

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until approximately 3 p.m. today.

Accordingly (at 2 o'clock and 10 minutes p.m.), the House stood in recess.

□ 1500

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. ESPAILLAT) at 3 p.m.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, the Chair will postpone further proceedings today on motions to suspend the rules on which a recorded vote or the yeas and nays are ordered, or votes objected to under clause 6 of rule XX.

The House will resume proceedings on postponed questions at a later time.

BLUE WATER NAVY VIETNAM VETERANS ACT OF 2019

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and to insert extraneous material on H.R. 299, as amended.

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

There was no objection.

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 299) to amend title 38, United States Code, to clarify presumptions relating to the exposure of certain veterans who served in the vicinity of the Republic of Vietnam, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 299

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 “Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019”.

SEC. 2. CLARIFICATION OF PRESUMPTIONS OF EXPOSURE FOR VETERANS WHO SERVED IN VICINITY OF REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Chapter 11 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by inserting after section 1116 the following new section:

“§ 1116A. Presumptions of service connection for veterans who served offshore of the Republic of Vietnam

“(a) SERVICE CONNECTION.—For the purposes of section 1110 of this title, and subject to section 1113 of this title, a disease covered by section 1116 of this title becoming manifest as specified in that section in a veteran who, during active military, naval, or air service, served offshore of the Republic of Vietnam during the period beginning on January 9, 1962, and ending on May 7, 1975, shall be considered to have been incurred in or aggravated by such service, notwithstanding that there is no record of evidence of such disease during the period of such service.

“(b) EXPOSURE.—A veteran who, during active military, naval, or air service, served offshore of the Republic of Vietnam during the period beginning on January 9, 1962, and ending on May 7, 1975, shall be presumed to

have been exposed during such service to an herbicide agent unless there is affirmative evidence to establish that the veteran was not exposed to any such agent during that service.

“(c) EFFECTIVE DATE OF AWARD.—(1) Except as provided by paragraph (2), the effective date of an award under this section shall be determined in accordance with section 5110 of this title.

“(2)(A) Notwithstanding subsection (g) of section 5110 of this title, the Secretary shall determine the effective date of an award based on a claim under this section for an individual described in subparagraph (B) by treating the date on which the individual filed the prior claim specified in clause (i) of such subparagraph as the date on which the individual filed the claim so awarded under this section.

“(B) An individual described in this subparagraph is a veteran, or a survivor of a veteran, who meets the following criteria:

“(i) The veteran or survivor submitted a claim for disability compensation on or after September 25, 1985, and before January 1, 2020, for a disease covered by this section, and the claim was denied by reason of the claim not establishing that the disease was incurred or aggravated by the service of the veteran.

“(ii) The veteran or survivor submits a claim for disability compensation on or after January 1, 2020, for the same condition covered by the prior claim under clause (i), and the claim is approved pursuant to this section.

“(d) DETERMINATION OF OFFSHORE.—Notwithstanding any other provision of law, for purposes of this section, the Secretary shall treat a location as being offshore of Vietnam if the location is not more than 12 nautical miles seaward of a line commencing on the southwestern demarcation line of the waters of Vietnam and Cambodia and intersecting the following points:

“Points Geographic Names	Latitude North	Longitude East
At Hon Nhan Island, Tho Chu Archipelago Kien Giang Province	9°15.0'	103°27.0'
At Hon Da Island southeast of Hon Khoai Island Minh Hai Province	8°22.8'	104°52.4'
At Tai Lon Islet, Con Dao Islet in Con Dao-Vung Toa Special Sector	8°37.8'	106°37.5'
At Bong Lai Islet, Con Dao Islet	8°38.9'	106°40.3'
At Bay Canh Islet, Con Dao Islet	8°39.7'	106°42.1'
At Hon Hai Islet (Phu Qui group of islands) Thuan Hai Province	9°58.0'	109°5.0'
At Hon Doi Islet, Thuan Hai Province	12°39.0'	109°28.0'
At Dai Lanh point, Phu Khanh Province	12°53.8'	109°27.2'
At Ong Can Islet, Phu Khanh Province	13°54.0'	109°21.0'
At Ly Son Islet, Nghia Binh Province	15°23.1'	109° 9.0'
At Con Co Island, Binh Tri Thien Province	17°10.0'	107°20.6'

“(e) HERBICIDE AGENT.—In this section, the term ‘herbicide agent’ has the meaning given that term in section 1116(a)(3) of this title.”.

(b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections at the beginning of such chapter is amended by inserting after the item relating to section 1116 the following new item:

“1116A. Presumptions of service connection for veterans who served offshore of the Republic of Vietnam.”.

(c) IMPLEMENTATION.—

(1) GUIDANCE.—Notwithstanding section 501 of such title, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs may issue guidance to implement section 1116A of title 38, United States Code, as added by subsection (a), before prescribing new regulations under such section.

(2) UPDATES.—(A) Not later than 120 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall submit a report to the Committees on Veterans’ Affairs of the House of Representatives and the Senate regarding the plans of the Secretary—

(i) to conduct outreach under subsection (d); and

(ii) to respond to inquiries from veterans regarding claims for disability compensation under section 1116A of title 38, United States Code, as added by subsection (a) of this section.

(B) On a quarterly basis during the period beginning on the date of the enactment of this Act and ending on the date on which regulations are prescribed to carry out such section 1116A, the Secretary shall submit to the Committees on Veterans’ Affairs of the

House of Representatives and the Senate updates on the status of such regulations.

(3) PENDING CASES.—

(A) AUTHORITY TO STAY.—The Secretary may stay a claim described in subparagraph (B) until the date on which the Secretary commences the implementation of such section 1116A.

