarely focused on telling the personal stories of those who have served, including those who have lost their lives serving our country. The National Veterans Memorial and Museum will be the only one of its kind that uses personal belongings, letters, and memories to bring the stories of our servicemembers and their families to life.

In addition to world class interactive exhibits that will serve to educate the next generation about the value of military service, this project will also be connected to an online database featuring the collection.

The National Veterans Memorial and Museum will also serve to honor our men and women in uniform by providing space for celebrations, and veterans ceremonies and reunions.

Ohio has a proud history of honoring our Nation's veterans and supporting our current men and women in uniform. Ohio is home to Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, the National Museum of the United States Air Force, and was recently selected as the United States Veterans Affairs National Archives. It is fitting that Ohio should be the place for telling these stories.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the bipartisan support on this bill and I urge my colleagues to support it.

Mr. WALZ. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time.

I thank everyone who spoke here. It is the way it is supposed to work. I am very excited about this.

Mr. Speaker, I would encourage you to go and look. This is going to be spectacular. It is at nationalvmm.org, if you want to see where they are and the progress that is being made. We are going to be open here soon in the spring. I am going to take Mrs. BEATTY up on this as a veteran myself.

I think of the countless families and veterans who will take their children and walk through the halls and tell the story. This is an important piece of our history. It is important to tell the story and it is important for us to preserve these stories.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage my colleagues to support this piece of legislation, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, again, we need to teach our children the value of military service so they can appreciate it. These are our true American heroes. I am looking forward to visiting Mrs. BEATTY in Columbus.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank Mrs. BEATTY and, of course, General Stivers for doing such a wonderful job in getting this bill done, and I also thank the ranking member.

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

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Florida (Mr. BILIRAKIS) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 1900, as amended.

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

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

□ 1530

VETERANS E-HEALTH AND TELE-MEDICINE SUPPORT ACT OF 2017

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 2123) to amend title 38, United States Code, to improve the ability of health care professionals to treat veterans through the use of telemedicine, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 2123

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

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Veterans E-Health and Telemedicine Support Act of 2017" or the "VETS Act of 2017".

SEC. 2. LICENSURE OF HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS PROVIDING TREATMENT VIA TELEMEDICINE.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Chapter 17 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by inserting after section 1730A the following new section:

"§ 1730B. Licensure of health care professionals providing treatment via telemedicine

"(a) IN GENERAL.—Notwithstanding any provision of law regarding the licensure of health care professionals, a covered health care professional may practice the health care profession of the health care professional at any location in any State, regardless of where the covered health care professional or the patient is located, if the covered health care professional is using telemedicine to provide treatment to an individual under this chapter.

"(b) PROPERTY OF FEDERAL GOVERNMENT.—Subsection (a) shall apply to a covered health care professional providing treatment to a patient regardless of whether the covered health care professional or patient is located in a facility owned by the Federal Government during such treatment.

"(c) CONSTRUCTION.—Nothing in this section may be construed to remove, limit, or otherwise affect any obligation of a covered health care professional under the Controlled Substances Act (21 U.S.C. 801 et seq.).

"(d) COVERED HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONAL DEFINED.—In this section, the term 'covered health care professional' means a health care professional who—

"(1) is an employee of the Department appointed under the authority under sections 7306, 7401, 7405, 7406, or 7408 of this title, or title 5;

"(2) is authorized by the Secretary to provide health care under this chapter;

"(3) is required to adhere to all quality standards relating to the provision of telemedicine in accordance with applicable policies of the Department; and

“(4) has an active, current, full, and unrestricted license, registration, or certification in a State to practice the health care profession of the health care professional.”.

(b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections at the beginning of chapter 17 of such title is amended by inserting after the item relating to section 1730A the following new item:

“1730B. Licensure of health care professionals providing treatment via telemedicine.”.

(c) REPORT ON TELEMEDICINE.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one year after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Representatives a report on the effectiveness of the use of telemedicine by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

(2) ELEMENTS.—The report required by paragraph (1) shall include an assessment of the following:

(A) The satisfaction of veterans with telemedicine furnished by the Department.

(B) The satisfaction of health care providers in providing telemedicine furnished by the Department.

(C) The effect of telemedicine furnished by the Department on the following:

(i) The ability of veterans to access health care, whether from the Department or from non-Department health care providers.

(ii) The frequency of use by veterans of telemedicine.

(iii) The productivity of health care providers.

(iv) Wait times for an appointment for the receipt of health care from the Department.

(v) The reduction, if any, in the use by veterans of in-person services at Department facilities and non-Department facilities.

(D) The types of appointments for the receipt of telemedicine furnished by the Department that were provided during the one-year period preceding the submittal of the report.

(E) The number of appointments for the receipt of telemedicine furnished by the Department that were requested during such period, disaggregated by Veterans Integrated Service Network.

(F) Savings by the Department, if any, including travel costs, of furnishing health care through the use of telemedicine during such period.

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

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Florida.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 2123.

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

There was no objection.

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 2123, the Veterans E-Health and Telemedicine Support Act of 2017.

