

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.

□ 1830

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

bill (H.R. 5649) to amend titles 10 and 38, United States Code, to amend the Social Security Act, and to direct the Secretaries of Veterans Affairs, Defense, Labor, and Homeland Security, and the Administrator of the Small Business Administration, to take certain actions to improve transition assistance to members of the Armed Forces who separate, retire, or are discharged from the Armed Forces, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 5649

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 “Navy SEAL Chief Petty Officer William ‘Bill’ Mulder (Ret.) Transition Improvement Act of 2018”.

SEC. 2. TABLE OF CONTENTS.

The table of contents for this Act is as follows:

Sec. 1. Short title.

Sec. 2. Table of contents.

Sec. 3. Definitions.

TITLE I—IMPROVEMENTS TO TRANSITION ASSISTANCE

Sec. 101. Access for the Secretaries of Labor and Veterans Affairs to the Federal directory of new hires.

Sec. 102. Pilot program for off-base transition training for veterans and spouses.

Sec. 103. Grants for provision of transition assistance to members of the Armed Forces after separation, retirement, or discharge.

Sec. 104. Study of community-based transition assistance programs for members of the Armed Forces after separation, retirement, or discharge.

Sec. 105. One-year independent assessment of the effectiveness of TAP.

Sec. 106. Longitudinal study on changes to TAP.

TITLE II—EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE

Sec. 201. Improvements to assistance for certain flight training and other programs of education.

Sec. 202. Elimination of the period of eligibility for the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment program of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Sec. 203. Educational assistance during extended school closures due to natural disasters.

SEC. 3. DEFINITIONS.

In this Act:

(1) The term “TAP” means the Transition Assistance Program under sections 1142 and 1144 of title 10, United States Code.

(2) The term “military departments” has the meaning given that term in section 101 of title 10, United States Code.

TITLE I—IMPROVEMENTS TO TRANSITION ASSISTANCE

SEC. 101. ACCESS FOR THE SECRETARIES OF LABOR AND VETERANS AFFAIRS TO THE FEDERAL DIRECTORY OF NEW HIRES.

Section 453A(h) of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 653a(h)) is amended by adding at the end the following new paragraph:

“(4) **VETERAN EMPLOYMENT.**—The Secretaries of Labor and of Veterans Affairs shall have access to information reported by employers pursuant to subsection (b) of this section for purposes of tracking employment of veterans.”.

SEC. 102. PILOT PROGRAM FOR OFF-BASE TRANSITION TRAINING FOR VETERANS AND SPOUSES.

(a) **EXTENSION OF PILOT PROGRAM.**—Subsection (a) of section 301 of the Dignified Burial

and Other Veterans’ Benefits Improvement Act of 2012 (Public Law 112–260; 10 U.S.C. 1144 note) is amended—

(1) by striking “During the two-year period beginning on the date of the enactment of this Act, the” and inserting “During the five-year period beginning on the date of the enactment of the Navy SEAL Chief Petty Officer William ‘Bill’ Mulder (Ret.) Transition Improvement Act of 2018, the”; and

(2) by striking “to assess the feasibility and advisability of providing such program to eligible individuals at locations other than military installations”.

(b) **LOCATIONS.**—Subsection (c) of such section is amended—

(1) in paragraph (1), by striking “not less than three and not more than five States” and inserting “not less than 50 locations in States (as defined in section 101(20) of title 38, United States Code)”; and

(2) in paragraph (2), by striking “at least two” and inserting “at least 20”.

(c) **CONFORMING REPEAL.**—Subsection (f) of such section is repealed.

SEC. 103. GRANTS FOR PROVISION OF TRANSITION ASSISTANCE TO MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES AFTER SEPARATION, RETIREMENT, OR DISCHARGE.

(a) **IN GENERAL.**—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall make grants to eligible organizations for the provision of transition assistance to members of the Armed Forces who are separated, retired, or discharged from the Armed Forces, and spouses of such members.

(b) **USE OF FUNDS.**—The recipient of a grant under this section shall use the grant to provide to members of the Armed Forces and spouses described in subsection (a) resume assistance, interview training, job recruitment training, and related services leading directly to successful transition, as determined by the Secretary.

(c) **ELIGIBLE ORGANIZATIONS.**—To be eligible for a grant under this section, an organization shall submit to the Secretary an application containing such information and assurances as the Secretary, in consultation with the Secretary of Labor, may require.

(d) **PRIORITY FOR HUBS OF SERVICES.**—In making grants under this section, the Secretary shall give priority to an organization that provides multiple forms of services described in subsection (b).

(e) **AMOUNT OF GRANT.**—A grant under this section shall be in an amount that does not exceed 50 percent of the amount required by the organization to provide the services described in subsection (b).

(f) **DEADLINE.**—The Secretary shall carry out this section not later than six months after the effective date of this Act.

(g) **TERMINATION.**—The authority to provide a grant under this section shall terminate on the date that is five years after the date on which the Secretary implements the grant program under this section.

(h) **AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.**—There is authorized to be appropriated \$10,000,000 to carry out this section.