(B) CLAIMS DESCRIBED.—A claim described in this subparagraph is a claim for disability compensation—

(i) relating to the service and diseases covered by such section 1116A; and

(ii) that is pending at the Veterans Benefits Administration or the Board of Veterans' Appeals on or after the date of the enactment of this Act and before the date on which the Secretary commences the implementation of such section 1116A.

(d) OUTREACH.—

(1) REQUIREMENT.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall conduct outreach to inform veterans described in paragraph (2) of the ability to submit a claim for disability compensation under section 1116A of title 38, United States Code, as added by subsection (a). Such outreach shall include the following:

(A) The Secretary shall publish on the website of the Department a notice that a veterans described in paragraph (2) may submit or resubmit a claim for disability compensation under such section 1116A.

(B) The Secretary shall notify in writing the veteran service organization community of the ability of veterans described in paragraph (2) to submit or resubmit claims for disability compensation under such section 1116A.

(2) VETERAN DESCRIBED.—A veteran described in this paragraph is a veteran who, during active military, naval, or air service, served offshore of the Republic of Vietnam during the period beginning on January 9, 1962, and ending on May 7, 1975.

(e) REPORTS.—Not later than January 1, 2021, and annually thereafter for two years, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Representatives and the Senate a report regarding claims for disability compensation under section 1116A of title 38, United States Code, as added by subsection (a). Each report shall include, with respect to the calendar year preceding the report, disaggregated by the regional offices of the Department of Veterans Affairs, the following:

(1) The number of claims filed under such section.

(2) The number of such claims granted.

(3) The number of such claims denied.

(f) HEALTH CARE.—Section 1710(e)(4) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by inserting “(including offshore of such Republic as described in section 1116A(d) of this title)”, after “served on active duty in the Republic of Vietnam”.

(g) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendments made by this section shall take effect on January 1, 2020.

SEC. 3. PRESUMPTION OF HERBICIDE EXPOSURE FOR CERTAIN VETERANS WHO SERVED IN KOREA.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Chapter 11 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by inserting after section 1116A, as added by section 2, the following new section:

“§ 1116B. Presumption of herbicide exposure for certain veterans who served in Korea

“(a) PRESUMPTION OF SERVICE-CONNECTION.—(1) For the purposes of section 1110 of this title, and subject to section 1113 of this title, a disease specified in subsection (b) that becomes manifest as specified in that subsection in a veteran described in paragraph (2) shall be considered to have been in-

curred or aggravated in the line of duty in the active military, naval, or air service, notwithstanding that there is no record of evidence of such disease during the period of such service.

“(2) A veteran described in this paragraph is a veteran who, during active military, naval, or air service, served in or near the Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), during the period beginning on September 1, 1967, and ending on August 31, 1971.

“(b) DISEASES.—A disease specified in this subsection is—

“(i) a disease specified in paragraph (2) of subsection (a) of section 1116 of this title that becomes manifest as specified in that paragraph; or

“(ii) any additional disease that—

“(A) the Secretary determines in regulations warrants a presumption of service-connection by reason of having positive association with exposure to an herbicide agent; and

“(B) becomes manifest within any period prescribed in such regulations.

“(c) HERBICIDE AGENT.—For purposes of this section, the term ‘herbicide agent’ has the meaning given such term in section 1821(d) of this title.”.

(b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections at the beginning of such chapter is amended by inserting after the item relating to section 1116A, as added by section 2, the following new item:

“1116B. Presumption of herbicide exposure for certain veterans who served in Korea.”.

(c) IMPLEMENTATION.—

(1) GUIDANCE.—Notwithstanding section 501 of such title, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs may issue guidance to implement section 1116B of title 38, United States Code, as added by subsection (a), before prescribing new regulations under such section.

(2) UPDATES.—(A) Not later than 120 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall submit a report to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Representatives and the Senate regarding the plans of the Secretary to respond to inquiries from veterans regarding claims for disability compensation under section 1116B of title 38, United States Code, as added by subsection (a) of this section.

(B) On a quarterly basis during the period beginning on the date of the enactment of this Act and ending on the date on which regulations are prescribed to carry out such section 1116B, the Secretary shall submit to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Representatives and the Senate updates on the status of such regulations.

(3) PENDING CASES.—

(A) AUTHORITY TO STAY.—The Secretary may stay a claim described in subparagraph (B) until the date on which the Secretary commences the implementation of section 1116B of title 38, United States Code, as added by subsection (a).

(B) CLAIMS DESCRIBED.—A claim described in this subparagraph is a claim for disability compensation—

(i) relating to the service and diseases covered by such section 1116B; and

(ii) that is pending at the Veterans Benefits Administration or the Board of Veterans' Appeals on or after the date of the enactment of this Act and before the date on which the Secretary commences the implementation of such section 1116B.

(d) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendments made by this section shall take effect on January 1, 2020.

SEC. 4. BENEFITS FOR CHILDREN OF CERTAIN THAILAND SERVICE VETERANS BORN WITH SPINA BIFIDA.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Subchapter III of chapter 18 of title 38, United States Code, is amended

by adding at the end the following new section:

“§ 1822. Benefits for children of certain Thailand service veterans born with spina bifida

“(a) BENEFITS AUTHORIZED.—The Secretary may provide to any child of a veteran of covered service in Thailand who is suffering from spina bifida the health care, vocational training and rehabilitation, and monetary allowance required to be paid to a child of a Vietnam veteran who is suffering from spina bifida under subchapter I of this chapter as if such child of a veteran of covered service in Thailand were a child of a Vietnam veteran who is suffering from spina bifida under such subchapter.

“(b) SPINA BIFIDA CONDITIONS COVERED.—This section applies with respect to all forms and manifestations of spina bifida, except spina bifida occulta.

