

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

Mr. LYNCH. Mr. Speaker, I have no further speakers.

Mr. Speaker, again, I urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to support this bill, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. JODY B. HICE of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I also urge adoption of this bill, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. JODY B. HICE) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 6893, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

The title of the bill was amended so as to read: "A bill to amend the Overtime Pay for Protective Services Act of 2016 to extend the Secret Service overtime pay exception through 2020, and for other purposes."

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

PROVIDING CERTAIN BURIAL BENEFITS FOR SPOUSES AND CHILDREN OF VETERANS WHO ARE BURIED IN TRIBAL CEMETERIES

Mr. ROE of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (S. 2248) to amend title 38, United States Code, to authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide certain burial benefits for spouses and children of veterans who are buried in tribal cemeteries, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

S. 2248

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

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE; TABLE OF CONTENTS.

(a) SHORT TITLE.—This Act may be cited as the "Veterans Benefits and Transition Act of 2018".

(b) TABLE OF CONTENTS.—The table of contents for this Act is as follows:

Sec. 1. Short title; table of contents.

TITLE I—EDUCATION

Sec. 101. 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.

Sec. 102. Provision of monthly housing stipend information under Post-9/11 Educational Assistance Program.

Sec. 103. Disapproval for purposes of educational assistance programs of Department of Veterans Affairs of certain courses of education that do not permit individuals to attend or participate in courses pending payment.

Sec. 104. Provision of information on required additional actions to allow individuals to stay enrolled in courses of education pending receipt of educational assistance from department of veterans affairs.

Sec. 105. Calculation of monthly housing stipend under high technology pilot program based on location of campus where veteran attends classes.

Sec. 106. Clarification regarding applicability of authority to use educational assistance to pursue independent study programs at certain educational institutions that are not institutions of higher learning.

TITLE II—MEMORIAL AFFAIRS

Sec. 201. Eligibility of spouses and children of veterans buried in tribal cemeteries for certain Department of Veterans Affairs burial benefits.

Sec. 202. Department of Veterans Affairs provision of headstones and markers for, and interment in national cemeteries of, spouses and dependent children of members of the Armed Forces serving on active duty.

TITLE III—CIVIL RELIEF

Sec. 301. Termination of leases of premises of deceased servicemembers who die while in military service.

Sec. 302. Residence of spouses of servicemembers for tax purposes.

Sec. 303. Residence of spouses of servicemembers for voting.

Sec. 304. Termination of multichannel video programming and internet access service contracts.

TITLE IV—TRANSITION ASSISTANCE

Sec. 401. Study of community-based transition assistance programs for members of the Armed Forces after separation, retirement, or discharge.

TITLE V—DEPARTMENTAL ADMINISTRATION

Sec. 501. Misuse of Department of Veterans Affairs purchase cards by Department employees.

Sec. 502. Updating dependent information.

Sec. 503. Oversight of Electronic Health Record Modernization Program.

Sec. 504. Department of Veterans Affairs notice relating to debt collection activities.

TITLE VI—MEDICAL FACILITIES

Sec. 601. Authorization of major medical facility projects for fiscal year 2019.

Sec. 602. Plans to improve medical facilities of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

TITLE VII—OTHER MATTERS

Sec. 701. Homeless veterans reintegration programs.

Sec. 702. Technical corrections.

Sec. 703. Medical Surgical Prime Vendor program.

Sec. 704. Report on expanding access to dental care for veterans eligible for health care from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

TITLE I—EDUCATION

SEC. 101. 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".

SEC. 102. PROVISION OF MONTHLY HOUSING STIPEND INFORMATION UNDER POST-9/11 EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM.

Section 3313 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new subsection:

"(k) PROVISION OF HOUSING STIPEND PAYMENT INFORMATION.—

"(1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall furnish to individuals receiving educational assistance under this chapter documentation that verifies the amount of the monthly housing stipend the individual receives under this section.

"(2) MANNER.—The Secretary shall make such documentation available to the individual using an internet website in the same manner the Secretary provides documentation verifying compensation and other benefits furnished by the Secretary to individuals."

SEC. 103. DISAPPROVAL FOR PURPOSES OF EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS OF CERTAIN COURSES OF EDUCATION THAT DO NOT PERMIT INDIVIDUALS TO ATTEND OR PARTICIPATE IN COURSES PENDING PAYMENT.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Section 3679 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new subsection:

"(e)(1) Notwithstanding any other provision of this chapter, beginning on August 1, 2019, a State approving agency, or the Secretary when acting in the role of the State approving agency, shall disapprove a course of education provided by an educational institution that has in effect a policy that is inconsistent with any of the following:

"(A) A policy that permits any covered individual to attend or participate in the course of education during the period beginning on the date on which the individual provides to the educational institution a certificate of eligibility for entitlement to educational assistance under chapter 31 or 33 of this title and ending on the earlier of the following dates:

"(i) The date on which the Secretary provides payment for such course of education to such institution.

"(ii) The date that is 90 days after the date on which the educational institution certifies for tuition and fees following receipt from the student such certificate of eligibility.

"(B) A policy that ensures that the educational institution will not impose any penalty, including the assessment of late fees, the denial of access to classes, libraries, or other institutional facilities, or the requirement that a covered individual borrow additional funds, on any covered individual because of the individual's inability to meet his or her financial obligations to the institution due to the delayed disbursement of a payment to be provided by the Secretary under chapter 31 or 33 of this title.

"(2) For purposes of this subsection, a covered individual is any individual who is entitled to educational assistance under chapter 31 or 33 of this title.

"(3) The Secretary may waive such requirements of paragraph (1) as the Secretary considers appropriate.

“(4) It shall not be inconsistent with a policy described in paragraph (1) for an educational institution to require a covered individual to take the following additional actions:

“(A) Submit a certificate of eligibility for entitlement to educational assistance not later than the first day of a course of education for which the individual has indicated the individual wishes to use the individual’s entitlement to educational assistance.

“(B) Submit a written request to use such entitlement.

“(C) Provide additional information necessary to the proper certification of enrollment by the educational institution.”.

(b) PROMPT PAYMENTS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall take such actions as may be necessary to ensure that the Secretary makes a payment to an educational institution on behalf of an individual, who is entitled to educational assistance under chapter 31 or 33 of title 38, United States Code, and who is using such assistance to pursue a program of education at the educational institution, not later than 60 days after the date on which the educational institution certifies to the Secretary the applicable tuition and fees for the individual.

(2) SEMIANNUAL REPORTS.—Not later than May 1 and October 1 of each year, the Secretary shall submit to the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs of the Senate and the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs of the House of Representatives a semiannual report summarizing any cases in which the Secretary failed to make a payment described in paragraph (1) within the period set forth in such paragraph and an explanation for each delayed disbursement of payment.

(c) RULE OF CONSTRUCTION.—In a case in which an individual is unable to meet a financial obligation to an educational institution due to the delayed disbursement of a payment to be provided by the Secretary under chapter 31 or 33 of such title and the amount of such disbursement is less than anticipated, nothing in section 3679(e) of such title, as added by subsection (a), shall be construed to prohibit an educational institution from requiring additional payment or imposing a fee for the amount that is the difference between the amount of the financial obligation and the amount of the disbursement.