SEC. 104. STUDY OF COMMUNITY-BASED TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS FOR MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES AFTER SEPARATION, RETIREMENT, OR DISCHARGE.

(a) **STUDY.**—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs, in consultation with State entities that serve members of the Armed Forces who are retired, separated, or discharged from the Armed Forces, shall enter into an agreement with an appropriate non-Federal entity to carry out a study to identify community-based programs—

(1) that provide transition assistance to such members; and

(2) operated by nonprofit entities.

(b) **TRANSMISSION TO MEMBERS.**—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall transmit the list of programs identified under this section to the Secretary of Defense so the Secretaries of the

military departments may provide information in the list to members of the Armed Forces who participate in TAP.

(c) **ONLINE PUBLICATION.**—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall publish the most recent version of the list of programs identified under this section on a public website of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

SEC. 105. ONE-YEAR INDEPENDENT ASSESSMENT OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF TAP.

(a) **INDEPENDENT ASSESSMENT.**—Not later than 90 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, in consultation with the covered officials, shall enter into an agreement with an appropriate entity with experience in adult education to carry out a one-year independent assessment of TAP, including—

(1) the effectiveness of TAP for members of each military department during the entire military life cycle;

(2) the appropriateness of the TAP career readiness standards;

(3) a review of information that is provided to the Department of Veterans Affairs under TAP, including mental health data;

(4) whether TAP effectively addresses the challenges veterans face entering the civilian workforce and in translating experience and skills from military service to the job market;

(5) whether TAP effectively addresses the challenges faced by the families of veterans making the transition to civilian life;

(6) appropriate metrics regarding TAP outcomes for members of the Armed Forces one year after separation, retirement, or discharge from the Armed Forces;

(7) what the Secretary, in consultation with the covered officials, veterans service organizations, and organizations described in section 203(a) of this Act, determine to be successful outcomes for TAP;

(8) whether members of the Armed Forces achieve successful outcomes for TAP, as determined under paragraph (7);

(9) how the Secretary and the covered officials provide feedback to each other regarding such outcomes;

(10) recommendations for the Secretaries of the military departments regarding how to improve outcomes for members of the Armed Forces after separation, retirement, and discharge; and

(11) other topics the Secretary and the covered officials determine would aid members of the Armed Forces as they transition to civilian life.

(b) **REPORT.**—Not later than 90 days after the completion of the independent assessment under subsection (a), the Secretary and the covered officials, shall submit to the Committees on Veterans’ Affairs of the Senate and House of Representatives and the Committees on Armed Services of the Senate and House of Representatives—

(1) the findings and recommendations (including recommended legislation) of the independent assessment prepared by the entity described in subsection (a); and

(2) responses of the Secretary and the covered officials to the findings and recommendations described in paragraph (1).

(c) **COVERED OFFICIALS DEFINED.**—In this section, the term “covered officials” is comprised of—

(1) the Secretary of Defense;

(2) the Secretary of Labor;

(3) the Administrator of the Small Business Administration; and

(4) the Secretaries of the military departments.

SEC. 106. LONGITUDINAL STUDY ON CHANGES TO TAP.

(a) **STUDY.**—Not later than 90 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, in consultation with the Secretaries of Defense and Labor and the Administrator of the Small Business Administration, shall conduct a five-year longitudinal study regarding TAP on three separate cohorts

of members of the Armed Forces who have separated from the Armed Forces, including—

(1) a cohort that has attended TAP counseling as implemented on the date of the enactment of this Act;

(2) a cohort that attends TAP counseling after the Secretaries of Defense and Labor implement changes recommended in the report under section 205(b) of this Act; and

(3) a cohort that has not attended TAP counseling.

(b) **PROGRESS REPORTS.**—Not later than 90 days after the day that is one year after the date of the initiation of the study under subsection (a) and annually thereafter for the three subsequent years, the Secretaries of Veterans Affairs, Defense, and Labor, and the Administrator of the Small Business Administration, shall submit to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and House of Representatives and the Committees on Armed Services of the Senate and House of Representatives a progress report of activities under the study during the immediately preceding year.

(c) **FINAL REPORT.**—Not later than 180 days after the completion of the study under subsection (a), the Secretaries of Veterans Affairs, Defense, and Labor, and the Administrator of the Small Business Administration, shall submit to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and House of Representatives and the Committees on Armed Services of the Senate and House of Representatives a report of final findings and recommendations based on the study.

(d) **ELEMENTS.**—The final report under subsection (c) shall include information regarding the following:

(1) The percentage of each cohort that received unemployment benefits during the study.

(2) The numbers of months members of each cohort were employed during the study.

(3) Annual starting and ending salaries of members of each cohort who were employed during the study.

(4) How many members of each cohort enrolled in an institution of higher learning, as that term is defined in section 3452(f) of title 38, United States Code.

(5) The academic credit hours, degrees, and certificates obtained by members of each cohort during the study.

(6) The annual income of members of each cohort.

(7) The total household income of members of each cohort.

(8) How many members of each cohort own their principal residences.

(9) How many dependents that members of each cohort have.

(10) The percentage of each cohort that achieves a successful outcome for TAP, as determined under section 205(a)(6) of this Act.