“(c) VETERAN OF COVERED SERVICE IN THAILAND.—For purposes of this section, a veteran of covered service in Thailand is any individual, without regard to the characterization of that individual's service, who—

“(1) served in the active military, naval, or air service in Thailand, as determined by the Secretary in consultation with the Secretary of Defense, during the period beginning on January 9, 1962, and ending on May 7, 1975; and

“(2) is determined by the Secretary, in consultation with the Secretary of Defense, to have been exposed to a herbicide agent during such service in Thailand.

“(d) HERBICIDE AGENT.—For purposes of this section, the term ‘herbicide agent’ means a chemical in a herbicide used in support of United States and allied military operations in Thailand, as determined by the Secretary in consultation with the Secretary of Defense, during the period beginning on January 9, 1962, and ending on May 7, 1975.”.

(b) CONFORMING AMENDMENT TO DEFINITION OF “CHILD”.—Section 1831(1) of such title is amended—

(1) in subparagraph (B)—

(A) by striking “subchapter III of this chapter” and inserting “section 1821 of this title”; and

(B) in clause (i), by striking “section 1821 of this title” and inserting “that section”; and

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

“(C) For purposes of section 1822 of this title, an individual, regardless of age or marital status, who—

“(i) is the natural child of a veteran of covered service in Thailand (as determined for purposes of that section); and

“(ii) was conceived after the date on which that veteran first entered service described in subsection (c) of that section.”.

(c) CLERICAL AMENDMENTS.—

(1) SUBCHAPTER HEADING.—The heading for subchapter III of chapter 18 of such title is amended by inserting “AND THAILAND” after “KOREA”.

(2) TABLE OF SECTIONS.—The table of sections at the beginning of chapter 18 of such title is amended—

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

“SUBCHAPTER III—CHILDREN OF CERTAIN KOREA AND THAILAND SERVICE VETERANS BORN WITH SPINA BIFIDA”;

and

(B) by inserting after the item relating to section 1821 the following new item:

“1822. Benefits for children of certain Thailand service veterans born with spina bifida.”.

(d) IMPLEMENTATION.—

(1) GUIDANCE.—Notwithstanding section 501 of such title, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs may issue guidance to implement section 1822 of title 38, United States Code, as added by subsection (a), before prescribing new regulations under such section.

(2) UPDATES.—(A) Not later than 120 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall submit a report to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Representatives and the Senate regarding the plans of the Secretary to respond to inquiries from veterans regarding claims for disability compensation under section 1822 of title 38, United States Code, as added by subsection (a) of this section.

(B) On a quarterly basis during the period beginning on the date of the enactment of this Act and ending on the date on which regulations are prescribed to carry out such section 1822, the Secretary shall submit to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Representatives and the Senate updates on the status of such regulations.

(3) PENDING CASES.—

(A) AUTHORITY TO STAY.—The Secretary may stay a claim described in subparagraph (B) until the date on which the Secretary commences the implementation of section 1822 of title 38, United States Code, as added by subsection (a).

(B) CLAIMS DESCRIBED.—A claim described in this subparagraph is a claim for benefits—

(i) relating to the spina bifida and service covered by such section 1822; and

(ii) that is pending at the Veterans Benefits Administration or the Board of Veterans' Appeals on or after the date of the enactment of this Act and before the date on which the Secretary commences the implementation of such section 1822.

(e) REPORT.—Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, in consultation with the Secretary of Defense, shall submit to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs

of the House of Representatives and the Senate a report identifying—

(1) the military installations of the United States located in Thailand during the period beginning on January 9, 1962, and ending on May 7, 1975, at which an herbicide agent (as defined in section 1822 of title 38, United States Code, as added by subsection (a)) was actively used; and

(2) the period of such use.

(f) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendments made by this section shall take effect on January 1, 2020.

SEC. 5. UPDATED REPORT ON CERTAIN GULF WAR ILLNESS STUDY.

Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Representatives and the Senate an updated report on the findings, as of the date of the updated report, of the Follow-up Study of a National Cohort of Gulf War and Gulf Era Veterans under the epidemiology program of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

SEC. 6. LOANS GUARANTEED UNDER HOME LOAN PROGRAM OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

(a) ADJUSTMENT OF LOAN LIMIT.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Section 3703(a)(1) of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(A) in subparagraph (A)—

(i) in clause (i)(IV), by striking “the lesser of the maximum guaranty amount (as defined in subparagraph (C)) or”;

(ii) in clause (ii), by striking “subparagraph (B) of this paragraph” and inserting “subparagraph (B) or (C)”;

(B) in subparagraph (B)—

(i) by striking “The maximum” and inserting “With respect to loans described in subclauses (I), (II), or (III) of subparagraph (A)(i), the maximum”; and

(ii) by striking “or in the case” and all that follows through “subparagraph (C)”; and

(C) by striking subparagraph (C) and inserting the following new subparagraph (C):

“(C)(i) With respect to loans described in subclause (IV) of subparagraph (A)(i) made to a veteran not covered by clause (ii), the maximum amount of guaranty entitlement available to the veteran shall be 25 percent of the loan.

“(ii) With respect to loans described in subclause (IV) of subparagraph (A)(i) made to a covered veteran, the maximum amount of guaranty entitlement available to the veteran shall be 25 percent of the Freddie Mac conforming loan limit, reduced by the amount of entitlement previously used by the veteran under this chapter and not restored as a result of the exclusion in section 3702(b) of this title.

“(iii) In this subparagraph:

“(I) The term ‘covered veteran’ means a veteran who has previously used entitlement under this chapter and for whom the full amount of entitlement so used has not been restored as a result of the exclusion in section 3702(b) of this title.

“(II) The term ‘Freddie Mac conforming loan limit’ means the limit determined under section 305(a)(2) of the Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corporation Act (12 U.S.C. 1454(a)(2)) for a single-family residence, as adjusted for the year involved.”.

(2) LOANS TO NATIVE AMERICAN VETERANS.—Section 3762(c) of such title is amended—

(A) by striking paragraph (1); and

(B) by redesignating paragraphs (2) and (3) as paragraphs (1) and (2), respectively.