I believe that telemedicine represents the future of healthcare delivery, and I am proud of the fact that the Department of Veterans Affairs is a longtime leader in telemedicine.

Through VA's many different telehealth modalities, VA doctors and nurses have been able to better serve veterans in remote, rural, or medically underserved areas and veterans with limited mobility or other issues that make it difficult to travel to and from the VA medical facilities for needed appointments and follow-up care. Importantly, veterans who have had experience accessing care through telemedicine have demonstrated improved healthcare outcomes, including decreases in hospital admissions.

It is my hope that all veterans would have access to VA telemedicine when and where appropriate. However, the continued expansion of telemedicine across the VA healthcare system has been constrained by restrictions on the ability of VA providers to practice telemedicine across State lines without jeopardizing their State medical license.

H.R. 2123, the Veterans E-Health and Telemedicine Support Act of 2017, would remove those constraints by authorizing the VA providers to practice telemedicine at a location in any State, regardless of where the provider or patient is located. This would provide VA clinicians the statutory protection they need to continue providing high-quality telehealthcare to veteran patients across the country without fear of penalties imposed by the State medical licensing boards.

I am grateful to my friend and colleague, Representative GLENN THOMPSON from the great State of Pennsylvania, for his leadership on this issue and for bringing this important bill forward.

I am also grateful to my fellow committee member, Representative JULIA BROWNLEY of California, the ranking member of the Subcommittee on Health, for her work and advocacy on VA telemedicine.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all my colleagues to join me in supporting H.R. 2123, and I reserve the balance of my time.

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

I rise in strong support of H.R. 2123, the VETS Act of 2017.

Since its very inception, the Veterans Health Administration has been a leader in medical advancements and the delivery of healthcare. This legislation would ensure it continues this history of leadership by allowing VA providers to engage in the delivery of telemedicine to veterans all over the country, regardless of where the provider is located. These are paper barriers, these are legal barriers, not barriers of technology, to allow us to deliver care.

Telemedicine and medicine, in general, is changing so rapidly, we need to make sure that barriers are not put in place, especially for rural veterans, and many of us have them all over.

Last week, I did a field hearing in International Falls, Minnesota, which, by the way, will be 1 degree tomorrow for all of you, just so you know. Those folks are veterans. They have served,

but they are miles from a VA facility. The technology that we have, and we know it works, allows them to get that.

If we have veterans sitting on State borders, if we have veterans sitting in remote areas, it sometimes makes it difficult. It will give VA the tools it needs to remain a leader in the use of telehealth technology.

I am particularly thankful to Representatives THOMPSON and BROWNLEY for their leadership. They identified a problem, worked on it, and came up with a workable solution that we can put into statute, making sure, the bottom line, again, that every veteran, regardless of geographic location, gets the best, most advanced care possible.

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

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. THOMPSON), who is the sponsor of the bill.

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I thank the chairman and ranking member for their support and their kind words.

Mr. Speaker, I do rise today in support of H.R. 2123, the Veterans E-Health and Telemedicine Support Act, also known as the VETS Act.

Years ago, a constituent approached me to discuss the barriers to care that his fellow veterans were experiencing through the VA system. As an Active-Duty soldier, he told me stories of his friends coming home from deployment and falling through the cracks of the system. Some were suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, TBIs, and depression and required the care of specialists. Others had difficulty traveling from their rural communities to VA medical centers because of injuries sustained during combat. Too many of those wound up taking their own lives.

It broke my heart to hear the stories of this soldier's friends and comrades not receiving the care that they deserve. What made it more difficult was the fact that this constituent soldier was my son.

After numerous conversations trying to figure out how we can help our servicemembers when they return home, we determined that expanding access to telehealth would be a great start. Many of our veterans live in rural areas and are unable to travel far distances. Allowing them to see their healthcare provider in the comfort of their home would increase their access to care. This is why Representative JULIA BROWNLEY and I introduced the VETS Act.

The VETS Act will allow VA-employed healthcare providers to practice telehealth across State lines, no matter where the doctor or the patient is located. It also commissions a report to study the effectiveness of telemedicine programs utilized by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

While the VA has made major strides and is a leader in advancing telehealth access, outdated barriers limit its

growth. Currently, each State has its own licensing requirements for healthcare providers to practice medicine within its borders. For example, if a doctor practices in Pennsylvania and Ohio, they must hold a license from each State.

VA-provider licensing requirements are different. As long as a doctor is licensed and in good standing with a single State, they can practice in-person care within the VA system in any State. This reciprocity, however, is not afforded to the practice of telehealth. VA providers seeking to provide telehealthcare to patients must also be licensed in the State where the patient is located. These outdated regulations are hurting our Nation's veterans.

The Department of Veterans Affairs has successfully been using telemedicine for quite some time. Since 2002, more than 2 million veterans have received telehealthcare through the VA. In 2016 alone, more than 12 percent of veterans receiving VA care utilized telehealth in some aspect. Forty-five percent of these veterans live in rural areas.