SEC. 104. PROVISION OF INFORMATION ON REQUIRED ADDITIONAL ACTIONS TO ALLOW INDIVIDUALS TO STAY ENROLLED IN COURSES OF EDUCATION PENDING RECEIPT OF EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE FROM DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

Section 3698(c)(1)(C) of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) in clause (x), by striking “; and” and inserting a semicolon;

(2) in clause (xi), by striking the period at the end and inserting “; and”; and

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

“(xii) information on whether the institution requires a covered individual to take additional action pursuant to section 3679(e)(4) of this title to stay enrolled in a course pending receipt of educational assistance under a law administered by the Secretary.”.

SECTION 105. CALCULATION OF MONTHLY HOUSING STIPEND UNDER HIGH TECHNOLOGY PILOT PROGRAM BASED ON LOCATION OF CAMPUS WHERE VETERAN ATTENDS CLASSES.

Section 116(d)(1) of the Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017 (Public Law 115-48, 38 U.S.C. 3001 (note)), is amended—

(1) in subparagraph (A), by striking “the institution at which the individual is en-

rolled” and inserting “the campus of the institution where the individual physically participates in a majority of classes”; and

(2) in subparagraph (B), by striking “the amount payable” and all that follows through “subparagraph (A)” and inserting “the national average of the monthly amount of the basic allowance for housing payable under section 403 of title 37, United States Code, for a member with dependents in pay grade E-5”.

SEC. 106. CLARIFICATION REGARDING APPLICABILITY OF AUTHORITY TO USE EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE TO PURSUE INDEPENDENT STUDY PROGRAMS AT CERTAIN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS THAT ARE NOT INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING.

The section heading for section 302 of the Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017 (Public Law 115-48; 131 Stat. 990) is amended to read as follows (and the table of contents for such Act is conformed accordingly):

“SEC. 302. AUTHORIZATION FOR USE OF EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE UNDER ANY OF THE EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS TO PURSUE INDEPENDENT STUDY PROGRAMS AT CERTAIN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS THAT ARE NOT INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING.”.

TITLE II—MEMORIAL AFFAIRS

SEC. 201. ELIGIBILITY OF SPOUSES AND CHILDREN OF VETERANS BURIED IN TRIBAL CEMETERIES FOR CERTAIN DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS BURIAL BENEFITS.

Section 2306 of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) in subsection (a)(4), by inserting “or a veterans’ cemetery owned by a tribal organization or on land owned by or held in trust for a tribal organization” after “State”;;

(2) in subsection (b)(1), by inserting “, a veterans’ cemetery of a tribal organization or on land owned by or held in trust for a tribal organization” after “owned by a State”;

(3) in subsection (f)—

(A) by redesignating paragraphs (1) and (2) as subparagraphs (A) and (B), respectively;

(B) by striking “The Secretary” and inserting “(1) The Secretary”;

(C) by striking “a national cemetery or in a veterans cemetery of a State or tribal organization for which the Department has provided a grant under section 2408 of this title” and inserting “a covered cemetery”; and

(D) by adding at the end the following:

“(2) The term ‘covered cemetery’ means any of the following:

“(A) A national cemetery.

“(B) A veterans’ cemetery of a State for which the Department has provided a grant under section 2408 of this title.

“(C) A veterans’ cemetery of a tribal organization or on land owned by or held in trust for a tribal organization for which the Department has provided a grant under subsection (f) of such section.”; and

(4) by adding at the end the following new subsection:

“(1) In this section, the term ‘tribal organization’ has the meaning given such term in section 3765 of this title.”.

SEC. 202. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS PROVISION OF HEADSTONES AND MARKERS FOR, AND INTERMENT IN NATIONAL CEMETERIES OF, SPOUSES AND DEPENDENT CHILDREN OF MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES SERVING ON ACTIVE DUTY.

(a) HEADSTONES AND MARKERS.—Section 2306(b)(2) of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) in subparagraph (B), by inserting “, or the spouse of a member of the Armed Forces

serving on active duty under conditions other than dishonorable, as shown by a statement from a general court-martial convening authority, at the time of the spouse’s death if such death occurs before October 1, 2024” after “veteran”; and

(2) in subparagraph (C), by inserting “, or the eligible dependent child of a member of the Armed Forces serving on active duty under conditions other than dishonorable, as shown by a statement from a general court-martial convening authority, at the time of the child’s death if such death occurs before October 1, 2024” after “veteran”.

(b) INTERMENT IN NATIONAL CEMETERIES.—Section 2402(a)(5) of such title is amended by inserting “, and the spouse, minor child, and, in the discretion of the Secretary, unmarried adult child of a member of the Armed Forces serving on active duty under conditions other than dishonorable, as shown by a statement from a general court-martial convening authority, at the time of the spouse’s or child’s death if such death occurs before October 1, 2024” after “paragraph (7)”.

TITLE III—CIVIL RELIEF

SEC. 301. 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).”.

SEC. 302. RESIDENCE OF SPOUSES OF SERVICEMEMBERS FOR TAX PURPOSES.

(a) RESIDENCE FOR TAX PURPOSES.—Section 511(a)(2) of the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (50 U.S.C. 4001(a)(2)) is amended—

(1) by striking “A spouse” and inserting the following:

“(A) IN GENERAL.—A spouse”; and

(2) by adding at the end the following new subparagraph:

“(B) ELECTION.—For any taxable year of the marriage, the spouse of a servicemember may elect to use the same residence for purposes of taxation as the servicemember regardless of the date on which the marriage of the spouse and the servicemember occurred.”.

(b) APPLICABILITY.—The amendments made by subsection (a) shall apply with respect to any return of State or local income tax filed for any taxable year beginning with the taxable year that includes the date of the enactment of this Act.

SEC. 303. RESIDENCE OF SPOUSES OF SERVICEMEMBERS FOR VOTING.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Section 705(b) of the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (50 U.S.C. 4025(b)) is amended—

(1) by striking “State or local office” and all that follows through the period at the end of paragraph (3) and inserting “State or local office—”; and

(2) by adding at the end the following new paragraphs:

“(1) a person who is absent from a State because the person is accompanying the person’s spouse who is absent from that same

State in compliance with military or naval orders shall not, solely by reason of that absence—

“(A) be deemed to have lost a residence or domicile in that State, without regard to whether or not the person intends to return to that State;

“(B) be deemed to have acquired a residence or domicile in any other State; or

“(C) be deemed to have become a resident in or a resident of any other State; and

“(2) the spouse of a servicemember may elect to use the same residence as the servicemember regardless of the date on which the marriage of the spouse and the servicemember occurred.”.

(b) **EFFECTIVE DATE.**—The amendments made by subsection (a) shall take effect on the date that is 90 days after the date of the enactment of this Act.

SEC. 304. TERMINATION OF MULTICHANNEL VIDEO PROGRAMMING AND INTERNET ACCESS SERVICE CONTRACTS.