(3) CONFORMING AMENDMENT.—Section 3710(d)(4) of such title is amended by striking “section 3703(a)(1)(B) of this title” and inserting “subparagraph (B) or (C) of section 3703(a)(1) of this title”.

(b) ADJUSTMENT OF LOAN FEES.—Section 3729(b)(2) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by striking the loan fee table and inserting the following:

“Type of loan	Active duty veteran	Reservist	Other obligor
(A)(i) Initial loan described in section 3710(a) to purchase or construct a dwelling with 0-down, or any other initial loan described in section 3710(a) other than with 5-down or 10-down (closed on or after October 1, 2004, and before January 1, 2020)	2.15	2.40	NA
(A)(ii) Initial loan described in section 3710(a) to purchase or construct a dwelling with 0-down, or any other initial loan described in section 3710(a) other than with 5-down or 10-down (closed on or after January 1, 2020, and before January 1, 2022)	2.30	2.30	NA
(A)(iii) Initial loan described in section 3710(a) to purchase or construct a dwelling with 0-down, or any other initial loan described in section 3710(a) other than with 5-down or 10-down (closed on or after January 1, 2022, and before October 1, 2029)	2.15	2.15	NA
(A)(iv) Initial loan described in section 3710(a) to purchase or construct a dwelling with 0-down, or any other initial loan described in section 3710(a) other than with 5-down or 10-down (closed on or after October 1, 2029)	1.40	1.40	NA
(B)(i) Subsequent loan described in section 3710(a) to purchase or construct a dwelling with 0-down, or any other subsequent loan described in section 3710(a) (closed on or after October 1, 2004, and before January 1, 2020)	3.30	3.30	NA
(B)(ii) Subsequent loan described in section 3710(a) to purchase or construct a dwelling with 0-down, or any other subsequent loan described in section 3710(a) (closed on or after January 1, 2020, and before January 1, 2022)	3.60	3.60	NA
(B)(iii) Subsequent loan described in section 3710(a) to purchase or construct a dwelling with 0-down, or any other subsequent loan described in section 3710(a) (closed on or after January 1, 2022, and before October 1, 2029)	3.30	3.30	NA
(B)(iv) Subsequent loan described in section 3710(a) to purchase or construct a dwelling with 0-down, or any other subsequent loan described in section 3710(a) (closed on or after October 1, 2029)	1.25	1.25	NA
(C)(i) Loan described in section 3710(a) to purchase or construct a dwelling with 5-down (closed before January 1, 2020)	1.50	1.75	NA
(C)(ii) Loan described in section 3710(a) to purchase or construct a dwelling with 5-down (closed on or after January 1, 2020, and before January 1, 2022)	1.65	1.65	NA

“Type of loan	Active duty veteran	Reservist	Other obligor
(C)(iii) Loan described in section 3710(a) to purchase or construct a dwelling with 5-down (closed on or after January 1, 2022, and before October 1, 2029)	1.50	1.50	NA
(C)(iv) Loan described in section 3710(a) to purchase or construct a dwelling with 5-down (closed on or after October 1, 2029)	0.75	0.75	NA
(D)(i) Loan described in section 3710(a) to purchase or construct a dwelling with 10-down (closed before January 1, 2020)	1.25	1.50	NA
(D)(ii) Loan described in section 3710(a) to purchase or construct a dwelling with 10-down (closed on or after January 1, 2020, and before January 1, 2022)	1.40	1.40	NA
(D)(iii) Loan described in section 3710(a) to purchase or construct a dwelling with 10-down (closed on or after January 1, 2022, and before October 1, 2029)	1.25	1.25	NA
(D)(iv) Loan described in section 3710(a) to purchase or construct a dwelling with 10-down (closed on or after October 1, 2029)	0.50	0.50	NA
(E) Interest rate reduction refinancing loan	0.50	0.50	NA
(F) Direct loan under section 3711	1.00	1.00	NA
(G) Manufactured home loan under section 3712 (other than an interest rate reduction refinancing loan)	1.00	1.00	NA
(H) Loan to Native American veteran under section 3762 (other than an interest rate reduction refinancing loan)	1.25	1.25	NA
(I) Loan assumption under section 3714	0.50	0.50	0.50
(J) Loan under section 3733(a)	2.25	2.25	2.25 ¹ .

(c) WAIVER OF FEES FOR PURPLE HEART RECIPIENTS.—Section 3729(c)(1) of such title is amended—

(1) by striking “or from a surviving spouse” and inserting “, from a surviving spouse”; and

(2) by inserting before the period at the end the following: “, or from a member of the Armed Forces who is serving on active duty and who provides, on or before the date of loan closing, evidence of having been awarded the Purple Heart”.

(d) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendments made by this section shall apply with respect to a loan guaranteed under section 3710 of title 38, United States Code, on or after January 1, 2020.

(e) GUIDANCE.—Notwithstanding section 501 of title 38, United States Code, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs may issue guidance to implement this section before prescribing new regulations under sections 3703, 3729, and 3762 of such title, as amended by this section.

SEC. 7. INFORMATION GATHERING FOR DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS HOME LOAN APPRAISALS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Section 3731(b) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new paragraph:

“(3) The Secretary shall permit an appraiser on a list developed and maintained under subsection (a)(3) to make an appraisal for the purposes of this chapter based solely on information gathered by a person with whom the appraiser has entered into an agreement for such services.”.

(b) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendments made by this section shall apply with respect to an appraisal under section 3731 of such title, on or after January 1, 2020.

(c) GUIDANCE.—Notwithstanding section 501 of such title, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs may issue guidance to implement this section before prescribing new regulations under sections 3731 of such title, as amended by subsection (a).

SEC. 8. DETERMINATION OF BUDGETARY EFFECTS.