(11) Other criteria the Secretaries and the Administrator of the Small Business Administration determine appropriate.

TITLE II—EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE

SEC. 201. IMPROVEMENTS TO ASSISTANCE FOR CERTAIN FLIGHT TRAINING AND OTHER PROGRAMS OF EDUCATION.

(a) **USE OF ENTITLEMENT FOR PRIVATE PILOT'S LICENSES.**—Section 3034(d) of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) in paragraph (1) by striking the semicolon and inserting the following: “and is required for the course of education being pursued (including with respect to a dual major, concentration, or other element of a degree); and”;

(2) by striking paragraph (2); and

(3) by redesignating paragraph (3) as paragraph (2).

(b) **ACCELERATED PAYMENTS FOR FLIGHT TRAINING.**—Section 3313 of such title is amended by adding at the end the following new subsection:

“(k) **ACCELERATED PAYMENTS FOR CERTAIN FLIGHT TRAINING.**—

“(1) **PAYMENTS.**—An individual enrolled in a program of education pursued at a vocational

school or institution of higher learning in which flight training is required to earn the degree being pursued (including with respect to a dual major, concentration, or other element of such a degree) may elect to receive accelerated payments of amounts for tuition and fees determined under subsection (c). The amount of each accelerated payment shall be an amount equal to twice the amount for tuition and fee so determined under such subsection, but the total amount of such payments may not exceed the total amount of tuition and fees for the program of education. The amount of monthly stipends shall be determined in accordance with such subsection (c) and may not be accelerated under this paragraph.

“(2) **EDUCATIONAL COUNSELING.**—An individual may make an election under paragraph (1) only if the individual receives educational counseling under section 3697A(a) of this title.

“(3) **CHARGE AGAINST ENTITLEMENT.**—The number of months of entitlement charged an individual for accelerated payments made pursuant to paragraph (1) shall be determined at the rate of two months for each month in which such an accelerated payment is made.”.

(c) **FLIGHT TRAINING AT PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS.**—Subsection (c)(1)(A) of such section 3313 is amended—

(1) in clause (i)—

(A) by redesignating subclauses (I) and (II) as items (aa) and (bb), respectively;

(B) by striking “In the case of a program of education pursued at a public institution of higher learning” and inserting “(I) Subject to subclause (II), in the case of a program of education pursued at a public institution of higher learning not described in clause (ii)(II)(bb)”;

(C) by adding at the end the following new subclause:

“(II) In determining the actual net cost for in-State tuition and fees pursuant to subclause (I), the Secretary may not pay for tuition and fees relating to flight training.”; and

(2) in clause (ii)—

(A) in subclause (I), by redesignating items (aa) and (bb) as subitems (AA) and (BB), respectively;

(B) in subclause (II), by redesignating items (aa) and (bb) as subitems (AA) and (BB), respectively;

(C) by redesignating subclauses (I) and (II) as items (aa) and (bb), respectively;

(D) by striking “In the case of a program of education pursued at a non-public or foreign institution of higher learning” and inserting “(I) In the case of a program of education described in subclause (II)”;

(E) by adding at the end the following new subclause:

“(II) A program of education described in this subclause is any of the following:

“(aa) A program of education pursued at a non-public or foreign institution of higher learning.

“(bb) A program of education pursued at a public institution of higher learning in which flight training is required to earn the degree being pursued (including with respect to a dual major, concentration, or other element of such a degree).”.

(d) **CERTAIN PROGRAMS OF EDUCATION CARRIED OUT UNDER CONTRACT.**—Section 3313(c)(1)(A)(ii)(II) of title 38, United States Code, as added by subsection (c)(2)(E), is amended by adding at the end the following new item:

“(cc) A program of education pursued at a public institution of higher learning in which the public institution of higher learning enters into a contract or agreement with an entity (other than another public institution of higher learning) to provide such program of education or a portion of such program of education.”.

(e) **APPLICATION.**—

(1) **IN GENERAL.**—Except as provided by paragraph (2), the amendments made by this section

shall apply with respect to a quarter, semester, or term, as applicable, commencing on or after the date of the enactment of this Act.

(2) **SPECIAL RULE FOR CURRENT STUDENTS.**—In the case of an individual who, as of the date of the enactment of this Act, is using educational assistance under chapter 33 of title 38, United States Code, to pursue a course of education that includes a program of education described in item (bb) or (cc) of section 3313(c)(1)(A)(ii)(II) of title 38, United States Code, as added by subsections (c) and (d), respectively, the amendment made by such subsection shall apply with respect to a quarter, semester, or term, as applicable, commencing on or after the date that is two years after the date of the enactment of this Act.

SEC. 202. ELIMINATION OF THE PERIOD OF ELIGIBILITY FOR THE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION AND EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

(a) **IN GENERAL.**—Section 3103 of title 38, United States Code, is repealed.

(b) **CLERICAL AMENDMENT.**—The table of sections at the beginning of chapter 31 of such title is amended by striking the item relating to section 3103.

SEC. 203. EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE DURING EXTENDED SCHOOL CLOSURES DUE TO NATURAL DISASTERS.