(a) **IN GENERAL.**—Section 305A of the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (50 U.S.C. 3956) is amended—

(1) in the section heading, by inserting “, **MULTICHANNEL VIDEO PROGRAMMING, AND INTERNET ACCESS**” after “**TELEPHONE**”;

(2) in subsection (b), by striking “cellular telephone service or telephone exchange service” and inserting “commercial mobile service, telephone exchange service, internet access service, or multichannel video programming service”;

(3) in subsection (c), by inserting “for commercial mobile service or telephone exchange service” before “terminated”;

(4) in subsection (d), in the matter preceding paragraph (1), by striking “cellular telephone service” and inserting “commercial mobile service”;

(5) in subsection (e)—

(A) by striking “For any” and inserting the following:

“(1) **IN GENERAL.**—For any”;

(B) by striking “If the” and inserting the following:

“(2) **REINSTATEMENT OF SERVICE.**—If the”;

and

(C) by adding at the end the following:

“(3) **RETURN OF PROVIDER-OWNED EQUIPMENT.**—If a servicemember terminates a contract under subsection (a), the servicemember shall return any provider-owned consumer premises equipment to the service provider not later than 10 days after the date on which service is disconnected.”; and

(6) in subsection (g)—

(A) by redesignating paragraph (2) as paragraph (4); and

(B) by striking paragraph (1) and inserting the following:

“(1) The term ‘commercial mobile service’ has the meaning given that term in section 332(d) of the Communications Act of 1934 (47 U.S.C. 332(d)).

“(2) The term ‘multichannel video programming service’ means a subscription video service offered by a multichannel video programming distributor, as that term is defined in section 602 of the Communications Act of 1934 (47 U.S.C. 522), over a system the distributor owns or controls.

“(3) The term ‘provider-owned consumer premises equipment’ means any equipment that a provider of internet access service or multichannel video programming service rents or loans to a customer during the provision of that service, including gateways, routers, cable modems, voice-capable modems, CableCARDs, converters, digital adapters, remote controls, and any other equipment provided.”.

(b) **CLERICAL AMENDMENTS.**—

(1) **TITLE HEADING.**—The heading for title III of the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act is

amended by striking “**TELEPHONE**” and inserting “**COMMUNICATIONS**”.

(2) **TABLE OF CONTENTS.**—The table of contents in section 1(b) of the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act is amended—

(A) by striking the item relating to title III and inserting the following new item:

“**TITLE III—RENT, INSTALLMENT CONTRACTS, MORTGAGES, LIENS, ASSIGNMENT, LEASES, COMMUNICATIONS SERVICE CONTRACTS**”;

and

(B) by striking the item relating to section 305A and inserting the following new item:

“**Sec. 305A.** Termination of telephone, multichannel video programming, and internet access service contracts.”.

TITLE IV—TRANSITION ASSISTANCE

SEC. 401. 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 the Transition Assistance Program under sections 1142 and 1144 of title 10, United States Code.

(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.

TITLE V—DEPARTMENTAL ADMINISTRATION

SEC. 501. MISUSE OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS PURCHASE CARDS BY DEPARTMENT EMPLOYEES.

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

“§ 728. Misuse of Department purchase cards

“(a) **IN GENERAL.**—(1) The Secretary shall prohibit any employee of the Department who the Secretary or the Inspector General of the Department determines has knowingly misused a purchase card from serving as a purchase card holder or approving official.

“(2) Such a prohibition shall be in addition to any other applicable penalty.

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

“(1) splitting purchases;

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

“(3) purchasing any unauthorized item;

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

“(5) violating ethics standards.”.

(b) **CLERICAL AMENDMENT.**—The table of sections at the beginning of such chapter is amended by inserting after the item relating to section 728 the following new item:

“728. Misuse of Department purchase cards.”.

SEC. 502. UPDATING DEPENDENT INFORMATION.

The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall make such changes to such information

technology systems of the Department of Veterans Affairs, including the eBenefits system or successor system, as may be necessary so that whenever the Secretary records in such systems information about a dependent of a person, the person is able to review and revise such information.

SEC. 503. OVERSIGHT OF ELECTRONIC HEALTH RECORD MODERNIZATION PROGRAM.

(a) **PROGRAM DOCUMENTS.**—Not later than 30 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to the appropriate congressional committees the following documents concerning the Electronic Health Record Modernization Program:

(1) Integrated Master Plan.

(2) Integrated Master Schedule.

(3) Program Management Plan.

(4) Annual and lifecycle cost estimates, including, at a minimum, cost elements relating to—

(A) Federal Government labor;

(B) contractor labor;

(C) hardware;

(D) software; and

(E) testing and evaluation.

(5) Cost baseline.

(6) Risk Management Plan.

(7) Health IT Strategic Architecture Plan.

(8) Transition Plan for implementing up-dated architecture.

(9) Data Migration Plan.

(10) System and Data Security Plan.

(11) Application Implementation Plan.

(12) System Design Documents.

(13) Legacy Veterans Information Systems and Technology Architecture Standardization, Security Enhancement, and Consolidation Project Plan.

(14) Health Data Interoperability Management Plan.

(15) Community Care Vision and Implementation Plan, including milestones and a detailed description of how complete interoperability with non-Department health care providers will be achieved.

(b) **QUARTERLY UPDATES.**—Not later than 30 days after the end of each fiscal quarter during the period beginning with the fiscal quarter in which this Act is enacted and ending on the date on which the Electronic Health Record Modernization Program is completed, the Secretary shall submit to the appropriate congressional committees the most recent updated versions, if any exist, of the following documents:

(1) Integrated Master Schedule.

(2) Program Management Plan, including any written Program Management Review material developed for the Program Management Plan during the fiscal quarter covered by the submission.

(3) Each document described in subsection (a)(4).

(4) Performance Baseline Report for the fiscal quarter covered by the submission or for the fiscal quarter ending the fiscal year prior to the submission.

(5) Budget Reconciliation Report.

(6) Risk Management Plan and Risk Register.

(c) **CONTRACTS.**—Not later than 5 days after awarding a contract, order, or agreement, including any modifications thereto, under the Electronic Health Record Modernization Program, the Secretary shall submit to the appropriate congressional committees a copy of the entire such contract, order, agreement, or modification.

(d) **NOTIFICATION.**—

(1) **REQUIREMENT.**—Not later than 10 days after an event described in paragraph (2) occurs, the Secretary shall notify the appropriate congressional committees of such occurrence, including a description of the event and an explanation for why such event occurred.

(2) **EVENT DESCRIBED.**—An event described in this paragraph is any of the following events regarding the Electronic Health Record Modernization Program:

(A) The delay of any milestone or deliverable by 30 or more days.

(B) A request for equitable adjustment, equitable adjustment, or change order exceeding \$1,000,000 (as such terms are defined in the Federal Acquisition Regulation).

(C) The submission of any protest, claim, or dispute, and the resolution of any protest, claim, or dispute (as such terms are defined in the Federal Acquisition Regulation).

(D) A loss of clinical or other data.

(E) A breach of patient privacy, including any—

(i) disclosure of protected health information that is not permitted under regulations promulgated under section 264(c) of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (Public Law 104-191; 42 U.S.C. 1320d-2 note); and

(ii) breach of sensitive personal information (as defined in section 5727 of title 38, United States Code).

(e) **DEFINITIONS.**—In this section:

(1) The term “appropriate congressional committees” means—

(A) the Committees on Veterans Affairs of the House of Representatives and the Senate; and

(B) the Committees on Appropriations of the House of Representatives and the Senate.

(2) The term “Electronic Health Record Modernization Program” means—

(A) any activities by the Department of Veterans Affairs to procure or implement an electronic health or medical record system to replace any or all of the Veterans Information Systems and Technology Architecture, the Computerized Patient Record System, the Joint Legacy Viewer, or the Enterprise Health Management Platform; and

(B) any contracts or agreements entered into by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out, support, or analyze the activities under subparagraph (A).

SEC. 504. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS NOTICE RELATING TO DEBT COLLECTION ACTIVITIES.