The budgetary effects of this Act, for the purpose of complying with the Statutory Pay-As-You-Go Act of 2010, shall be determined by reference to the latest statement titled “Budgetary Effects of PAYGO Legislation” for this Act, submitted for printing in the Congressional Record by the Chairman of the House Budget Committee, provided that such statement has been submitted prior to the vote on passage.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from California (Mr. TAKANO) and the gen-

tleman from Tennessee (Mr. DAVID P. ROE) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California.

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

Mr. Speaker, for the second time in 2 years, this House has arrived at a turning point in the journey to adjust VA compensation policy and finally recognize U.S. Navy sailors who were exposed to toxic herbicides during the Vietnam war.

Congress has failed our blue water Navy veterans, plain and simple. Those who have advocated for and participated in the process to bring this legislation to the House floor know this history is deeply tragic. By not granting the benefits these veterans earned more than 40 years ago, these veterans and their survivors continue to experience immeasurable pain, death, and grief caused by the spraying of 12.1 million gallons of highly toxic Agent Orange during the Vietnam war. It was unjust then, and it is unjust now. But today, we have an opportunity to right this wrong.

For Members of Congress, this fraught history comes with a responsibility to provide compensation and care for the injury Agent Orange exposure has caused. Though the exposures occurred primarily in the 1960s, Congress didn’t find the resolve to act until 1991, and it left out key groups of veterans exposed to Agent Orange, effectively denying their suffering that was a direct result of their military service.

Today, we will right this wrong by including three additional categories of veterans injured by Agent Orange: the blue water Navy Vietnam veterans; the veterans who served in the Korean DMZ; and children with spina bifida born to parents exposed during their service in Thailand.

The Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019 is the quickest and surest way to deliver benefits to these veterans. It is the direct result of bipartisan efforts by Ranking Member

PHIL ROE and myself to bring this to the House floor for consideration.

The 2019 version of H.R. 299 is an updated version of the act this House passed unanimously last Congress. It follows the Federal circuit court decision in Procopio. That case reversed VA’s 1997 decision to deny the presumption of Agent Orange exposure to veterans that served off the shores of Vietnam.

The Procopio decision was a huge step forward, but we need more. We need to ensure blue water Navy veterans are protected in the event Procopio is appealed to the Supreme Court and overturned.

That is why we have worked together with veteran service organizations to establish, without doubt, that blue water Navy veterans are entitled to this presumption.

Our current proposal is very similar to the bill passed in the last Congress. It includes crucial geo-coordinates that require VA to recognize service off the shore of Vietnam when deciding claims for disability compensation for herbicide-related diseases.

Let me repeat: This proposal is the quickest and clearest route to delivering benefits to those deserving veterans. They have waited long enough.

H.R. 299 has the full support of the American Legion, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Disabled American Veterans, the Vietnam Veterans of America, the Paralyzed Veterans of America, and many other veteran service organizations.

I have two letters signed by 25 of these organizations, and I included them in the RECORD.

MAY 13, 2019.

Hon. MARK TAKANO,
Chairman, House Veterans’ Affairs Committee,
Washington, DC.

Hon. PHIL ROE,
Ranking Member, House Veterans’ Affairs Committee, Washington, DC.

DEAR CHAIRMAN TAKANO AND RANKING MEMBER DR. ROE: As leaders of major veterans’ organizations, and on behalf of our more than 5 million combined members, we write to offer our strongest support for H.R. 299, the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans

Act and to encourage all Members of Congress to vote to approve this legislation.

As you know, during the 115th Congress, Blue Water Navy legislation passed the House by a vote of 382 to 0; however, the bill was not successful in the Senate. We thank you both for reintroducing Blue Water Navy veteran legislation in the 116th Congress and we are grateful that with your leadership H.R. 299 was unanimously reported out of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee on May 8, 2019.

When VA implemented the Agent Orange Act of 1991, it determined that veterans who received the Vietnam Service Medal, to include those who served in the waters offshore, were exposed to Agent Orange. In 1993, a VA General Counsel opinion held that veterans with service in the waters offshore were exposed to Agent Orange. However, in 1997, VA General Counsel opined that the 1996 Veterans Benefits Improvements Act determined only veterans who physically served in Vietnam were exposed to Agent Orange, although that was not stated in the law.

To clarify, from 1991 to 1997 veterans with service in the waters offshore of Vietnam were considered to have been exposed to Agent Orange, as Congress intended. The 1997 decision to exclude Blue Water Navy veterans was not based on medical or scientific evidence, law, or Congressional intent; it was based on a misinterpretation.

On January 29th, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit in *Procopio v. Wilkie*, overruled VA's previous misinterpretations and determined that service in the Republic of Vietnam includes the territorial waters within 12 nautical miles of the baseline.

H.R. 299 would fully protect Procopio's holdings that service in the Republic of Vietnam includes the territorial waters. The bill would use the same grid coordinates in the legislation approved by the House last year, which would extend beyond 12 nautical miles in some locations, particularly the Mekong Delta.

H.R. 299 will also expand benefits for Korean DMZ veterans who suffer from diseases and illnesses directly linked to Agent Orange. The bill would provide an earlier date of exposure for Vietnam Era veterans who served on the DMZ.

This legislation would also expand coverage for those children suffering from spina bifida because of their parents' exposure to Agent Orange while serving in Thailand during the Vietnam War. This change would provide these children benefits on par with those received by children of Vietnam veterans.

For decades, tens of thousands of veterans, their families, and survivors have been denied their earned benefits. While it is long past due, it is time that we correct the injustice done to Blue Water Navy veterans and provide protection of the Procopio decision by passing H.R. 299.

We thank you for your unwavering commitment and dedication to Blue Water Navy Vietnam veterans. We look forward to the day when we will finally pay a long overdue debt to tens of thousands of Blue Water Navy Vietnam veterans, their families and survivors.