Section 3680 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new subsection:

“(h) **SCHOOL CLOSURE DURING NATURAL DISASTERS.**—

“(1) **IN GENERAL.**—An individual described in paragraph (2) shall be entitled to a monthly stipend in the amount to which the individual would be entitled were the individual pursuing a course of education at an institution of higher education through resident training but for a school closure described under paragraph (4).

“(2) **INDIVIDUAL DESCRIBED.**—An individual described in this paragraph is an individual pursuing a course of education at an institution of higher education using educational assistance under chapter 32, 33, 34, or 35 of this title, who—

“(A) is forced to discontinue pursuing such course at such institution by reason of a school closure described under paragraph (4); and

“(B) opts to—

“(i) pursue that course of education solely by distance learning; or

“(ii) pursue an alternative course of education solely by distance learning.

“(3) **DURATION.**—The duration of the monthly stipends payable to an individual under paragraph (1) shall be the shorter of the following:

“(A) The period of time necessary to complete the quarter, semester, term or academic period during which the school closure described in paragraph (4) occurs.

“(B) Four months.

“(4) **SCHOOL CLOSURE.**—A school closure described in this paragraph is the closure of an institution of higher education—

“(A) by reason of a natural disaster;

“(B) for a period of time that—

“(i) the institution confirms will last for four weeks or longer; or

“(ii) the institution describes as indefinite and that endures for a period of four weeks or longer; and

“(C) that the Secretary confirms is covered for purposes of this subsection.

“(5) **NATURAL DISASTER DEFINED.**—In this subsection, the term ‘natural disaster’ means a specific weather event or earth process, including a hurricane, tornado, wildfire or forest fire, earthquake, avalanche, mudslide, hailstorm, thunderstorm, lightning storm, freeze, blizzard, sinkhole, or other disastrous event that occurs as a result of such an event or process, that the President or the governor of a State declares a natural disaster.

“(6) **NO CHARGE TO ENTITLEMENT.**—No charge shall be made to the entitlement of any individual to educational assistance under chapter

32, 33, 34, or 35 of this title by reason of a payment under this subsection.”.

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 in which 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. 5649, as amended, the Navy SEAL Chief Petty Officer William “Bill” Mulder (Ret.) Transition Improvements Act of 2018.

One of the most important things our government can do to help our Nation’s servicemembers is to ensure that their transition from military to civilian life is as smooth and seamless as possible. We all know that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, and I know that so many of the problems that veterans encounter later in life could have been mitigated if they had a more supportive and successful transition.

I know that the goal of this bill, and of provisions that are aimed at improving the transition period in the House version of the National Defense Authorization Act, are to help servicemembers have as smooth a transition as possible to civilian life.

I will allow Congressman JODEY ARRINGTON of Texas, who is the sponsor of this bill, to go into the specifics of it in a moment. But before I do, I want to thank him, Congressman BETO O’ROURKE of Texas, and all of the members of the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity for taking the time earlier this session to sit down with stakeholders and really examine the transition process from the very beginning and look at the need for improvements.

While this bill is a culmination of bipartisan review and work, it is only a step in the process to ensure a successful transition for all servicemembers. I know we will remain dedicated to making improvements to this process to reach this goal.

Mr. Speaker, I thank Chairman BRADY for helping to expedite the consideration of the bill today, and I thank Congressman ARRINGTON for his work.

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

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS’ AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC, July 16, 2018.

Hon. KEVIN BRADY,
Chairman, House Ways and Means Committee,
Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: On July 12, 2018, the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs ordered re-

ported H.R. 5649, as amended, the Navy SEAL Chief Petty Officer William “Bill” Mulder (Ret.) Transition Improvement Act of 2018. The bill was referred to the House Veterans’ Affairs Committee with additional referrals to the House Ways and Means Committee and the House Armed Services Committee. Based on our previous consultation, we intend to request H.R. 5649, as amended, be scheduled for floor consideration.

To expedite floor consideration, I ask that you forego further consideration of H.R. 5649, as amended. This in no way affects your jurisdiction over the subject matter of the bill, and it will not serve as precedent for future referrals. In addition, should a conference on the bill be necessary, I would support your request to have the House Ways and Means Committee represented on the conference committee. Finally, I would be pleased to include this letter and any response in the bill report filed by the Committee on H.R. 5649, as amended, as well as in the Congressional Record during floor consideration to memorialize our understanding.

Thank you for your consideration of my request.

Sincerely,

DAVID P. ROE, M.D.,
Chairman.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS,
Washington, DC, July 17, 2018.

Hon. DAVID P. ROE, M.D.,
Chairman, Committee on Veterans’ Affairs,
Washington, DC.

DEAR CHAIRMAN ROE: Thank you for your July 16, 2018 letter regarding H.R. 5649, the “Navy SEAL Chief Petty Officer William “Bill” Mulder (Ret.) Transition Improvement Act of 2018” which was ordered favorably reported to the House on July 12, 2018.