(a) **DEBT NOTIFICATION LETTER FORMATS.**—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall collaborate with veterans service organizations to develop a standard format for any letter provided to an individual who the Secretary determines is indebted to the United States by virtue of such individual's participation in a benefits program administered by the Secretary. Such letter shall be written in plain language and shall include a notice of the debt and a clear explanation of—

(1) why the individual is indebted to the United States by virtue of such person's participation in a benefits program administered by the Secretary; and

(2) the options available to the individual.

(b) **DELIVERY OF DEBT NOTICES BY STANDARD MAIL AND ELECTRONIC MEANS.**—The Secretary shall develop a method by which individuals may elect to receive notice of debt by electronic means and shall ensure, to the extent practicable, that the letter developed under subsection (a) is delivered—

(1) by both standard mail and by electronic means to intended recipients who have made such an election; and

(2) only by standard mail to intended recipients who have not made such an election.

(c) **NOTICE TO CONGRESS.**—

(1) **NOTICES OF COMPLETION.**—Upon completion of the development of the standard letter format required under subsection (a) and upon completion of development of the method by which individuals may elect to receive notice of debt by electronic means under subsection (b), the Secretary shall sub-

mit to Congress notice of the completion of the respective development.

(2) **PROGRESS REPORTS.**—If the Secretary has not submitted each notice required by paragraph (1) by the date that is 90 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall—

(A) submit to Congress a report describing the progress of the Secretary toward implementing subsections (a) and (b) and an explanation for why the respective development has not been completed; and

(B) every 30 days thereafter until all of the notices required by paragraph (1) have been submitted, submit to Congress an update to the report under subparagraph (A) that includes an additional explanation for the failure to complete the respective development.

(d) **STUDY AND REPORT.**—

(1) **STUDY.**—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs, in coordination with the Secretary of the Treasury, shall conduct a study on the process by which individuals who are indebted to the United States by virtue of their participation in a benefits program administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs are notified of debt collection efforts relating to such indebtedness.

(2) **ELEMENTS.**—The study required by paragraph (1) shall include the following:

(A) An analysis of the scope of the problem of individuals who are indebted to the United States by virtue of their participation in a benefits program administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs not receiving debt collection notices relating to such indebtedness.

(B) Identification of administrative actions the Secretary of Veterans Affairs and the Secretary of the Treasury can carry out to reduce the number of incorrect or unknown addresses of such individuals in the databases of the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of the Treasury and a timeline for carrying out such actions.

(C) An estimate of the costs associated with sending debt collection notices to such individuals by certified mail.

(D) An analysis of whether, or to what extent, sending debt collection notices to such individuals by certified mail would address the problem analyzed under subparagraph (A).

(E) An analysis of the requirements and resources that would be necessary for the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a method for the Secretary to display in one consolidated document the details regarding all of the debts of an individual to the United States by virtue of such individual's participation in a benefits program administered by the Secretary.

(F) An analysis of the extent to which such individuals are so indebted by reason of actions by the Secretary or by actions of the individual, including any trends relating to whether the actions of the individual may be by reason of error, misrepresentation, or fraud.

(3) **REPORT.**—Not later than one year after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, in coordination with the Secretary of the Treasury, shall submit to Congress a report on the findings of the Secretaries with respect to the study conducted under paragraph (1).

TITLE VI—MEDICAL FACILITIES

SEC. 601. AUTHORIZATION OF MAJOR MEDICAL FACILITY PROJECTS FOR FISCAL YEAR 2019.

(a) **IN GENERAL.**—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs may carry out the following major medical facility projects in fiscal year 2019 at the locations specified and in an amount for each project not to exceed the amount specified for such location:

(1) Construction of a community living center and renovation of domiciliary and

outpatient facilities in Canandaigua, New York, in an amount not to exceed \$351,980,000 (an increase of \$193,000,000 as compared to the previous authorization for such project).

(2) Renovation of space for a simulation training education center in North Chicago, Illinois, in an amount not to exceed \$15,980,000.

(3) Construction of a surgical intensive care unit and renovation to expand the operating room suite in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, in an amount not to exceed \$29,461,000.

(4) Construction of a new medical facility in Louisville, Kentucky, in an amount not to exceed \$450,000,000 (an increase of \$300,000,000 as compared to the previous authorization for such project).

(b) **AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.**—There is authorized to be appropriated to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs for fiscal year 2019 or the year in which funds are appropriated for the Construction, Major Projects account, \$847,421,000 for the projects authorized in subsection (a).

SEC. 602. PLANS TO IMPROVE MEDICAL FACILITIES OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

(a) **PLANS REQUIRED.**—

(1) **PLANS OF DIRECTORS OF MEDICAL FACILITIES.**—Not later than 90 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall require each director of a medical facility of the Department of Veterans Affairs to submit to the director of the Veterans Integrated Service Network that covers the facility a plan to improve such facility.

(2) **PLANS OF DIRECTORS OF VETERANS INTEGRATED SERVICE NETWORKS.**—The Secretary shall require each director of a Veterans Integrated Service Network to submit to the Secretary, not later than 60 days after receiving all of the plans under paragraph (1), a plan, based on the plans received under paragraph (1), to improve the facilities within that Veterans Integrated Service Network in such a fashion that would improve the ability of all facilities within that network to provide the best and most efficient care to patients.

(b) **REGULAR REPORTS.**—The Secretary shall ensure that each director of a Veterans Integrated Service Network submits to the Secretary, not later than two years after the date of the enactment of this Act and not less frequently than once every two years thereafter, a report on the actions taken by the director to improve the facilities within that Veterans Integrated Service Network and what further such actions might be necessary.

(c) **SENSE OF CONGRESS ON USE OF AUTHORITIES TO INVESTIGATE MEDICAL CENTERS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.**—It is the sense of Congress that the Secretary of Veterans Affairs should make full use of the authorities provided by section 2 of the Enhancing Veteran Care Act (Public Law 115-95; 38 U.S.C. 1701 note).

TITLE VII—OTHER MATTERS

SEC. 701. HOMELESS VETERANS REINTEGRATION PROGRAMS.

Section 2021(a) of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) by striking “reintegration of homeless veterans into the labor force.” and inserting the following: “reintegration into the labor force of—”; and

(2) by adding at the end the following new paragraphs:

“(1) homeless veterans (including veterans who were homeless but found housing during the 60-day period preceding the date on which the veteran begins to participate in a program under this section);

“(2) veterans participating in the Department of Veterans Affairs supported housing

program for which rental assistance is provided pursuant to section 8(o)(19) of the United States Housing Act of 1937 (42 U.S.C. 1437f(o)(19)) or the Tribal HUD-VA Supportive Housing (Tribal HUD-VASH) program;

“(3) Indians who are veterans and receiving assistance under the Native American Housing Assistance and Self Determination Act of 1996 (25 U.S.C. 4101 et seq.);

“(4) veterans described in section 2023(e) of this title or any other veterans who are transitioning from being incarcerated; and

“(5) veterans participating in the Department of Veterans Affairs rapid rehousing and prevention program authorized in section 2044 of this title.”.

SEC. 702. TECHNICAL CORRECTIONS.

(a) TITLE 38.—Title 38, United States Code, is amended as follows:

(1) In the table of sections at the beginning of chapter 55, by inserting a period at the end of the item relating to section 5501A.

(2) In section 7463(c)(2)(B), by striking “to answer to answer” and inserting “to answer”.