Respectfully,

EDWARD R. REESE, JR.,
Executive Director,
Washington Headquarters, DAV (Disabled American Veterans).

LOUIS CELLI, JR.,
Executive Director,
Government & Veterans Affairs, The American Legion.

RICK WEIDMAN,
Executive Director for Policy, Vietnam Veterans of America.

DANA T. ATKINS,
Lieutenant General, U.S. Air Force (Ret.), President, Military Officers Association of America.

ROBERT E. WALLACE,
Executive Director, Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

CARL BLAKE,
Executive Director, Paralyzed Veterans of America.

JOSEPH R. CHENELLY,
Executive Director, AMVETS.

DOUGLAS GREENLAW,
National Commander, Military Order of the Purple Heart.

NATIONAL MILITARY & VETERANS ALLIANCE,
May 11, 2019.

Hon. MARK TAKANO,
Chairman, House Veterans Affairs Committee, Washington, DC.

Hon. PHL ROE,
Ranking Member, House Veterans Affairs Committee, Washington, DC.

DEAR CHAIRMAN TAKANO AND RANKING MEMBER ROE: The National Military and Veterans Alliance (NMVA), a non-partisan advocacy group comprised of the undersigned military and veteran service organizations, is pleased to offer our support for H.R. 299. H.R. 299—The Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act. H.R. 299 recognizes and brings relief to veterans who, during active military, naval, or air service, served offshore of the Republic of Vietnam during the period beginning on January 9, 1962, and ending on May 7, 1975 by amending Title 38 to recognize the presumption that these veterans have been exposed to the herbicide Agent Orange, notwithstanding that there is no record of evidence of such disease during the period of such service.

Our organizations are all familiar with the history of Agent Orange and its use in Vietnam. The United States spread over 20,000,000 gallons of the potent chemical-laced herbicide over southern Vietnam throughout the 1960's and first part of the 1970's. These areas included coastal regions and the areas around rivers and streams that emptied into the South China Sea where our Blue Water Navy service members operated.

U.S. Government-initiated studies have proven that Agent Orange causes cancer and birth defects and there are now numerous documented ways that "Blue Water" sailors, like their "Brown Water" shipmates, were exposed to Agent Orange while serving aboard ships in these contaminated areas.

One of the benefits of military service, whether in peace or in a time of war, is the peace of mind that comes with knowing that veterans and their families will be cared for. Politics should, under no circumstances, ever interfere with that peace of mind. The enactment of H.R. 299 will ensure that the veterans and their families who have suffered from the use of Agent Orange by the United States in Vietnam will finally receive the care and relief they need.

NMVA is also pleased that H.R. 299 solves another inequity by finally extending the VA Home Loan funding fee waiver to active duty Purple Heart recipients. Currently, this waiver is granted only to veterans with VA

service-connected disabilities, and we see absolutely no reason why combat-wounded service members, the vast majority of whom will almost certainly qualify for VA disability compensation upon discharge, should be denied this significant benefit, simply because they continue to serve in uniform.

NMVA thanks you for your leadership on these issues and your commitment to service members, veterans, retirees and their families. We look forward to working with you to ensure the passage of this important legislation.

Sincerely,

TED PAINTER,
Co-Director, National Military & Veterans Alliance, Executive Director, Armed Forces Retirees Association.

ALEKS MOROSK,
Co-Director, National Military & Veterans Alliance, National Legislative Director, Military Order of the Purple Heart.

NATIONAL MILITARY AND VETERANS ALLIANCE MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS SUPPORTING THIS LETTER

American Military Society, American Retirees Association, AMVETS, Armed Forces Retirees Association, Army and Navy Union, Association of the United States Navy, Military Order of Foreign Wars, Military Order of the Purple Heart, Military Order of the World Wars, Naval Enlisted Reserve Association, Reserve Officers Association, Sea Service Family Foundation, Society of Military Widows, The Independence Fund, The Retired Enlisted Association, Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors, VetsFirst, Vietnam Veterans of America.

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I also want to mention the efforts we made to pay for this bill, so it can pass the Senate this Congress.

Mr. Speaker, I include in the RECORD the Congressional Budget Office scores.

CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET OFFICE,
U.S. CONGRESS,
Washington, DC, May 13, 2019.

Hon. MARK TAKANO,
Chairman, Committee on Veterans' Affairs,
House of Representatives, Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: The Congressional Budget Office has prepared the enclosed cost estimate for H.R. 299, the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019.

If you wish further details on this estimate, we will be pleased to provide them. The CBO staff contact is Logan Smith.

Sincerely,

KEITH HALL.

Enclosure.

[By fiscal year, millions of dollars]

	2019	2019-2024	2019-2029
Direct Spending (Outlays)	0	135	-75
Revenues	0	0	0
Deficit Effect	0	135	-75
Spending Subject to Appropriation (Outlays)	0	70	191

Pay-as-you-go procedures apply? Yes.

Increases on-budget deficits in any of the four consecutive 10-year periods beginning in 2030? \$5 billion.

Mandate Effects:

Contains intergovernmental mandate? No.

Contains private-sector mandate? No.

The bill would:

Modify home loan programs administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

Increase disability compensation and expand health care for more veterans who

served in the seas near Vietnam during the Vietnam War.

Provide disability compensation to certain veterans who served near the Korea Demilitarized Zone.

Provide payments, vocational training, rehabilitation services, and health care to the biological children of certain veterans who served in Thailand during the Vietnam War if those children have been diagnosed with Spina Bifida.

Estimated budgetary effects would primarily stem from:

Changes to VA's home loan programs.

Increased disability compensation and health care benefits for certain veterans.

Areas of significant uncertainty include:

The number of veterans affected by the bill and the change in their disability ratings.