Veterans who have accessed telehealth are overwhelmingly pleased with the quality of care and access they received. Those receiving at-home care, for example, through telehealth cite an 88 percent satisfaction rate.

While the VA has done a great job of expanding telehealth access to veterans across the country, more needs to be done. Our veterans deserve the best care available to them, and this starts with the passage of the VETS Act.

I thank Representative BROWNLEY, Committee Chairman Dr. PHIL ROE, Ranking Member TIM WALZ, and Chairman BILIRAKIS for bringing this bill to the floor today.

I urge my colleagues to vote in favor of the bill to give our Nation's veterans access to quality, proven healthcare.

Mr. WALZ. Mr. Speaker, I have no further speakers, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1 minute to the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. COFFMAN).

Mr. COFFMAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 2123, the Veterans E-Health and Telemedicine Support Act of 2017.

Under current law, VA healthcare providers must possess a current, unrestricted license issued by a State to practice medicine at a VA facility. However, VA providers are restricted from practicing telemedicine across State lines. This limits the VA's continued expansion of telemedicine and, as a result, reduces the accessibility of healthcare for so many veterans.

As technology continues to evolve and Congress considers what the VA of the 21st century should look like, there is no doubt that methods like telemedicine, coupled with more regulatory flexibility, are long overdue.

Geographical location in our country is no longer a challenge thanks to modern technology. VA healthcare providers should have the opportunity to practice telemedicine across State lines to provide medical advice to our veterans that is more timely and responsive to the patient's needs.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage my colleagues to support the passage of H.R. 2123.

Mr. WALZ. Mr. Speaker, I have no further speakers, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1 minute to the gentleman from the great State of Michigan (Mr. BERGMAN).

Mr. BERGMAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 2123, the Veterans E-Health and Telemedicine Support Act.

For veterans in my district, the challenge of receiving timely, quality care from the VA is, at times, impossible. In fact, winter has already arrived in northern and upper Michigan. Travel is complex and sometimes hazardous.

With some of the most rural geography in the country, veterans in Michigan's First District are forced to travel long distances, often hours, into Wisconsin or hundreds of miles down into mid- and southeast Michigan just to keep simple doctors' appointments.

Innovative healthcare solutions like telemedicine are long overdue. Veterans in my district will help validate the requirements for and the quality of such innovations.

H.R. 2123 will allow VA-licensed healthcare providers to practice telemedicine at any location, in any State, regardless of where the provider or patient is located. This bill will make it easier for veterans in my district and all across the country to access healthcare services in a convenient setting that fits their schedule, ultimately, putting the veteran first. I have long said that if a program or policy can work in Michigan's First District, it can work anywhere.

Mr. Speaker, I urge support of H.R. 2123.

Mr. WALZ. Mr. Speaker, again, it makes sense. Removing some of these paper barriers, as the gentleman from Michigan said, geography, weather, other things, it makes sense to use the technology to improve the care.

I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 2123, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, this puts the veterans first, as the gentleman said; and, again, the veteran has a choice as to whether to use telemedicine or go to see the doctor, because it doesn't work for everyone.

But, in any case, this is a great bill. It puts the veteran first. I urge my colleagues to pass this particular bill.

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

Ms. BROWNLEY of California. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 2123, the Veterans E-Health and Telemedicine Support Act, or VETS Act.

As we approach Veterans Day, a time when we honor the service and sacrifice of those who fought bravely on behalf of our nation, we must rededicate ourselves to ensuring that the VA has the tools it needs to be the 21st century, world-class healthcare system that our veterans deserve. One way the VA can modernize is by embracing telehealth and using new technologies to provide more timely and convenient care for our veterans.

The VA has seen tremendous growth and interest in telehealth over the past few years, and we should continue to find innovative ways to connect veterans with the providers that they need, no matter their physical location. This will particularly help rural veterans, and will help us expand access to specialty care from the medical centers to the community clinics, and even into veterans' homes. I have seen this firsthand at the Oxnard community clinic in my district, which is able to connect veterans to retinal specialists and audiology specialists using telehealth technology, making it easier for veterans to get better care closer to home.

The House Veterans' Affairs Committee has also heard from many veterans who have used telemedicine services. For instance, at a field hearing in my district, Zachary Walker, a Navy veteran, testified about the fast and efficient service that telemedicine can deliver to our veterans, getting him in the door to his local clinic faster than a traditional appointment.

Our bill is a commonsense solution that will allow us to further expand on these telehealth services by permitting VA providers to conduct telehealth treatment across state lines no matter their location, connecting more health professionals with the veterans who need their care.

It has been my pleasure to work with Congressman GLENN 'GT' THOMPSON, and Senators JONI ERNST and MAZIE HIRONO, to advance this bipartisan, bicameral bill, which has received widespread support from the Veterans Service Organizations and the VA. I urge my colleagues to support this commonsense legislation.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Florida (Mr. BILIRAKIS) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 2123.

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

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

VETERANS INCREASED CHOICE FOR TRANSPLANTED ORGANS AND RECOVERY ACT OF 2017

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 2601) to amend the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014 to improve the access of veterans to organ transplants, and for other purposes, as amended.