

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

assigned to Fort Hood before deploying in support of Operation Freedom's Sentinel.

After her husband's death, Kylie chose to be back in Illinois with her family, surrounded by those whom she loves and love her so they could mourn together this inconceivable loss. But in the wake of this tragedy, their landlord refused to allow Kylie to terminate the lease that she and her husband had signed—I mean, it is just hard to even get those words out—refused to allow them to get out of their lease.

The families of our fallen heroes have already sacrificed far too much, and we should do everything in our power to ensure grieving spouses receive the support that they need. For this reason, I was proud to introduce this commonsense, bipartisan bill, the Gold Star Spouses Leasing Relief Act.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague, Congressman BRAD WENSTRUP, who is also an Army Reserve officer and a physician, who helped introduce this with me. I would also like to thank Chairman ROE and Ranking Member TIM WALZ for their work in bringing this to the floor.

Currently, the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act protects servicemembers from lease termination fees when they deploy or receive a permanent change of station. Our legislation narrowly extends that law's residential leasing protections to the surviving spouses of servicemembers who are killed while serving their country.

Ranking Member WALZ helped ensure the bill would protect all these families, including those who lose a member of the National Guard or Reserves. He has been a tireless advocate for the National Guard in Congress, and it is a pleasure to be able to work with him.

I can hardly think of anything worse than taking advantage of a grieving widow or widower whose spouse made the ultimate sacrifice for our country. Mr. Speaker, I ask my colleagues to support this bill to ensure this does not happen again.

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

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I have no more speakers. I am prepared to close, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. ROE of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I am prepared to close.

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to join me in passing H.R. 5882, as amended.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman from Illinois for introducing this important piece of legislation. I am dumbfounded that we have landlords who would not recognize the situation of a fallen soldier, but this law is necessary, and I urge all my colleagues to support it.

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

Mr. ROE of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I, too, associate my comments with Mr. TAKANO.

I grew up in a military town, Clarksville, Tennessee, where, during the

Vietnam war, I saw all too many families broken apart, had to move. I find it almost unimaginable that a landlord would insist that somebody not separate, not do this when they have lost a spouse.

That beautiful family that she showed, their lives are changed forever, and the last thing that young widow needed to worry about was that. She needed to take care of those children, to explain why their father was not coming home or, in another case, their mother might not be coming home.

Mr. Speaker, I can't think of any bill that deserves the support more than this one does, and I encourage all Members to support H.R. 5882, as amended.

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

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. GAETZ). 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. 5882, 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.

VA HOSPITALS ESTABLISHING LEADERSHIP PERFORMANCE ACT

Mr. ROE of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 5864) to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish qualifications for the human resources positions within the Veterans Health Administration of the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 5864

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

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "VA Hospitals Establishing Leadership Performance Act".

SEC. 2. QUALIFICATIONS FOR HUMAN RESOURCES POSITIONS WITHIN THE VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

(a) ESTABLISHMENT OF QUALIFICATIONS.—Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall—

(1) establish qualifications for each human resources position within the Veterans Health Administration of the Department of Veterans Affairs;

(2) establish standardized performance metrics for each such position; and

(3) submit to Congress a report containing the qualifications and standardized performance metrics established under paragraphs (1) and (2).

(b) REPORT.—Not later than 180 days after the establishment of the qualifications and performance metrics under subsection (a), the Comptroller General of the United States shall submit to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate a report containing—

(1) a description of the implementation of such qualifications and performance metrics; and

(2) an assessment of the quality of such qualifications and performance metrics.

SEC. 3. NO ADDITIONAL FUNDS AUTHORIZED.

No additional funds are authorized to be appropriated to carry out the requirements of this Act. Such requirements shall be carried out using amounts otherwise authorized to be appropriated.

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.

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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. 5864, the VA Hospitals Establishing Leadership Performance Act, or the VA HELP Act.

The significant recruitment and retention challenges facing the VA healthcare system are nothing new. One of my priorities as chairman has been to help the VA address those challenges and attract high-quality clinicians and support staff to VA medical facilities. To that end, I have worked to see two major pieces of legislation—the VA Choice and Quality Employment Act, and the VA Mission Act—signed into law this Congress include extensive improvements to the VA's hiring authorities.

However, those improvements will not be nearly as effective as they could be if the HR professionals that are administering them aren't operating at the top of their game. Unfortunately, the committee has found several instances where it appeared that some HR staff working in VA medical facilities had substandard education and professional backgrounds, including one HR director at a VA medical center who lacked both a college degree and relevant work experience.

To prevent that, the VA HELP Act would require the VA to establish qualification standards and standardized performance metrics for HR within the VHA. To ensure transparency and to aid the committee in our ongoing oversight efforts, it would also require the VA to provide Congress with a copy of those qualification standards and performance metrics, as well as require the Government Accountability Office to conduct an assessment of them.

I wholeheartedly believe that this bill will result in better staffed VA medical facilities, and, therefore, a