

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 2787, as amended, the Vet MD Act.

The Department of Veterans Affairs, like the Nation, is experiencing a shortage of healthcare providers. With shortages in areas like mental healthcare and medical administration, it can become increasingly difficult to maintain a facility's efficiency and quality. That is why it is increasingly important to promote medical education and employment within VA as soon in a student's educational career as is possible.

This bill allows VA to capture students as they complete their premedical undergraduate degrees by offering them the opportunity to shadow medical professionals in VA facilities. Not only does this create a familiarity with VA among the students, but allows VA to continue to do one of the things it does best: educate the Nation's future healthcare providers.

I appreciate the hard work of my colleague, Representative KAPTUR, and urge my colleagues to vote in favor of the Vet MD Act.

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

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

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR), the author of this bill.

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Speaker, I thank Ranking Member TAKANO for his great support and for yielding me the time, and I thank Chairman ROE very much for moving this bill through his committee.

H.R. 2787, the Vet MD Act, also called the Veterans-Specific Education for Tomorrow's Health Professionals Act, I am honored to speak on its behalf this evening.

The Vet MD Act works to break down barriers and expand opportunities for healthcare professionals to get training to care for our veterans. The bill creates a 3-year pilot program for pre-health undergraduate students to gain clinical observation experience within at least five VA medical centers.

Health schools recommend or require clinical observation hours, but there is no formal process to apply for these hours. Opportunities to shadow are limited and are based on where you go to school or whom you know; and students who attend schools outside major cities, as well as those whose families lack connections to the medical community, find it harder and harder to shadow and are disadvantaged in medical school admissions. This places an unfair burden on otherwise qualified students who come from less affluent communities or rural areas.

Several years ago, two premedical undergraduate students highlighted to my team the struggles disadvantaged, minority, and other young people who lack personal connections face as they apply for medical school. So I thank Seamus Carragher and Andrew Frank for bringing this serious omission to our attention, and I thank Carrie

Swope, my legislative assistant, on this important issue, for her work throughout.

Through their own struggle, these students struggled to gain access to clinical observation, experience so critical in medical circles, and they realized an immense opportunity was missing. The bill prioritizes students in medically underserved areas; first-generation college students, of which I was one; students referred by minority-serving institutions; and, of course, veterans.

The Vet MD Act creates a pipeline for future physicians and medical professionals and prioritizes training for students who specialize in a health profession where there is a serious staffing shortage. This important step will help narrow the gap and ensure we are training pre-health students in careers that are in demand and necessary.

I can tell you, in every hospital system I represent, there is an unmet demand. Thousands and thousands of individuals are needed.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The time of the gentlewoman has expired.

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I yield an additional 45 seconds to the gentlewoman from Ohio.

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Speaker, importantly, pre-health students in the pilot will gain a deeper understanding of veterans' specific health needs and experiences, which is critical for health professionals who treat veterans, many of whom have complex conditions, as the chair and ranking member know.

One of our top responsibilities as a Congress is to ensure that our veterans, those who have sacrificed so much for our country and for liberty's cause, receive high-quality healthcare from highly trained health professionals. This bill furthers that effort, and I am pleased it will get a vote this evening.

I thank my colleagues: Mr. TAKANO, for his diligent work on this bill; Ranking Member WALZ; and Chairman ROE, for bringing this bill to the floor so expeditiously. On behalf of our health professionals, our veterans, myself, and all the cosponsors, I can't thank you enough.

Mr. ROE of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I have no further speakers, and I am prepared to close.

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

Mr. Speaker, as I was listening to my friend from the State of Ohio, I was struck by just how the process of legislating in this body works, how ideas come from very real people seeking to solve problems through their Representative. And I watched this legislation move through committee, the gentlewoman graciously accepting the changes and approving the bill.

I know that my colleague from Tennessee, a doctor himself, cares so much about medical education. We worked together on expanding the number of medical residencies.

I am delighted this bill has come to the floor so expeditiously. Often, legis-

lation takes so much time to win its way through, but an idea that was very worthy moved through and, I think, in record time.

So, again, Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to join me in passing H.R. 2787, as amended, and I yield back the balance of my time.

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

In closing, I, too, came from rural America, and I, too, am a first-generation college graduate and had an opportunity to use the public education system to go to college and medical school. After that, then mentored and taught for over 25 years in medical school, so I had a chance to see young students, and I think this is a fantastic idea.

I thank my colleagues on the other side of the aisle for bringing this forward. To bring a young person in who has never had a chance to be in that sort of environment and expose them to this, you don't know what sort of light bulb you are going to turn on in their head to encourage them and mentor them. And many of them will become passionate about medicine, nursing, physical therapy, occupational therapy, audiology, PTSD treatment. I could go on and on. I think this is a great idea. I strongly encourage all Members to support H.R. 2787, as amended.

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 Tennessee (Mr. ROE) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 2787, 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.

INCLUDING ADDITIONAL PERIODS OF ACTIVE DUTY SERVICE IN DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAMS

Mr. ROE of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 5538) to amend title 38, United States Code, to provide for the inclusion of certain additional periods of active duty service for purposes of suspending charges to veterans' entitlement to educational assistance under the laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs during periods of suspended participation in vocational rehabilitation programs.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 5538

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

SECTION 1. INCLUSION OF CERTAIN ADDITIONAL PERIODS OF ACTIVE DUTY SERVICE FOR PURPOSES OF SUSPENSION OF CHARGES TO ENTITLEMENT DURING PERIODS OF SUSPENDED PARTICIPATION IN DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAMS.