(b) VETERANS’ BENEFITS IMPROVEMENTS ACT OF 1996.—Section 504 of the Veterans’ Benefits Improvements Act of 1996 (Public Law 104-275; 38 U.S.C. 5101 note) is amended by redesignating the second subsection (c) as subsection (d).

SEC. 703. MEDICAL SURGICAL PRIME VENDOR PROGRAM.

(a) VENDORS.—In procuring certain medical, surgical, and dental supplies or laboratory supplies for medical centers of the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall carry out the Medical Surgical Prime Vendor program, or successor program, in a manner that—

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

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

(b) CLINICALLY DRIVEN SOURCING.—

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

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

SEC. 704. REPORT ON EXPANDING ACCESS TO DENTAL CARE FOR VETERANS ELIGIBLE FOR HEALTH CARE FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 360 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs of the Senate and the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs of the House of Representatives a report on the feasibility and advisability of expanding access to dental care for eligible veterans.

(b) ELEMENTS.—The report required by subsection (a) shall include the following:

(1) An analysis of access to dental care for eligible veterans outside of the Department, including—

(A) the percentage of eligible veterans currently enrolled in dental insurance through a third-party payer, including—

(i) the dental insurance plan for veterans and survivors and dependents of veterans under section 1712C of title 38, United States Code;

(ii) the Medicaid program under title XIX of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 1396 et seq.); and

(iii) employer-sponsored dental insurance; (B) the affordability of dental insurance described in subparagraph (A); and

(C) the comprehensiveness of benefits of dental insurance described in subparagraph (A).

(2) An analysis of the current oral health needs of eligible veterans, including an estimate of the number of eligible veterans who—

(A) experience untreated cavities or decay; (B) require dentures, implants, or other restorative dental services; or

(C) have not received regular dental cleanings within the two-year period preceding the report.

(3) An analysis of the financial impact to the Department of Veterans Affairs of providing dental care to eligible veterans, including—

(A) whether the provision of such services would result in a reduction in total health care costs;

(B) a cost-benefit analysis that indicates potential cost savings to the Department over a 5-, 10-, and 20-year period; and

(C) projected cost savings to the Department and across the broader health care system.

(4) An analysis of the number and types of dental providers necessary to treat eligible veterans, including—

(A) dentists; (B) hygienists; (C) dental technicians; and (D) dental therapists.

(c) CATEGORIES OF ELIGIBLE VETERANS.—The report required by subsection (a) shall be disaggregated by each of the following categories of eligible veterans:

(1) Veterans enrolled in the system of annual patient enrollment of the Department pursuant to the priority group under subsection (a)(6) of section 1705 of such title.

(2) Veterans enrolled in such system pursuant to the priority group under subsection (a)(5) of such section.

(3) Veterans enrolled in such system pursuant to a priority group under any of subsections (a)(1) through (a)(4) of such section.

(4) Veterans enrolled in such system pursuant to a priority group under subsection (a)(7) or (a)(8) of such section.

(d) ELIGIBLE VETERANS DEFINED.—In this section, the term “eligible veterans” means veterans enrolled in the system of annual patient enrollment of the Department of Veterans Affairs established and operated under section 1705 of title 38, United States Code.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. POE of Texas). 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 add 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 S. 2248, as amended, the Veterans Benefits and Transition Act of 2018. This legislation is a prenegotiated, bipartisan package of bills that we have worked out with the Senate Committee on Veterans’ Affairs. The amended version of the bill contains 23 sections, many of which originated in the 80-plus veterans bills that the House passed in the 115th Congress.

Though S. 2248, as amended, reflects just a fraction of our collective efforts, as we were unable to come to an agreement with the Senate on several outstanding issues, it, nonetheless, contains many important provisions that we can all be pleased to support.

For example, one provision of the bill would make schools ineligible for GI Bill tuition payments if they place penalties or burdens on students due to the Department of Veterans Affairs’ inability to pay the GI Bill payments to schools on time. This provision was championed by Vice Chairman BILIRAKIS, and I thank him for his advocacy.

There are several provisions in the bill that make improvements to the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act that protect deployed servicemembers from commercial penalties, which they can occur as a result of their service.

The bill also includes provisions that would improve burial benefits for servicemembers, veterans, and their families; expand eligibility for a successful homeless veteran job training program; authorize funding for VA construction projects; and provide critical oversight of government purchase cards and the development of VA’s new electronic health record.

Mr. Speaker, before yielding back, I will take a moment to say that serving as chairman of the Veterans’ Affairs Committee has been an immense honor to me, and I am grateful to all of those who put their trust and faith in me to fulfill this role for Congress.

I thank a number of individuals who have been instrumental in this committee’s success during the 115th Congress.

First, I thank Ranking Member WALZ, the newly elected Governor of the very cold State of Minnesota; my subcommittee chairmen and ranking members; and the members of the committee. Without their continued hard work and involvement, none of this congressional success in the veterans area would have been realized. Many members on our committee had numerous other duties but never, ever neglected the Veterans’ Affairs Committee.

I thank the Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee chairman, Senator ISAKSON, and Ranking Member JON TESTER for their hard work, and I look forward to working with them in the next Congress.

□ 1700

I am also grateful to the House leadership on both sides of the aisle, but particularly Speaker PAUL RYAN, Leader MCCARTHY, Whip STEVE SCALISE, and CATHY MCMORRIS RODGERS. Leadership support for this committee was unwavering and ensured that veterans' matters received the time and attention they so richly deserve.

Finally, I want to thank all Members of the House of Representatives who strive, day in and day out, to do right by America's veterans. With Members' support, we have helped enact landmark legislation this Congress, including: The VA MISSION Act, the Forever GI Bill, the VA Accountability Act, appeals reform, and many, many other smaller, yet impactful pieces of legislation which Americans, and especially veterans, can be proud of.

The bipartisan nature of this committee is unique in Congress, and it is nothing less than what our veterans deserve. I look forward to serving as ranking Republican member of the committee next Congress and continuing our work with soon-to-be Chairman MARK TAKANO.

I urge my colleagues to support S. 2248, as amended, 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 strong support of the House amendment to S. 2248, the Veterans Benefit and Transition Act of 2018. This bipartisan measure contains legislation championed by my House and Senate colleagues on both sides of the aisle and is a testament to the bipartisan relationships we cultivate and preserve on both the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committees.

I thank Chairman ROE and all members of the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committees, both Democrats and Republicans, for their hard work putting together this legislative package that will improve the benefits and support our country owes America's veterans.

I want to specifically acknowledge my Democratic colleagues, Ranking Member WALZ, now Governor-elect of Minnesota—and, yes, Chairman ROE, it is very cold there—Congressman SCOTT PETERS, Congressman CORREA, Congresswoman PINGREE, Congressman HIMES, and Congresswoman BUSTOS, who have made valuable contributions to this legislation.

I would also like to take this time to thank Dr. ROE for his leadership as chairman of this committee in this Congress. I look forward to working with Dr. ROE as ranking member of the 116th Congress so that we can continue to function as a productive committee in the 116th, free from partisan gridlock, on behalf of the veterans whom we represent.

Now, as a former teacher—actually, a current teacher—and advocate for improving educational and training opportunities for veterans, I am pleased this legislation contains several provi-

sions written by my colleagues that will improve the lives of our student veterans and those of our Gold Star spouses.

