

account or forcing the student to begin payment of tuition and fees on a payment plan until they received money from VA.

My bill, the SIT-REP Act, would give the Secretary the authority to disapprove courses of education for the GI Bill unless the educational institution adopts a policy ensuring that it will not impose a fee on the veteran or deny the veteran's access to education. This policy would be applied for the first 90 days of the school term.

The SIT-REP Act is a commonsense bill that protects student veterans and their families who, through no fault of their own, are denied access to education because the school made a mistake or the VA made a late payment. It is not the veteran's fault, and they should not be punished for the actions of others.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all my colleagues to join me in support of my practical and bipartisan legislation, which will help ensure our student veterans have full access to the educational benefits they have earned and deserve. I hope that the Senate takes up this bill quickly.

Again, I urge passage of this great bill. We have got to get it to the President's desk as soon as possible.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the committee staff as well. They did a great job on this bill.

Mr. WALZ. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Florida for his great work on this. I encourage its passage.

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

Mr. DUNN. Mr. Speaker, once again, I encourage all Members to support H.R. 4830, as amended, and 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. DUNN) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 4830, as amended.

The question was taken.

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

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

The yeas and nays were ordered.

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

VETERANS AFFAIRS PURCHASE CARD MISUSE MITIGATION ACT

Mr. ROE of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 5215) to amend title 38, United States Code, to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to prohibit employees found to have knowingly misused Department of Veterans Affairs purchase cards from serving as purchase card holders or approving officials.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 5215

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 Affairs Purchase Card Misuse Mitigation Act".

SEC. 2. MISUSE OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS PURCHASE CARDS BY DEPARTMENT EMPLOYEES.

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

“§ 727. Misuse of Department purchase cards

“(a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall prohibit any employee of the Department who the Secretary or the Inspector General of the Department determines has knowingly misused a purchase card from serving as a purchase card holder or approving official. Such a prohibition shall be in addition to any other applicable penalty.

“(b) MISUSE.—For purposes of this section, the term 'misuse' means—

“(1) splitting purchases;

“(2) exceeding applicable purchase card limits or purchase thresholds;

“(3) purchasing any unauthorized item;

“(4) using a purchase card without being an authorized purchase card holder; or

“(5) violating ethics standards.”

(b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections at the beginning of such chapter is amended by inserting after the item relating to section 725 the following new item:

“727. Misuse of Department purchase cards.”

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

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Tennessee.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. ROE of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and insert extraneous material into the record on H.R. 5215.

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

There was no objection.

Mr. ROE of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself as much time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 5215, the Veterans Affairs Purchase Card Misuse Mitigation Act.

This legislation is sponsored by my Veterans' Affairs Committee colleagues JACK BERGMAN, KATHLEEN RICE, MIKE BOST, Dr. NEAL DUNN, and MIKE COFFMAN.

H.R. 5215 would implement an additional safeguard in VA's multibillion-dollar government purchase card program, which has too often lacked adequate controls and has periodically been abused. The legislation directs the Secretary to revoke the purchase card from any employee who is found to have intentionally misused it.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 5215, and I reserve the balance of my time.

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 5215, the Veterans Affairs Purchase Card Mitigation Act.

I have often said I am the VA's staunchest supporter, but I will be their harshest critic. On this one, I will be their harshest critic.

Time and again when we hear reports of VA employees misusing purchase cards, that cannot stand. Every dollar that is misused, whether it is through fraud, waste, or abuse, is one less dollar that is not being used towards veterans, and it is the taxpayers' dollars that need to be guarded. This misuse erodes Congress' ability to oversee the VA budget and the use of the money.

Employees who misuse purchase cards should be held accountable and should be prevented from being a purchase card holder or authorizing official, because they can't be trusted to follow the regulations or be good stewards of taxpayer dollars.

This legislation will ensure that taxpayer dollars are protected from purchase card misuse. If you are doing it right, you can still use the card and it can serve veterans. If you choose to ignore the rules, you are not going to be able to do it anymore.

It is pretty simple. It is a smart piece of legislation. I urge its passage.

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

Mr. ROE of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. BERGMAN), our Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee chair.

Mr. BERGMAN. Mr. Speaker, government purchase cards are issued to Federal employees to make small, simple purchases. Their transaction limit was \$3,500, but the fiscal year 2018 NDAA increased that limit to \$10,000. This increase will cause purchase card usage to go up, thereby increasing the chance for misuse.

Purchase card transactions already total roughly \$4 billion annually in the VA, and the program has been found repeatedly to lack adequate controls related to waste, fraud, and abuse.

As chairman of the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, it is my job to monitor programs involving taxpayer dollars and veterans. That is why I introduced the Veterans Affairs Purchase Card Misuse Mitigation Act. It will mitigate the potential for misuse of purchase card spending by requiring the VA Secretary to revoke a purchase card from any employee found to have knowingly misused their card or approval authority.

Currently, penalties are applied slowly, if at all, and employees are very rarely terminated for purchase card misuse or abuse. H.R. 5215 creates a safeguard to stop purchase card misuse once it begins and holds bad actors accountable for all of their actions.

Mr. Speaker, being a good steward of taxpayers' dollars is my top priority, and this bill brings accountability to the necessary but problematic purchase card structure.