As a result of your having consulted with us on provisions in H.R. 5649 that fall within the Rule X jurisdiction of the Committee on Ways and Means, I agree to waive formal consideration of this bill so that it may move expeditiously to the floor. The Committee on Ways and Means takes this action with the mutual understanding that we do not waive any jurisdiction over the subject matter contained in this or similar legislation, and the Committee will be appropriately consulted and involved as the bill or similar legislation moves forward so that we may address any remaining issues that fall within our jurisdiction. The Committee also reserves the right to seek appointment of an appropriate number of conferees to any House-Senate conference involving this or similar legislation, and requests your support for such request.

Finally, would ask that a copy of our exchange of letters on this matter be included in the Congressional Record during floor consideration of H.R. 5649.

Sincerely,

KEVIN BRADY,
Chairman.

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 5649, as amended, the Navy SEAL Chief Petty Officer William “Bill” Mulder (Ret.) Transition Improvements Act of 2018.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the Economic Opportunity Subcommittee chairman, Mr. ARRINGTON, and ranking member, Mr. O’ROURKE, for their bipartisan focus on this issue and the bipartisan way they have crafted this piece of legislation and have moved it forward.

This bill was generated out of feedback from our veteran service organi-

zation partners, rigorous oversight, and many, many hearings. It includes a number of curriculum changes, expansion of services, as well as first steps to making TAP a part of a larger transition effort.

It also includes Ms. BROWNLEY’s Reduce Unemployment for Veterans of All Ages Act, which eliminates the period of eligibility for vocational rehabilitation services. Currently, veterans have only 12 years after their military service to utilize vocational rehabilitation services. This removes that deadline and allows anyone who qualifies for vocational rehabilitation to access those services in perpetuity.

It also includes Mr. POE’s Veterans Education Disaster Act that provides continued educational assistance to students impacted by natural disasters. This is similar to the benefits that are provided for veterans whose schools suddenly close their doors, in order to ensure that veterans are not struggling while they seek to restart their education. This would also allow veterans to continue collecting their housing benefits even though their schools closed from natural disasters, and allow them to stop and restart their tuition benefits once their schools reopen.

We also pay for this bill by closing a loophole in flight school costs, while also making modifications to law that allows for the unique nature of flight schools.

All of these provisions have been crafted to fix issues we have seen in the field, and they will make life a little bit easier for our veterans.

Mr. Speaker, again, I thank Mr. O’ROURKE and Mr. ARRINGTON for these necessary improvements to the Transition Assistance Program. A testament to their work is the broad support they have received from committee members for this bill, including Ms. KUSTER, Mr. PETERS, and Ms. ESTY. I look forward to their future work on this as they continue to focus on and refine the program.

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

Mr. ROE of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I yield 4 minutes to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. ARRINGTON), chairman of the Economic Opportunity Subcommittee on the House Veterans’ Affairs Committee, and my good friend.

Mr. ARRINGTON. Mr. Speaker, I can’t thank the chairman enough for the opportunity to serve with him, Mr. TAKANO, and Mr. WENSTRUP. I am looking out and seeing colleagues on both sides of the aisle who have worked in a bipartisan way to solve problems so that we can better serve our veterans. I have to say, it has to be the most productive bipartisan committee in all of the United States Congress, and that is refreshing. And there is no worthier customer to serve than those who wore the uniform, those who sacrificed their today so that we could have our tomorrow.

I think it is notable to remind my colleagues of the work under his leadership to produce more than 70 pieces of reform legislation. Seventy bills that have passed the House of Representatives is no small task. More than 20 bills have become law of the land.

Again, I thank Mr. TAKANO for his leadership, Mr. WALZ, and my friends on the other side of the aisle. This is truly a bipartisan committee and effort altogether.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to encourage my colleagues to support my bill, H.R. 5649. It is really not my bill; it is our bill. It is the bill of the committee, and it is the bill of the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity. This is a bill that was amended as the Navy SEAL Chief Petty Officer William "Bill" Mulder (Ret.) Transition Improvements Act of 2018.

Mr. Speaker, again, there is no greater honor for me than to serve the men and women who served our country with honor and distinction. I am pleased to be here today to debate the legislation I introduced, which I believe will significantly improve the lives of our servicemen and -women who are in transition from Active Duty to civilian life.

When our soldiers come home from war, it doesn't mean that the conflict necessarily is over for them. There is often a battle that continues to rage on inside of them. I think that is a big reason that we see, unfortunately, 20 veterans commit suicide every day in this country.

One of those veterans was my good friend and fellow Plainview Bulldog, Bill Mulder, after whom this bill was named. I am so proud that this is named after Bill, and I am grateful to Sydney and their family for allowing us to do so.

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Bill was a true American hero who served his country with honor and distinction. However, again, like many of our veterans, Bill returned home from service with an internal struggle, with scars that you couldn't see with the naked eye, and he was working through his transition to civilian life after 20 years as a combat Navy SEAL. That is tough. I can't imagine, to think about redefining your purpose and your mission after 20 years of fighting for our freedom in combat as a Navy SEAL.

Our country makes a tremendous investment, as Chairman ROE said, in preparing our citizens to be freedom fighters, to be part of the greatest fighting machine in the world, but we only invest a fraction of that helping soldiers in their transition back to civilian life.