This package also includes a provision that helps our reservists and National Guard members access the valuable help that the vocational rehabilitation program can provide.

I would first like to highlight legislation written by Mr. PETERS, our colleague on this committee. This measure contains his bill, H.R. 5538, that would provide parity to our National Guard and Reserve servicemembers involuntarily mobilized to Active Duty under 12304b of title 10 in support of commands that conduct combat missions.

As our country continues to utilize our Guard and Reserve members as an operational reserve force, it is critically important that we modernize our statutes to treat our Guard and Reserve members who have served shoulder to shoulder with Active-Duty servicemembers on multiple deployments with parity while they serve in uniform.

This bill allows Guard and Reserve members to stop the clock on the 12-year limit to use vocational rehabilitation programs while they are supporting active combat missions. Currently, the clock is stopped for most other instances in which National Guard and Reserve are mobilized, but this particular authority was overlooked.

This is an important fix because the Department of Defense continues to increase the use of its 12304b authority. With this provision, Congress has the authority to be proactive in addressing the needs of our servicemembers.

Now, let me turn to Congressman HIMES' bill, H.R. 3634, the Securing Electronic Records for Veterans' Ease Act of 2017. It is included in this measure as well.

For student veterans, the VA does not currently provide sufficient information about the exact amount of housing stipend that a beneficiary will receive under the GI Bill benefits; but many veterans rely on their housing stipend to pay for housing while they are attending school, making it necessary for them to show proof of their housing allowance as proof of income. Without this proof of income, veterans often find themselves unable to secure housing before the start of school.

Now, this is a commonsense piece of documentation that VA can electronically provide to allow our veterans to easily use their earned benefits, and I am pleased this great idea by Congressman HIMES was included in this package.

Congresswoman BUSTOS' legislation, H.R. 5882, the Gold Star Spouses Leasing Relief Act, would allow the spouse of a deceased servicemember to terminate a housing lease following the death of his or her loved one.

Servicemembers and their families are often stationed far from home due

to the needs of the service. In the sad and difficult time after the passing of a servicemember, spouses should not be locked into a rental lease far away from their home and support network and face an additional financial burden to return home.

This small detail can make life a lot easier for a grieving spouse, and I am pleased to see my colleague's bill included in this package.

Congressman LOU CORREA, our colleague on this committee, introduced H.R. 4335, the Servicemember Family Burial Act, which makes permanent VA's practice of providing burials and headstones for the family of servicemembers who predecease them.

When an Active-Duty servicemember loses a spouse or a child, it is always in tragic and difficult circumstances. VA should continue to seamlessly provide this benefit with dignity, sensitivity, and compassion.

I want to thank Congressman CORREA for sponsoring this legislation, and I am pleased to see it included in this measure.

I also wish to highlight legislation written by Congresswoman PINGREE, the Veterans Fair Debt Notice Act of 2017, which is included in this legislative package.

The American Legion, the Disabled American Veterans, the Paralyzed Veterans of America, the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors, and the Veterans of Foreign Wars testified before our committee that the debt collection letters VA sends veterans are confusing, do not clearly explain the reason for the debt or clearly describe the steps a veteran must take to dispute or mitigate the debt.

This legislation would require VA to explain the reason the veteran incurred a debt in plain language and clearly explain the steps they can take to dispute or repay the debt.

It would also require VA to give veterans the option to opt-in to electronic notification and require VA to determine the number of veterans who are not receiving debt notification letters due to incorrect addresses on file, which prevents veterans from taking action because they have not been notified. This legislation forces VA to make these changes within 90 days of enactment.

Finally, I wish to thank my good friend, Ranking Member TIM WALZ, for his leadership on this committee during the 115th Congress. The Governor-elect of Minnesota leaves the United States House of Representatives with a legacy of bipartisan legislative accomplishments that will undoubtedly improve the lives of veterans for years to come.

I want to thank Chairman ROE and our Senate colleagues for including his bill, H.R. 4245, the Veterans' Electronic Health Record Modernization Oversight Act of 2017, in this measure, enabling this committee to continue its oversight of the \$16 billion Electronic Health Record Modernization, or EHRM, program over the next 10 years.

Mr. Speaker, I say to the gentleman, Chairman ROE, we are going to do intensive oversight of this project; I guarantee you that.

This legislation requires the VA to submit contract, technical, and other documents to Congress and to provide updated documents on a quarterly basis.

The legislation also requires VA to notify Congress about program challenges, including incidents affecting patient safety, cost overruns over \$1 million, and a milestone delay of 30 days or more, bid protests, or a data or privacy breach.

Now, we know that we will likely need to expand these reporting requirements in the future to include other contract and technical documents as the program matures and additional technical capabilities are achieved. I look forward to working with my colleagues in the next Congress to ensure that we maintain close oversight of this program and hold VA accountable, if necessary.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support the House amendment to S. 2248, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. ROE of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Florida (Mr. BILIRAKIS), vice chair of the Veterans' Affairs Committee and one of the most fierce advocates for our veterans in this Congress.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of the House amendment to S. 2248, the Veterans Benefit and Transition Act.

I am proud of the work Chairman ROE and the rest of our committee did to pass the multiple historic pieces of legislation over the course of this Congress, including the Forever GI Bill and the VA MISSION Act.

Despite all the progress we have made, there is still more work to be done. I look forward to working on these issues for our heroes.

This legislative package contains many commonsense, zero-cost bills we passed in the House over the past year but have stalled in the Senate. But I know there is an agreement in the Senate, and we are going to get this done before the end of the year.

I am especially proud that this package contains a provision that includes my bill, H.R. 4830, the SIT-REP Act, which will hold student veterans harmless from bureaucratic red tape and delays at higher education institutions and at the VA. This legislation prevents educational institutions from imposing a fee on student veterans or denying their access to education when tuition payments are delayed by bureaucracy, no fault of the veteran.

In our subcommittee hearings on the implementation of the Forever GI Bill, we heard many concerns about delays and processing of tuition payments between schools and the VA. I also had roundtables in my district and heard the same concerns, Mr. Speaker.

This fall semester, IT failures and delay at the VA led to an artificially

created backlog, adding a significant amount of stress to our heroes who rely on their monthly stipends and tuition benefits. In some cases, delays meant the schools putting a hold on a student's account or forcing the student to begin payment of tuition and fees on a payment plan until they receive the money from the VA.

It is unacceptable. We cannot allow this type of uncertainty for our Nation's heroes, Mr. Speaker, and my SIT-REP bill protects these veterans from additional penalties from schools. It is not the veterans' fault, and they should not be punished for the actions of others. It is as simple as that.

I urge my colleagues to join me in support of this commonsense, bipartisan legislative package which contains many additional provisions to help our veterans, such as a study on community-based transition assistance programs, a report on the feasibility of expanding access to dental care for veterans at the VA, and the expansion of eligibility under the Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program.

I hope the Senate takes this up quickly, and I know they will. I want them to pass the Veterans Benefit and Transition Act of 2018 so we can send it to the President's desk before the year's end.

Mr. Speaker, the chairman did an outstanding job as chairman, and my friend Ranking Member WALZ did as well on behalf of our heroes.

I thank Mr. TAKANO and congratulate him on being the next chairman of the committee. I look forward to working with him.

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, may I inquire how much time I have remaining?

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman from California has 10½ minutes remaining.

□ 1715

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from California (Mr. CORREA), my colleague, my good friend and fellow Californian, and member of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

Mr. CORREA. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of the House amendment to S. 2248.