Section 3105(e)(2) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by striking “or 12304” and inserting “12304, 12304a, or 12304b”.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. ROE) and the gentleman from California (Mr. TAKANO) 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 to revise and extend their remarks and insert extraneous material.

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 such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 5538.

Under current law, if a member of the Guard or Reserve is called to Active Duty under certain orders while receiving training through the Department of Veterans Affairs Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment program, the charges for that training are waived. However, those charges are not waived for members of the Guard or Reserve who are called up under orders regarding emergency response or augmentation of overseas combat forces. This creates a disparity.

H.R. 5538 would address that disparity and level the playing field by waiving training charges for all servicemembers, regardless of which Active-Duty orders they are serving under.

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

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 5538, the Reserve Component Vocational Rehabilitation Parity Act.

This bill protects an overlooked provision related to our National Guard and Reserve servicemembers who are mobilized under 12304b authorities. This bill allows servicemembers to pause the clock on the 12-year limit to use vocational rehabilitation programs while mobilized on Active Duty orders. Currently, this is allowed for mostly mobilization authorities, but this particular authority was overlooked. Simply, the bill adds to 12304a and 12304b authorities to the 12304 provision already listed within the statute.

This is an important fix because of the increased use of 12304b authority by the Department of Defense over the past few years, and the increases planned for the future. As we move the

Reserve components from a strategic reserve to an operational reserve concept, it is critically important that we modernize our statutes to ensure benefits parity while servicemembers are in uniform. This is a step in the right direction.

With this bill, Congress has the opportunity to be proactive, instead of reactive, to the needs of our servicemembers.

Mr. Speaker, I thank Mr. PETERS for bringing this issue forward and identifying a fix. He is a reliable and critical advocate for our country's National Guard and Reserve servicemembers. I also thank Mr. BERGMAN for reaching across the aisle and joining Mr. PETERS in introducing this bill. And I thank the co-chairs of the House's National Guard and Reserve Components Caucus, Mr. WALZ and Mr. PALAZZO, for supporting the initiative. Lastly, I thank the six other members of our committee who were original cosponsors of the bill, including Mr. O'ROURKE, Ms. BROWNLEY, and Ms. KUSTER.

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

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

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I yield 5 minutes to the gentleman from California (Mr. PETERS), a member of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, the author of this bill, and my good friend.

Mr. PETERS. Mr. Speaker, I thank Mr. TAKANO for yielding. I appreciate his commitment to improving the lives of veterans, their families, and the communities. The Reserve Component Vocational Rehabilitation Parity Act, my bill before the House today, aims to continue investing in veterans, specifically those still fighting for our Nation.

Our veterans have served our country, and it is our duty to make sure they can access the resources that they have earned. Many guardsmen and reservists have realized that they didn't qualify for all their benefits after the Department of Defense began using their new authority created to call up Reserve components for involuntary service. This new authority unintentionally excluded these reservists.

Thankfully, Ranking Member WALZ and Mr. PALAZZO took the lead to fix several of these inconsistencies. We passed a few of these fixes in the Forever GI Bill last year. This week, we are also passing other bills to make sure benefits are properly extended.

One unresolved issue, though, was access to vocational rehabilitation. This VA program provides access to education and critical job training that helps servicemembers and veterans develop their career plan after service.

Vocational rehab helps veterans determine transferable skills that will lead to good jobs and what additional skills they need to fulfill their career goals.

Upon separation, a veteran must use his or her vocational rehab benefits

within 12 years. Any months or years spent deployed should not count against this time clock.

Currently, two reservists serving side by side in Active Duty may not have access to the same vocational rehab benefits just because of the authority under which they have been mobilized. Additionally, reservists involuntarily called up may be leaving their family or a civilian job without notice, compared to a reservist who volunteered.

In both cases, these guardsmen and reservists served honorably in missions to support combat zones. They have earned the same employment and education benefits as every other reservist throughout their service.

My bill, the Reserve Component Vocational Rehabilitation Parity Act, ensures that reservists and guardsmen have access to the full 12 years of vocational rehab benefits by pausing the clock during their service.

I am happy to have received the support of the National Guard Association of the United States and the Reserve Officers Association in this effort.

I urge Congress to pass this bill so that all of our veterans can access the education benefits they earned.

Mr. Speaker, I thank General Bergman, who joined me to introduce this bill, and seven of our committee colleagues who cosponsored the bill, as Mr. TAKANO said. I also thank Chairman ROE, a wonderful chairman; Ranking Member WALZ; and the Veterans' Affairs Committee staff for their steadfast work to support our Nation's veterans.

Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleagues for their strong support of the bill, and I urge its passage.

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

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to join me in passing H.R. 5538, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. ROE of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I thank Mr. PETERS for bringing up this much-needed piece of legislation and correcting this inequity. It wasn't intended, but now this Congress has a chance, in a bipartisan way, to correct this.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage all Members to support H.R. 5538, 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. 5538.

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.

NAVY SEAL CHIEF PETTY OFFICER WILLIAM “BILL” MULDER (RET.) TRANSITION IMPROVEMENTS ACT OF 2018

Mr. ROE of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the