I have often said, like the gentleman has stated, that an ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure. And if we do a better job on the front end in their transition, and especially identifying the highest-risk individuals, I think that we can reduce the number

of veterans who struggle with unemployment, with homelessness, suicide, et cetera.

This bill is the result, again, of Mr. TAKANO, Mr. O'ROURKE, my ranking member, my friend and fellow Texan, and it will make the following improvements: It will improve in the sense that we will engage our Active Duty personnel earlier in the process. We will have a more comprehensive assessment, including mental health. We will customize support for them.

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

Mr. ROE of Tennessee. I yield the gentleman from Texas an additional 1 minute.

Mr. ARRINGTON. It will not just be a one-size-fits-all, I think, like we have seen in the past. We will also connect them back to community organizations and we will track and we will measure the success and the outcomes so we will know what is working, where we can continue to make those investments.

Again, I want to thank my friend and fellow Texan, Mr. O'ROURKE, for working with me on this package, and Chairman ROE, and Mr. WALZ for helping bring this forward and to a vote here on the House floor.

I am proud to say that this bill is fully offset. It is budget neutral, and I believe it will have a positive impact; in fact, I pray it will actually save lives of our American veterans.

I urge all Members to support H.R. 5649, as amended.

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

The work of this subcommittee is the work of great heart, and I appreciate the heartfelt work that the chairman, Mr. ARRINGTON, has put forward.

I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. O'ROURKE), my good friend, the ranking member of the Economic Opportunity Subcommittee, a gentleman with great heart for veterans.

Mr. O'ROURKE. Mr. Speaker, I thank the vice-ranking member of the full committee, Mr. TAKANO, for this time to speak in favor of this bill.

As my colleague from Texas, and the chairman of the subcommittee pointed out, by the best estimate of the VA, which many believe is a conservative estimate, every single day in this country, 20 veterans will have taken their lives.

The purpose and the function and the dignity that they found as a member of the armed services, as a contributing member of their military unit, where the decisions that they made, the actions that they took, would literally save and determine the outcomes of the lives of their fellow servicemembers, to return that level of function and purpose to their lives when they come back to this country and reintegrate within our communities, that is the purpose of this legislation.

I want to thank my colleague, the chairman of the subcommittee, for his

diligent work on this, by convening stakeholders, veterans service organizations, veteran student service organizations, members of the VA, the Department of Labor, other colleagues from the committee to make sure that we got this right and that we help those servicemembers transition into a life that allows them to give to their full potential once back in their home community, once back in their country.

I want to make sure that we do everything we can to ensure the success of this legislation; that we follow the outcome assessments that are provided for in the legislation; that we meet the intention and the purpose that is described here, so that it is not a boxes checked at the end of a servicemember's career, but something that is pursued with thought, so that when that servicemember reintegrates, they are ready to hit the ground running.

Lastly, I want to thank the chairman of the full committee. Some will say that without Tennessee, there would be no Texas. Without Chairman ROE, there would be no H.R. 5649. The fact that you elevated this and that you spent so much of your time personally listening to these veteran service organizations and your colleagues on the committee, I think, helped to make it a much better bill than it would have been otherwise, and for that I am grateful.

Mr. ROE of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. WENSTRUP), my good friend, a former member of the committee, and chair of the Subcommittee on Health, also a member of the House Armed Services Committee and the Intelligence Committee.

Mr. WENSTRUP. Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 5649.

As a member of the Army Reserve who served in Iraq, I know how difficult the transition to civilian life can be after service for so many of our servicemembers. I still remember the eerie feeling of the quiet and serenity of home life after returning from the battlefield.

For those servicemembers who don't have a clear cut path upon their return to civilian life, there is often a struggle for what I like to refer to as post-necessary stress.

When you go from being completely necessary, part of a team, part of something big, and you come home and you don't have that same feeling, it takes its toll on you. It is hard for many servicemembers to actually settle back into civilian life when they get back. This is what this is about.

We can combat this problem by encouraging servicemembers to focus on transition earlier. Even when they first join the armed services, imagine if you were being recruited and you are talking to a recruiter about what you plan to do when you enter the military, and if they also said to you, and what do you plan to do afterwards? If we were plotting a course for your life when in uniform and after.

So this gives us a chance to modernize our curriculum for those going through the Transition Assistance Program to ensure that the information they have is timely and specific to the servicemember.

I think this legislation is an important first step to better equip servicemembers with the skills needed to successfully transition into civilian life.

I encourage my colleagues to support this legislation. I want to thank the committee, all the members on the committee, and the staff, for pushing this along and doing such a great job of that.

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentlewoman from Connecticut (Ms. ESTY), my good friend, and the ranking member of the Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs.

Ms. ESTY of Connecticut. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 5649, the Navy SEAL Chief Petty Officer William "Bill" Mulder Transition Improvement Act of 2018, a bill that will improve the transition process for servicemembers returning to civilian life to a life of purpose and meaning.

I want to thank my colleagues, the gentlemen from Texas, Mr. ARRINGTON and Mr. O'ROURKE, for introducing this important bill; and for including my own bill, the Job TOOLS for Veterans Act, as a provision within this larger legislation.