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, the decision in Procopio removed much of the cost issues both Chambers struggled with in the last Congress. Because we are covering more veterans than the Procopio decision, the ranking member and I included a mechanism in the bill to cover both the mandatory and discretionary costs. As was the case with the bill that passed last Congress, the pay-for results from raising the current rate of the filing fee veterans pay when applying for a home loan under the VA mortgage guarantee program.

We are running out of time to do what is right for the blue water Navy veterans and the survivors of those veterans we have already lost. It is time for Congress to make our intention clear. The evidence supports granting this presumption in favor of these veterans.

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

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

Mr. Speaker, today I rise in support of H.R. 299, the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019 which would extend the presumption of exposure to herbicides to veterans who served in the offshore waters of Vietnam.

I want to thank Chairman TAKANO for reintroducing this legislation and for working with me to get this bill to the House floor.

It is no surprise that the fight for our blue water Navy Vietnam veterans to receive the benefits they deserve is near and dear to me. Last Congress, I was heartened by the overwhelming support for these veterans when the House passed H.R. 299 by a vote of 382-0.

To say the least, I was very disappointed that last year's bill stalled in the Senate, and never made it to the President's desk. However, with 333 co-sponsors, it is my hope this legislation passes the House with the same bipartisan support as last year's package, and the Senate takes it up quickly. I know that is an oxymoron in the Senate, but quickly.

As many of you know, Agent Orange was used in Vietnam to defoliate areas in the jungle where enemy forces would ambush our troops. When Vietnam veterans began developing diseases as a result of their contact with Agent Or-

ange, Congress legislated the Agent Orange presumption to streamline benefits for affected veterans.

Unfortunately, the Department of Veterans Affairs' longstanding practice was to limit the presumption to veterans who set foot, boots on the ground, in Vietnam or served in inland waterways or brown water.

The blue water Navy Vietnam veterans were excluded from the presumption because VA claims there was not enough information to determine whether they came into contact with herbicides. As a result, blue water Navy Vietnam veterans must provide evidence that they were actually harmed by herbicides.

I understand how incredibly difficult this must be for veterans who try to find any records for potential exposure. I served in the United States 2nd Infantry Division in Korea near the DMZ, and I have no way to prove where I walked there 40-something years ago. There is just no way to prove that.

But right now, these veterans are suffering from conditions that are known to be associated with exposure to Agent Orange, and I believe Congress must act to resolve this issue definitively.

The recent court decision in Procopio was a huge victory for our blue water Navy Vietnam veterans. However, it is unclear how VA plans to implement the court's holdings. Congress should not wait for this issue to work itself out by VA or the courts.

These veterans have waited long enough to receive acknowledgment from VA that their illnesses may have been caused by their military service.

Mr. Speaker, 523 Vietnam veterans are dying each day. So, if the VA and this government waits long enough, we will all die. We need to get this done.

We must pass H.R. 299, as amended, so that our blue water Navy veterans can qualify for the same benefits as their boots-on-the-ground and brown-water Navy comrades.

Moreover, H.R. 299 not only addresses the concerns of blue water Navy Vietnam veterans, but also includes provisions that would: one, extend the presumption to veterans who served in or near the Korean DMZ on September 1, 1967; provide benefits to certain children of Thailand veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange; and require VA to identify the U.S. military bases located in Thailand where Agent Orange was used and when it was used.

Mr. Speaker, one of my best friends I will ever have in my life who served on one of those air bases died of a very rare lymphoma. The perimeter was sprayed with Agent Orange, and he died about 4 years ago.

H.R. 299 also provides an update on current research on their potential or in-service toxic exposures of the Gulf War veterans.

Finally, this bill would make several improvements to the VA home loan program, including: changing VA's home appraisal system so that veterans

can close on their homes quicker and more seamlessly; eliminating the conforming home loan limit to allow veterans to use their earned VA loan benefits in more expensive areas; extending the waiver of home loan funding fees to recipients of the Purple Heart who are still serving on Active Duty; and temporarily increasing VA's home loan funding fees for nondisabled veterans, which would offset the cost of the bill.

I would be remiss if I did not thank veteran service organizations for their unwavering support on this issue. I am particularly grateful to the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Disabled American Veterans, The American Legion, the Vietnam Veterans of America, the Paralyzed Veterans of America, the Military Officers Association of America, AMVETS, and the Military Order of the Purple Heart for their hard work on this legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I just read a study that was published yesterday that the United States is going into Vietnam and providing some benefits for some of the people there whose offspring were damaged. We are also doing mega-site cleanups. We are spending tens of millions of dollars to clean up Da Nang and Bien Hoa, the two major air bases where this Agent Orange was used.

It is time we did the same thing for America's veterans here in the United States. That is the right thing to do there. It is the right thing to do here.

I think I can speak for all of us today when I say that H.R. 299, as amended, does the right thing for our veterans.

Once again, Mr. Speaker, I encourage all Members to support H.R. 299, as amended, and I reserve the balance of my time.

□ 1515

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentlewoman from Virginia (Mrs. LURIA). She is my good friend and the chairwoman of the Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs Subcommittee and also a cosponsor of H.R. 299.

Mrs. LURIA. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak in support of H.R. 299, the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act. As a Navy veteran myself, this issue hits close to home, specifically in coastal Virginia, the district that I have the honor of representing.

At my first townhall after taking office, the wife of a Virginia Beach Vietnam veteran posed a deeply personal question. She said to me: Where is the blue water Navy sailor bill? I have a dying vet at home from Agent Orange who wants his country to respond to his service during Vietnam.

After the townhall, I talked with her more in depth on the issue, and with tears in her eyes, she asked me again for help and to make sure Congress did not forget her husband's service and what he sacrificed for our country.

I stand today to speak on behalf of the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act so that my constituent and

so many others across the Nation will know that we have not forsaken their service.

I am thankful to the House of Representatives for stepping up to the plate and fulfilling our responsibility to our veterans and their service to America. I am proud to support their cause today.

