

I want to thank Justin and the American Legion in Ephrata for their work to support the Honor Flight. Spending the afternoon learning about the once in a lifetime experiences from local veterans is an excellent way to recognize military members. I look forward to greeting more veterans from Washington in the future.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until 2 p.m. today.

Accordingly (at 12 o'clock and 6 minutes p.m.), the House stood in recess.

□ 1400

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Ms. FOXX) at 2 p.m.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, the Reverend Patrick J. Conroy, offered the following prayer: Eternal God, we give You thanks for giving us another day.

We pause now in Your presence and acknowledge our dependence on You.

We ask Your blessing upon the men and women of this, the people's House. Keep them aware of Your presence as they face the tasks of this day, that no burden be too heavy, no duty too difficult, and no work too wearisome.

Help them, and indeed help us all, to obey Your law, to do Your will, and to walk in Your way. Grant that they might be good in thought, gracious in word, generous in deed, and great in spirit.

Make this a glorious day in which all are glad to be alive, eager to work, and ready to serve You, our great Nation, and all our fellow brothers and sisters.

May all that is done this day be for Your greater honor and glory.

Amen.

THE JOURNAL

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair has examined the Journal of the last day's proceedings and announces to the House her approval thereof.

Pursuant to clause 1, rule I, the Journal stands approved.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair will lead the House in the Pledge of Allegiance.

The SPEAKER pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

COMMUNICATION FROM THE CLERK OF THE HOUSE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following commu-

nication from the Clerk of the House of Representatives:

OFFICE OF THE CLERK,
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
Washington, DC, May 21, 2018.

Hon. PAUL D. RYAN,
The Speaker, House of Representatives,
Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. SPEAKER: Pursuant to the permission granted in Clause 2(h) of Rule II of the Rules of the U.S. House of Representatives, the Clerk received the following message from the Secretary of the Senate on May 21, 2018, at 10:22 a.m.:

That the Senate passed S. 346.

That the Senate agreed to S.J. Res. 60.

With best wishes, I am,

Sincerely,

KAREN L. HAAS.

REAPPOINTMENT OF INDIVIDUAL TO COMMISSION ON INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair announces the Speaker's reappointment, pursuant to section 201(b) of the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (22 U.S.C. 6431) and the order of the House of January 3, 2017, of the following individual on the part of the House to the Commission on International Religious Freedom for a term ending May 14, 2020:

Ms. Kristina Arriaga, Alexandria, Virginia

APPOINTMENT OF INDIVIDUALS TO ALYCE SPOTTED BEAR AND WALTER SOBOLEFF COMMISSION ON NATIVE CHILDREN

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair announces the Speaker's appointment, pursuant to section 3 of the Alyce Spotted Bear and Walter Soboleff Commission on Native Children Act (Pub. L. 114-244), and the order of the House of January 3, 2017, of the following individuals on the part of the House to the Alyce Spotted Bear and Walter Soboleff Commission on Native Children:

Ms. Gloria O'Neill, Anchorage, Alaska

Ms. Lisa Johnson Billy, Lindsay, Oklahoma

Ms. Elizabeth Morris, Hillsboro, North Dakota

APPOINTMENT OF MEMBER TO UNITED STATES SEMIQUINCENTENNIAL COMMISSION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair announces the Speaker's appointment, pursuant to section 4 of the United States Semiquincentennial Commission Act of 2016 (Pub. L. 114-196), and the order of the House of January 3, 2017, of the following Member on the part of the House to the United States Semiquincentennial Commission to fill the existing vacancy thereon:

Mr. HOLDING, North Carolina

APPOINTMENT OF MEMBER TO UNITED STATES CAPITOL PRESERVATION COMMISSION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair announces the Speaker's appointment, pursuant to 2 U.S.C. 2081, and the order of the House of January 3, 2017, of the following Member on the part of the House to the United States Capitol Preservation Commission:

Mr. HOLDING, North Carolina

SUPPORTING THE PROTECT LIFE RULE

(Ms. FOXX asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Ms. FOXX. Mr. Speaker, I rise to applaud President Trump for issuing the Protect Life Rule, delivering on his promise to ensure that the government is not involved in the abortion business—either directly or indirectly.

When Title X was created in 1970, Congress intended for these funds to go toward family planning programs, explicitly barring abortion providers from receiving funds by stating: "None of the funds appropriated under this title shall be used in programs where abortion is a method of family planning."

Since then, the will of Congress and those we represent has been undermined as Title X funds have routinely contributed to employee salaries, facility costs, and medical supplies for abortion providers.

The Protect Life Rule is a victory for the majority of Americans who are fundamentally opposed to taxpayer-funded abortion without decreasing funding for other Title X beneficiaries, and I stand by our pro-life President's decision.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. JOHNSON of Ohio). Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until approximately 3 p.m. today.

Accordingly (at 2 o'clock and 7 minutes p.m.), the House stood in recess.

□ 1500

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. MITCHELL) at 3 p.m.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, the Chair will postpone further proceedings today on motions to suspend the rules on which a recorded vote or the yeas and nays are ordered, or on which the vote incurs objection under clause 6 of rule XX.

The House will resume proceedings on postponed questions at a later time.

VA BILLING ACCOUNTABILITY ACT

Mr. DUNN. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 1972) to amend title 38, United States Code, to authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to waive the requirement of certain veterans to make copayments for hospital care and medical services in the case of an error by the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 1972

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 "VA Billing Accountability Act".

SEC. 2. AUTHORITY OF SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS TO WAIVE REQUIREMENT OF CERTAIN VETERANS TO MAKE COPAYMENTS FOR CARE AND SERVICES IN THE CASE OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS ERROR.