The Job TOOLS Act for veterans would ensure that veterans of all eras have access to transition assistance classes. The Transition Assistance Program, commonly known as TAP, was established to help current servicemembers transition to civilian life with job search and training information.

Prior to the establishment of TAP, very few servicemembers received any job training assistance during their transition at all.

We know that access to job training is essential to our mission of ensuring that all our servicemembers land on their feet when they return home from protecting our freedom. And given the transitions that veterans face over the years, especially in a changing economy, these job training programs are especially valuable throughout life; and that is why our bill would allow veterans, no matter when they served, to get access to this crucial assistance.

Additionally, it will allow veterans from any service era access to all TAP programs and will expand the TAP program to at least 50 locations across the United States.

The men and women who have admirably served our great Nation must know that we stand behind them when transitioning from military to civilian life, and that we stand behind them for life.

I want to thank Chairman ROE, Ranking Member WALZ, and Vice Ranking Member TAKANO for their work in getting this important bill to the floor today, for the outstanding bi-

partisan work of this committee, which I am so proud to serve on, and for our excellent staff.

I fully support H.R. 5649, and I urge all of my colleagues to support this legislation, and to stand behind the veterans who will be assisted by this across the Nation.

Mr. ROE of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Florida (Mr. RUTHERFORD) a former, very active member on the Veterans Affairs Committee, and a good friend.

Mr. RUTHERFORD. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of H.R. 5649, the Navy SEAL Chief Petty Officer William Mulder Transition Improvement Act.

In my time on the House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity, my colleagues and I heard from countless constituents, including Active Duty and separated servicemembers about how ineffective the Federal Government's comprehensive Transition Assistance Program was at placing our veterans in long-term, stable employment.

Under the leadership of Chairman ROE and Subcommittee Chairman ARRINGTON, the subcommittee held a number of roundtables, hearings, meetings to receive feedback from all the stakeholders. We heard from DOD, the Department of Labor, Veterans Affairs, community providers and, of course, veterans themselves.

One section of this bill that I would like to highlight and thank Chairman ARRINGTON for including is section 203, which is bill language I introduced last year called the Veterans Armed for Success Act.

This section makes grants available to organizations that provide servicemembers transition assistance of their knowledge, skills, and abilities to private industry through such means as résumé building and interview training, and it is mirrored off an organization called Operation New Uniform that does just that in my district in Florida. This group has a 97 percent success rate in placing veterans in long-term employment.

As we learned through the information gathering process, a successful transition often relies on the community supporting our veterans and connecting with the resources that they need. We should help this and other similar organizations around the country use this model to help our veterans succeed.

I strongly commend Chairman ROE, Chairman ARRINGTON, Ranking Member WALZ, and all the members of the committee for their incredible work on this important piece of legislation. You all, along with the committee staff and other groups that worked so hard on this, should be proud of the real world impact that this legislation will have.

As I now serve as a member of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs, I look forward to building on this important work with my col-

leagues to ensure our veterans are set up to succeed.

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

Mr. Speaker, this is a very special piece of legislation to me. I was once the ranking member of this very subcommittee, and I applaud the work of Ranking Member BETO O'ROURKE and Chairman ARRINGTON. This is a work of great heart, of great compassion, and we all know that we need to improve the transition from military service to civilian life for our servicemembers.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to join me in passing H.R. 5649, as amended, and I yield back the balance of my time.

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Mr. ROE of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I want to close by thanking Mr. ARRINGTON and Mr. O'ROURKE for bringing this great piece of legislation to the floor.

As I was listening to the debate and conversation, it sort of took me back a few years. I recall 53 years ago, when I was a college student, and I buried a very good friend of mine, who was my Scoutmaster, First Sergeant Thomas E. Thayer, who was killed in Vietnam. He won the Silver Star there. He had four children and a family at home. His life was worth, I think, \$10,000. I think that is what it was worth. I thought about what it did to his family and how little our country did for our Nation's heroes at that time, and I fast-forward to what we are doing now. We are making some things right.

I know Mr. ARRINGTON spoke very warmly of his friend, Chief Petty Officer Bill Mulder, a true American hero, who died.

I know when I separated from the military at the end of 1974, got back from Southeast Asia, separated from the Army, there was no transition. It was basically just out the front gate you went, and no one called, checked, whatever.

We are much better as a country, and we are much better now, Mr. Speaker, for what we are doing in this bill.

I agree with Mr. O'ROURKE and Mr. ARRINGTON. I really believe if you put these young men and women back in a job, in school, which we just passed the Forever GI Bill from this committee and the President has signed it into law, all of these things, I think, will make a huge difference in the future not only of these young people who have served our Nation so honorably, but it will also help this country, this Nation.

I know, as a veteran and as a person who did not benefit from this, I certainly am more than happy to support this. I think this is a great piece of legislation.

Mr. Speaker, again, I want to thank Mr. WALZ, Mr. TAKANO, and others who have helped push this through, and I again encourage all Members to support H.R. 5649, 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. 5649, 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.