Mr. Speaker, I thank Chairman ROE for his service and leadership in the committee. I also thank Ranking Member WALZ, as well as the committee staff, for their efforts in this legislation and for including my bipartisan bill, the Servicemember Family Burial Act, as a provision of this larger bill.

When the Department of Veterans Affairs provides burial and headstones or markers for eligible family members who predecease active servicemembers, it is always under very difficult situations. The loss of a spouse or a child is a very painful occurrence, and we want to make sure that the burial benefits and the whole process is as easy as possible for our Active Duty servicemembers during these very difficult times.

This bill codifies existing current practice to ensure the VA's process occurs with dignity, sensitivity, and compassion.

In summary, this is a simple change that allows for the burial and provisions of headstones for eligible spouses and dependents of children of Active Duty servicemembers in a timely manner.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the inclusion of my legislation within the larger bill, which contains a range of notable measures aimed at assisting our Nation's veterans.

Mr. Speaker, I urge passage of this legislation.

Mr. ROE of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. BERGMAN), my good friend, and chairman of the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigation, and a retired Marine Corps lieutenant general.

Mr. BERGMAN. Mr. Speaker, I thank Chairman ROE and Chairman ISAKSON for their leadership throughout the 115th Congress in a bipartisan, bicameral way for putting together one last package of veterans priority bills.

To be able to sponsor any bill is a privilege, but to be able to sponsor a veteran-related bill is both an honor and a privilege.

I want to talk just very quickly about a couple of bills that I was proud to sponsor. The VA Purchase Card Misuse Mitigation Act: The VA has been able to use purchase cards for up to \$10,000 using government cards. This act basically allows them to continue to do that, but also allows the Secretary of the VA to revoke purchase card approval authority from any employee who is found to be misusing that card.

As chairman of the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee, transparency and accountability have been my priorities, and this bill will keep bad actors in check while making the VA more efficient.

The second bill I was proud to sponsor is the Medical-Surgical Purchasing Stabilization Act. In pure and simple terms, going to a prime vendor program in med-surge purchasing was a good idea to control costs and increase patient outcomes. However, we need to ensure that the providers, the doctors and the nurses who are actually using those instruments in surgery or in the clinic, have a say in what is being purchased, because the goal is to provide outcomes for the veteran, and those healthcare providers know which instruments are the best to use.

Lastly, the Veterans' Electronic Health Record Modernization Act, which we have already talked about here, this is key to providing seamless care from the veterans beginning of their service to the end of their service. This is overdue, and it needs to be monitored, it needs to be assessed so that we, as the committee, in a bipartisan way can make it happen.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I am extremely proud of the bipartisan work

and I am looking forward to the 116th Congress.

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentlewoman from Maine (Ms. PINGREE), my good friend.

Ms. PINGREE. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from California for yielding the time.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of the Veterans Benefit and Transition Act of 2018. Frankly, it is always a good feeling to be able to speak for common-sense legislation put together in a bipartisan fashion for the good of America's veterans.

In particular, I welcome the inclusion of section 504, the Veterans Fair Debt Notice Act. I introduced this last year in response to frustrations veterans have been experiencing with the VA's debt management system. It incorporates some refinements made in the Senate companion bill introduced by Senator DEB FISCHER, which demonstrates the bipartisan nature of this effort.

The legislation improves the way that veterans are notified about debts that they may owe from the VA benefits program. Because of the VA's failure to notify or due to confusingly worded letters or letters that actually just never reach the vet, many veterans in Maine and elsewhere are shocked to learn that they owe debts, and for many, they have missed the deadlines to dispute or seek forgiveness for the alleged debt.

This bill directs the VA to work with veterans service organizations to develop standard notification notices that are written in plain language that anyone can understand and it also allows veterans to receive notices electronically.

To promote accountability, the bill requires the VA to report to Congress on the new standard and on the VA's efforts to reduce the number of errors in its debt notification system.

Mr. Speaker, I thank Chairman ROE and Ranking Member WALZ for their work in support, and I urge passage.

Mr. ROE of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. WENSTRUP), my good friend, who currently serves and has served on the House Veterans' Affairs Committee as the Health Subcommittee chair. He also serves on the House Armed Services Committee, Intel Committee, and is a colonel in the reserves.

Mr. WENSTRUP. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding the time.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of this legislation, the Veterans Benefits and Transition Act of 2018.

Mr. Speaker, I thank Chairman ROE and Ranking Member WALZ and all the members of the committee and staff who work so hard on behalf of our veterans. I would like to congratulate Mr. TAKANO as chairman-elect.

This legislation we are talking about today includes reforms to ensure America's heroes receive the benefits and recognition that they so richly deserve.

It includes several provisions that I was honored to support during my time on the Veterans' Affairs Committee, including updates to our educational assistance programs at the Department of Veterans Affairs and additional emphasis on transition services provided to our servicemembers. That one is very near and dear to me.

Importantly, it includes provisions to help the most vulnerable in the veteran community. It includes the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program's Reauthorization Act, which is a bipartisan bill I introduced with Congresswoman BROWNLEY. This legislation ensures those eligible for the Department of Housing and Urban Development's Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing Program and other housing assistance programs are also eligible for the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program.

By prioritizing the reintegration of homeless and recently homeless veterans, we will empower our veterans to reenter the workforce and help them regain self-sufficiency.

This legislation also includes the Gold Star Spouses Leasing Relief Act, which I introduced along with Congresswoman BUSTOS. It recognizes that after the loss of a military spouse, Gold Star families may need flexibility to relocate to fit their family's needs.

It would help spouses like Cindy Southern, a native of Portsmouth, Ohio, in my district. Cindy lost her husband while he was serving in the Navy overseas during Operation Desert Storm. As she grieved, all she wanted to do was move home, but she had signed a one-year lease on a home in North Carolina. Her landlords refused to waive her lease without massive termination fees. This bill would ensure Gold Star families are not trapped into a jointly-held residential lease after the death of a servicemember.

Mr. Speaker, our veterans have given so much to our Nation. This legislation before us today makes sure we provide the benefits they deserve, properly support their families, and prepare them for success in civilian life.

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Connecticut (Mr. HIMES), my good friend and also a member of the House Intelligence Committee.

Mr. HIMES. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of this bill, and I want to start by thanking Mr. TAKANO, Governor-elect WALZ, and Dr. ROE for their work on this bill.

As I have sat here and listened to not so much a debate, but a celebration of the bipartisan work that was done to create this bill, including so many things that I know will assist our veterans, it is great to see the parties working together as we close out this Congress.

Mr. TAKANO was very kind in saying that the SERVE Act, which is included in this legislation, was my idea. It wasn't actually my idea. It was better than that, because it grew out of a con-

versation I had with a retired marine at Sacred Heart University in Fairfield, Connecticut, in which I simply asked Nicholas Quinzi of the Marine Corps, "What can we do to make your life a little easier?"

And he said, "You know, the problem I have, like so many of my fellow veterans, I have post-9/11 GI Bill benefits, but there is no way for me, when I go to a landlord to rent an apartment to be here at school, there is no way for me to verify that income, and as a result, I have had a rough time getting housing even though I have got this stipend from the Federal Government which comes to me as a result of my service."

So there it was: a problem with an easy solution.