(a) HOSPITAL CARE, NURSING HOME CARE, AND MEDICAL SERVICES.—Section 1710(f)(3) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new subparagraph:

"(G) The Secretary may waive the requirement of a veteran to make a payment under this subsection or subsection (g) if—

"(i) an error committed by the Department or an employee of the Department was the cause of delaying notification sent to the veteran of the requirement to make the payment; and

"(ii) the veteran received such notification later than 180 days after the date on which the veteran received the care or services for which the payment was required."

(b) MEDICATIONS.—Section 1722A of such title is amended—

(1) by redesignating subsection (c) as subsection (d); and

(2) by inserting after subsection (b) the following new subsection (c):

"(c) The Secretary may waive the requirement of a veteran to make a payment under this section if—

"(1) an error committed by the Department or an employee of the Department was the cause of delaying notification sent to the veteran of the requirement to make the payment; and

"(2) the veteran received such notification later than 180 days after the date on which the veteran received the medication for which the payment was required."

(c) BILLING PROCEDURES.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Subchapter I of chapter 17 of such title is amended by adding at the end the following new section:

"§ 1709C. Procedures for copayments

"(a) CARE AT DEPARTMENT FACILITY.—(1) In requiring a veteran to make a payment for care or services provided at a medical facility of the Department pursuant to this chapter, including sections 1710 and 1722A, the Secretary shall provide to such veteran a notification of such required payment by not later than 180 days after the date on which the veteran receives the care or services for which payment is required.

"(2) If the Secretary does not provide to a veteran a notification of the required payment by the date required under paragraph (1), the Secretary may not collect such payment, including through a third-party entity, unless the Secretary provides the veteran the following:

"(A) Information regarding how to apply for a waiver described in section 1710(f)(3)(G) or section 1722A(c) of this title, as appropriate.

"(B) Information regarding how to establish a payment plan with the Secretary.

"(C) Opportunity to make such a waiver or establish such a payment plan.

"(b) CARE AT NON-DEPARTMENT FACILITY.—(1) In requiring a veteran to make a payment for care or services provided at a non-Department facility pursuant to this chapter or other provision of law, the Secretary shall provide to such veteran a notification of such required payment by not later than 18 months after the date on which the veteran receives the care or services for which payment is required.

"(2) If the Secretary does not provide to a veteran a notification of the required payment by the date required under paragraph (1), the Secretary may not collect such payment, including through a third-party entity, unless the Secretary provides the veteran the following:

"(A) Information regarding how to apply for a waiver described in paragraph (3).

"(B) Information regarding how to establish a payment plan with the Secretary.

"(C) Opportunity to make such a waiver or establish such a payment plan.

"(3) The Secretary may waive the requirement of a veteran to make a payment for care or services provided at a non-Department facility pursuant to this chapter or other provision of law if—

"(A) an error committed by the Department, an employee of the Department, or a non-Department facility was the cause of delaying the notification sent to the veteran of the requirement to make the payment; and

"(B) the veteran received such notification after the period described in paragraph (1)."

(2) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections at the beginning of such chapter is amended by inserting after the item relating to section 1709B the following new item:

"1709C. Procedures for copayments."

(d) IMPROVEMENT OF PROCEDURES.—Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall—

(1) review the copayment billing internal controls and notification procedures of the Department of Veterans Affairs; and

(2) improve such controls and procedures, including pursuant to the amendments made by this Act.

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

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Florida.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. DUNN. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and insert extraneous material into the RECORD on H.R. 1972, as amended.

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

There was no objection.

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 1972, as amended, the VA Billing Accountability Act.

This bill would authorize the Department of Veterans Affairs to waive copayment requirements if veterans are not notified of their need to pay a copayment for a given service in a timely manner.

VA's untimely processing of claims is well-documented. The negative impact those challenges have on recruiting and retaining community providers is also well-documented. However, those challenges also have a negative impact on our veterans.

Three years ago this June, the VA Medical Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota, initiated a review of past processes on veteran inpatient copayment charges for the years 2011 to 2015. Following that review, thousands of veterans in Minnesota and Wisconsin were charged copayments for services that they had received as much as 4 years earlier.

Receiving a large bill out of the blue for care that was received, in some cases years ago, understandably caused great concern and upset among veterans. The VA Billing Accountability Act would prevent that.

The VA MISSION Act that the House passed last week included several provisions that would make it easier for the VA to process and pay claims accurately and on time. This bill would protect veterans by setting specific notification procedures that the VA must abide by when a veteran is going to be charged a copayment for a VA service and by authorizing the VA to waive a copayment if an error committed by the VA caused a delayed notification.

I am grateful to my colleague from Pennsylvania, Representative LLOYD SMUCKER, for introducing this bill. Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting it, and I reserve the balance of my time.

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

Mr. Speaker, I, too, rise in support of H.R. 1972, but I would once again like to note we are here again with the most productive committee in the United States Congress, the most bipartisan committee, the most open, and it is fitting, going into Memorial Day, that the question of the shared commitment to this Nation's veterans is never in question. So I am grateful.

I would also like to extend thanks to the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. EMMER), for his work on this piece of legislation, bringing it to light and continuing to carry this until we got it to the floor.

This committee has heard from veterans across the country that have experienced harassment from debt collectors or experienced adverse credit reporting through no fault of their own.

The bill simply requires VA to waive any of those copayments due by a veteran when VA makes an error that causes significant delay in notification of the copayment. It is a very simple solution to a problem that can significantly impact nearly every aspect of a veterans' life. This can add unnecessary stress for veterans when they are trying to pay their medical expenses and make ends meet. Veterans shouldn't be hung out to dry when the VA is at fault. This legislation would mitigate the harm a delayed copayment notification could create for a veteran.

Mr. Speaker, I am grateful for this bill being brought up today by the gentleman, and I reserve the balance of my time.