Mr. Speaker, I urge support of this bill.

Mr. WALZ. Mr. Speaker, may I inquire of the gentleman whether he has any further speakers.

Mr. ROE of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I have no further speakers.

Mr. WALZ. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume, and I am prepared to close.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to note, on this, there are other issues at hand here. There are certainly some of these cases where people are just blatantly misusing them. That is a small percentage. The vast majority is of leadership not implementing policies. Especially we were talking about the medical-surgical supply formulary, and people are taking the shortcut to getting things instead of getting—we had this conversation on contracts and the way it should be done.

The part about this is it isn't somebody going out and buying themselves a new phone or something; it is them going out and buying things that are actually going to be used, but it is a stupid way to do it because we end up paying more money. We don't have certain contracts. It is just is not the way to budget.

So I think this has a lot of really good things that it can do. One of them that it should continue to do is force VA leadership to have a better plan in place. We see it right here in the D.C. VA, not having this supply management piece down right.

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

Mr. ROE of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 5215, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. ROE) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 5215.

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 AFFAIRS MEDICAL-SURGICAL PURCHASING STABILIZATION ACT

Mr. ROE of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 5418) to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out the Medical Surgical Prime Vendor program using multiple prime vendors, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 5418

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 Affairs Medical-Surgical Purchasing Stabilization Act”.

SEC. 2. MEDICAL SURGICAL PRIME VENDOR PROGRAM.

(a) VENDORS.—In procuring certain medical, surgical, and dental supplies or labora-

tory supplies for medical centers of the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall carry out the Medical Surgical Prime Vendor program, or successor program, in a manner that—

(1) requires the Secretary to award contracts to multiple regional prime vendors instead of a single nationwide prime vendor; and

(2) prohibits a prime vendor from solely designing the formulary of such supplies.

(b) CLINICALLY DRIVEN SOURCING.—

(1) EXPERTISE.—In carrying out the formulary of supplies under the Medical Surgical Prime Vendor program, or successor program, the Secretary shall ensure that each employee of the Department of Veterans Affairs who conducts formulary analyses or makes decisions with respect to including items on the formulary has medical expertise relevant to the items for which the employee conducts such analyses or makes such decisions.

(2) LISTS.—Not later than 30 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, and quarterly thereafter with respect to any updates, the Secretary shall submit to the Committees on Veterans’ Affairs of the House of Representatives and the Senate a list of each employee described in paragraph (1) and the relevant medical expertise of the employee, listed by the categories of items in the formulary described in such paragraph.

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

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Tennessee.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. ROE of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and insert extraneous material into the RECORD on H.R. 5418, as amended.

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

There was no objection.

Mr. ROE of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself as much time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 5418, as amended, the Veterans Affairs Medical-Surgical Purchasing Stabilization Act. This legislation was introduced by General Bergman and is cosponsored by Representatives PETERS, BANKS, DUNN, and KUSTER.

VA’s medical-surgical prime vendor program is an ambitious effort to save money by establishing a medical-surgical formulary in leveraging the Department’s massive buying power. Unfortunately, the results have fallen far short of expectations.

I held a hearing on this subject last December and continue to monitor it closely.

The formulary was originally created with little clinical input, and it does not contain what clinicians need.

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Over the past year, physicians, surgeons, and nurses have been organized into teams to reevaluate the formulary. At one point, a group of clinicians was essentially put in a room for

a week to concentrate on the task, but the formulary remains troubled.

Now, VA is restructuring the program to put the prime vendors in charge of negotiating the supplier contracts, but it remains crucial that VA get the formulary right. This is a matter of safety as well as finances.

H.R. 5418, as amended, would put clinicians with appropriate expertise back in charge of the formulary, which is the first step toward stabilizing the Medical-Surgical Prime Vendor Program.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 5418, as amended, and I reserve the balance of my time.

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 5418, as amended. The Veterans Affairs Medical-Surgical Purchasing Stabilization Act ties into what we were just discussing.

For many years, we have heard complaints that the VA formulary did not meet the needs of VA healthcare providers, thus making the delivery of healthcare to our Nation’s heroes even more challenging.

As VA worked toward a solution, the Government Accountability Office recommended that clinicians who treat veterans should be at the center of the decision making.

Involving clinicians at every step of building a medical supply formulary is the same best practice employed by other private sector and nonprofit hospitals.

We have got wonderful physicians on this committee. It makes sense that they should be there. I have heard it time and time again over the years that we get better results when we do that.

That is why this committee was concerned when VA proposed that it would outsource the development of its medical-surgical supply formulary to vendors who had no experience treating patients. This proposal goes against best practices in the private and nonprofit healthcare industry.

This legislation would prevent VA from outsourcing formulary development. It would also ensure VA follows best practices and sticks to a timeline so that VA facilities and vendors have a predictable, functional medical supply.

Now VA must demonstrate it is willing to put the right leadership and resources in place to appropriately manage the project and ensure the actual end users of the formulary, the clinicians treating veterans, have the supplies as needed.

Mr. Speaker, again, another good piece of legislation, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. ROE of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. BERGMAN), the Oversight and Investigation Subcommittee chairman.

Mr. BERGMAN. Mr. Speaker, the Medical-Surgical Prime Vendor Program is VA’s system of contracts to