The SERVE Act, which is now incorporated into the amendment to S. 2248 will simply require the VA to provide proof of that stipend so that landlords and other housing organizations can see that our veterans have a steady source of income to help them pay that rent. It is a small thing, but it is something that matters an awful lot to Nicholas Quinzi and the roughly 1.1 million other veterans who are getting this kind of benefit.

So this is an example of what happens when you listen to your constituents. It wasn't my idea, but I am just so thrilled that Republicans and Democrats were able to come together around this small, good thing for a lot of young veterans who are post-service, trying to get educated, trying to get the kind of tools they will need to succeed.

Mr. Speaker, I thank Mr. ROE for his hard work. I thank TIM WALZ and wish him well as he goes off to other things. And to Chairman-elect TAKANO, I thank him for his good work on this bill.

Mr. ROE of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentlewoman from New York (Ms. STEFANIK), my good friend and fellow member of the Education and the Workforce Committee.

Ms. STEFANIK. Mr. Speaker, I thank Mr. ROE for his leadership.

Mr. Speaker, my legislation included in this package gives all military spouses, regardless of which State they married in, the choice to establish the same State of residency as the servicemember for both voting and tax purposes.

As the proud representative of Fort Drum and the Navy nuclear site at Kesselring, I understand the challenges military families face and the sacrifices these families make to help protect our Nation and safeguard our freedoms.

Military families are constantly relocating to meet the needs of the military. They sacrifice so much during these relocations, uprooting their lives and disrupting their families. This is often a very difficult and trying time, with the heaviest burden falling upon

military spouses, who serve as a critical support system for their loved ones.

Current law allows Active Duty servicemembers to maintain one State of legal residence for tax and voting purposes even when those servicemembers receive military orders requiring them to relocate, but this does not apply evenly to spouses. Spouses are forced to establish residency every time the servicemember receives a new assignment, adding additional stress to families as they manage these relocations and seek new employment.

My legislation, the Military Residency Choice Act, fixes this inconsistency to better ease these trying transitions.

Mr. Speaker, I thank Mr. ROE for his leadership, Ranking Member WALZ, as well as Chairman-elect TAKANO.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this bill on a bipartisan basis.

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

Mr. Speaker, I have no further speakers.

I want to urge all my colleagues to join me in passing this important legislation, S. 2248. I want to announce my intention to work with Mr. ROE, my colleague from Tennessee, in the next Congress, that we will preserve the sacred bipartisan space that we have here for America's veterans in the Veterans' Affairs Committee. We have so much more to do, and I hope it lays the groundwork for this Congress to continue to heal and reach out to each other and serve America as well as our veterans.

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

□ 1730

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

Mr. Speaker, I, too, want to encourage all Members to support S. 2248, as amended.

As I close, I thank both the Republican and Democratic members of the committee and of the full House for the incredible work that they have done. This committee is an example of how Congress should work. We put our partisanship aside at the door and we think about one thing: what is good for America's veterans and their families.

You heard today how Members on both sides of the aisle have gone home and listened to their constituents and come back with great ideas. Often, the great ideas don't emanate from here; they emanate from the citizens of this country. I thank them and the 20 million or so surviving veterans in this country for their incredible service. We will never get it all straight up here, but I can assure you that we are trying our very best to do what is right.

I congratulate Mr. TAKANO in his elevation to the chairmanship. I know we have worked very closely together through the last several years—not just the last 2 years, but the last sev-

eral years. He will do a great job as chairman, and I look forward to serving.

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, S. 2248, 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.

RAY HENDRIX VETERANS CLINIC

Mr. ROE of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to take from the Speaker's table the bill (H.R. 3946) to name the Department of Veterans Affairs community-based outpatient clinic in Statesboro, Georgia, the "Ray Hendrix Veterans Clinic", with the Senate amendments thereto, and concur in the Senate amendments.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Clerk will report the Senate amendments.

The Clerk read as follows:

Senate amendments:

SECTION 1. NAME OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMUNITY-BASED OUTPATIENT CLINIC, STATESBORO, GEORGIA.

The Department of Veterans Affairs community-based outpatient clinic in Statesboro, Georgia, shall after the date of the enactment of this Act be known and designated as the "Ray Hendrix Department of Veterans Affairs Clinic" or the "Ray Hendrix VA Clinic". Any reference to such clinic in any law, regulation, map, document, record, or other paper of the United States shall be considered to be a reference to the Ray Hendrix Department of Veterans Affairs Clinic.

Amend the title so as to read: "An Act to name the Department of Veterans Affairs community-based out-patient clinic in Statesboro, Georgia, the Ray Hendrix Department of Veterans Affairs Clinic."

Mr. ROE of Tennessee (during the reading). Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to dispense with the reading.

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

There was no objection.

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

There was no objection.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until approximately 6:30 p.m. today.

Accordingly (at 5 o'clock and 32 minutes p.m.), the House stood in recess.

□ 1830

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro

tempore (Mr. PAULSEN) at 6 o'clock and 30 minutes p.m.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, proceedings will resume on motions to suspend the rules previously postponed.

Votes will be taken in the following order:

H. Res. 792, by the yeas and nays; and

H.R. 3008, by the yeas and nays.

The first electronic vote will be conducted as a 15-minute vote. The second electronic vote will be conducted as a 5-minute vote.

URGING SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR TO RECOGNIZE THE HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF ROBERTO CLEMENTE'S PLACE OF DEATH

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The unfinished business is the vote on the motion to suspend the rules and agree to the resolution (H. Res. 792) urging the Secretary of the Interior to recognize the historical significance of Roberto Clemente's place of death near Piñones in Loíza, Puerto Rico, by adding it to the National Register of Historic Places, as amended, on which the yeas and nays were ordered.

The Clerk read the title of the resolution.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Utah (Mr. BISHOP) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the resolution, as amended.

The vote was taken by electronic device, and there were—yeas 385, nays 1, answered "present" 2, not voting 44, as follows:

[Roll No. 426]

YEAS—385

Abraham	Brown (MD)	Comstock
Adams	Brownley (CA)	Conaway
Aderholt	Buck	Connolly
Aguilar	Bucshon	Cook
Allen	Budd	Cooper
Amodei	Burgess	Correa
Arrington	Bustos	Costello (PA)
Babin	Butterfield	Courtney
Bacon	Byrne	Cramer
Balderson	Calvert	Crawford
Banks (IN)	Capuano	Crist
Barr	Carbajal	Crowley
Barragán	Cárdenas	Cuellar
Barton	Carson (IN)	Culberson
Bass	Carter (GA)	Cummings
Beatty	Carter (TX)	Curtis
Bera	Cartwright	Davidson
Bergman	Castor (FL)	Davis (CA)
Biggs	Castro (TX)	Davis, Danny
Bilirakis	Chabot	Davis, Rodney
Bishop (GA)	Cheney	DeFazio
Bishop (UT)	Chu, Judy	DeGette
Black	Cicilline	Delaney
Blackburn	Clark (MA)	DeLauro
Blum	Clarke (NY)	DeBene
Blumenauer	Clay	Demings
Blunt Rochester	Cleaver	DesJarlais
Bonamici	Cloud	Deutch
Bost	Clyburn	Diaz-Balart
Boyle, Brendan	Coffman	Dingell
F.	Cohen	Doggett
Brady (TX)	Cole	Donovan
Brat	Collins (GA)	Doyle, Michael
Brooks (AL)	Collins (NY)	F.
Brooks (IN)	Comer	Duffy