GOLD STAR SPOUSES LEASING RELIEF ACT

Mr. ROE of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 5882) to amend the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act to provide for the termination by a spouse of a lessee of certain leases when the lessee dies while in military service, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 5882

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 “Gold Star Spouses Leasing Relief Act”.

SEC. 2. TERMINATION OF LEASES OF PREMISES OF DECEASED SERVICEMEMBERS WHO DIE WHILE IN MILITARY SERVICE.

Section 305(a) of the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (50 U.S.C. 3955) is amended—

(1) in the subsection heading, by striking “BY LESSEE”;

(2) in the heading for paragraph (1), by striking “IN GENERAL” and inserting “TERMINATION BY LESSEE”; and

(3) by adding at the end the following new paragraph:

“(3) DEATH OF LESSEE.—The spouse of the lessee on a lease described in subsection (b)(1) may terminate the lease during the one-year period beginning on the date of the death of the lessee, if the lessee dies while in military service or while performing full-time National Guard duty, active Guard and Reserve duty, or inactive-duty training (as such terms are defined in section 101(d) of title 10, United States Code).”.

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 in which 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 as much time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 5882, as amended, the Gold Star Spouses Leasing Relief Act.

The death of a servicemember can have a profound impact on their loved

ones. Our government should take every measure necessary to help family members through such a time of need.

In recognition of that, the Gold Star Spouses Leasing Relief Act would amend the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act, the SCRA, to allow a spouse of a servicemember who has died due to military service to break their residential lease without penalty within 1 year of the servicemember's death.

Mr. Speaker, paying fees for breaking a lease should be the last thing on someone's mind when they are confronting life without their spouse.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the sponsor of this bill, Congresswoman CHERI BUSTOS of Illinois, for her commonsense solution to this problem. I also want to thank Ranking Member WALZ and his staff for their suggestion to improve the bill by including in it a provision that would extend protection to surviving spouses of members of the National Guard and Reserve whose death occurred while on Active-Duty orders.

We should recognize the service of all servicemembers on Active-Duty orders, and I am glad the amended version of this bill includes that provision.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all Members to support this bill, and I reserve the balance of my time.

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 5882, as amended, the Gold Star Spouses Leasing Relief Act.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to first start by thanking the gentlewoman from Illinois (Mrs. BUSTOS) for drafting this bill. It would allow the spouse of a servicemember to terminate their lease after the death of the servicemember.

Oftentimes, servicemembers and their families are required to move far away from home due to the needs of the service and where the servicemember is stationed. In the difficult time after the passing of a servicemember, spouses should not be stuck in a lease far away from their home and support network. This may seem like a small detail, but it is something that can make life just a little bit easier in a very trying time.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the chairman for working with us on including National Guard and Reserve servicemembers who are killed while on duty.

As we move the Reserve components from a Strategic Reserve to an Operational Reserve concept, we are seeing too many deaths of National Guardsmen and -women and reservists while they are in uniform. It is critically important that we modernize our statutes to ensure benefits parity while servicemembers are in uniform.

Mr. Speaker, again, I would like to thank the gentlewoman from Illinois (Mrs. BUSTOS), for working on this issue and Mr. WENSTRUP for joining her in introducing the bill. I would also like to thank our fellow committee members, Ms. KUSTER, Ms. BROWNLEY,

and Miss GONZÁLEZ-COLÓN, for cosponsoring this bill and raising the profile of this issue.

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

Mr. ROE of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. WENSTRUP). He spoke a moment ago. He has previously served as chair of the Health Subcommittee of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee.

Mr. WENSTRUP. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of the Gold Star Spouses Leasing Relief Act, legislation that I am proud to have introduced alongside my colleague Congresswoman BUSTOS, and I thank her for bringing this situation to my attention so that we could bring this forward.

Part of our Nation's commitment to our men and women in uniform is a commitment to their families, especially if they endure the loss of life in the line of duty. As Gold Star families grieve, they should have the freedom to relocate to fit their family's needs. Sadly, that is all too often not the case.

Cindy Southern, a native of Portsmouth, Ohio, lost her husband while he was serving in the Navy overseas during the first Desert Storm war. As she grieved, all she wanted to do was move home, but she had signed a 1-year lease on a home in North Carolina. Her landlords refused to waive her lease without massive termination fees.

Cindy has suffered enough. Others have as well. This legislation would protect Gold Star families by ensuring they are not trapped in a jointly held residential lease after the death of a servicemember. They have grieved enough.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this important legislation.

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

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I yield 5 minutes to the gentlewoman from Illinois (Mrs. BUSTOS), my good friend and the author of this bill.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of my bill, the Gold Star Spouses Leasing Relief Act. This bipartisan bill would support the widows and widowers of our fallen heroes by allowing them to terminate residential leases without penalty in the wake of a servicemember's death.

This issue first came to my attention when I met a Gold Star spouse, Kylie Riney of Farmington, Illinois, which is in a central part of the congressional district that I serve.

Kylie's life was forever changed on October 19, 2016, when her husband, Sergeant Douglas Riney, tragically died defending our freedom in Kabul, Afghanistan.

Kylie and her two young children, James and Elea, were living in Texas at the time. This is their beautiful family before tragedy hit. They had moved there when Sergeant Riney was