This bipartisan bill on the floor would finally correct an injustice for veterans who are suffering and dying from conditions related to Agent Orange exposure and who have been unfairly denied VA disability and health benefits for more than four decades.

For those who may not know, blue water Navy Vietnam veterans are servicemembers who served at sea off the shore of Vietnam during the Vietnam war.

A Federal Court, in January, ruled that the VA was wrong in denying disability and health benefits to blue water Navy Vietnam veterans who were exposed to the toxin Agent Orange; however, the administration has not yet committed to implementing this decision. As a result, the blue water Navy veterans are still in limbo, and Congress must act to secure their benefits.

Mr. Speaker, I urge quick House passage of our bipartisan legislation so our Senate colleagues can do the same and get this to the White House and pass it into law.

Mr. DAVID P. ROE of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. BOST), who was the previous chairman of the Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs Subcommittee and is now ranking member.

Mr. MIKE BOST is a marine veteran who also led a bill that we passed 2 years ago, the appeals modernization bill, a bill that has helped so many disabled veterans get their claims adjudicated more quickly.

Mr. BOST. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 299, the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act.

I am a marine and a member of the Veterans' Affairs Committee. Caring for our Nation's men and women who have served is a top priority for me and for my staff and, I know, for the members of this committee. They should have peace of mind knowing that they will be cared for by this grateful Nation.

I have had many veterans come into my office with health problems. Sometimes they can't pinpoint the problem at all, but all too often they can if they served in Vietnam: It is exposure to Agent Orange.

We now have 100,000 Navy veterans who served on ships during the Vietnam war and later became ill from their service due to exposure to Agent Orange. Unfortunately, without this legislation, they do not qualify for the same benefits as their fellow veterans who served on the ground.

We must do better. Today's legislation is a step forward in the right di-

rection. This critical legislation ensures they receive benefits for any condition they may have developed as a result of exposure to Agent Orange. It is a bipartisan bill, and it puts our veterans first.

As has been mentioned before, we passed this bill to the Senate last Congress. Unfortunately, the Senate did not, and was not, able to take it up. My hope and my prayer is that we pass this quickly, that it goes to the Senate, that they quickly do their job, and that, with that, we can get it to this President's desk, get it signed, and take care of these veterans who deserve it and have waited so long.

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume to say that my good friend, Congressman COURTNEY from Connecticut, is, unfortunately, unable to join us to speak in support of the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act due to an illness. The gentleman from Connecticut has been a steadfast advocate for the blue water Navy veterans and the veterans in his district, and I want to express my gratitude to him for pushing the Veterans' Affairs Committee and the House to right this wrong and ensure veterans receive the benefits they are owed.

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

Mr. DAVID P. ROE of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. MEUSER). DAN MEUSER is a new and very dedicated member of our committee.

Mr. MEUSER. Mr. Speaker, I thank Dr. ROE for the time.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today as well in support of H.R. 299, the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019, an important bipartisan bill that will finally guarantee equality for the blue water Navy Vietnam veterans exposed to Agent Orange.

Agent Orange was used by the U.S. military to strategically clear terrain and deforest areas during the Vietnam war. This tactical chemical has been linked, however, to prostate cancer, Parkinson's disease, and many other diseases.

For far too long, only veterans who served on Vietnam's landmass or inland waterways were entitled to the service-connected presumption of exposure to Agent Orange. This legislation ensures that the same automatic presumption is provided to those who served in the territorial seas of Vietnam. H.R. 299 addresses and permanently fixes this by properly defining those who will be eligible for VA benefits related to Agent Orange.

With this bill, we ensure that blue water Navy veterans will be treated fairly and will receive the benefits and care they deserve. I am proud to be a cosponsor of this important bill, and I will continue to work for our Nation's veterans, providing them the care and benefits they have earned.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this bill.

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume to pay tribute to the late Congressman Walter B. Jones, Jr., from North Carolina, who cosponsored H.R. 299 at the very beginning of this Congress. It saddens me that we weren't able to pass this bipartisan bill into law before his passing. As a former member of the North Carolina National Guard, he would be proud to know that this bill was being considered on the House floor today and that we will continue to push to get this legislation passed into law.

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

Mr. DAVID P. ROE of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to thank the chairman. I know Walter's family appreciates that. He served this House, this Chamber, honorably for so many years and was an incredible supporter of our Nation's veterans. I know his family and I certainly appreciate the chairman's acknowledging his service and his dedication to our veterans.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from New York (Mr. ZELDIN). I have been to his district, and there is no better and more fervent supporter of our Nation's veterans.

Mr. ZELDIN. Mr. Speaker, I thank the ranking member, and I thank the chairman for bringing this bill to the entire committee in a bipartisan fashion again. This is the second time that the House has taken action to pass this legislation. It is incredibly important for the Senate to do their part to help make this actually become law. I am looking forward to that bill signing, and it is decades overdue.

I rise today in support of H.R. 299, the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act, of which I am a proud cosponsor. This bill expands treatment coverage for those affected by Agent Orange from not only those who served on the ground, but to those servicemembers who are known as blue water Navy vets who were affected while serving our Nation at sea.

I live in a county called Suffolk in the State of New York. We have the largest veterans population of any county in the entire State. Thousands of Vietnam veterans and their families would now be able to receive benefits that they have earned. These brave servicemembers have put their lives on the line for our great Nation, and they have earned nothing less than the highest quality care.

Additionally, this legislation includes my bill, the Flexible VA Loan Guarantee Act, which expands veterans' opportunity for homeownership by eliminating the loan limit the VA can guarantee. This is especially critical in districts like mine.

I thank Chairman TAKANO and Ranking Member ROE for bringing this bill to the floor, and I urge all my colleagues in the Chamber to vote for it.

As I mentioned, this is the second time this legislation is passing the House. It is incredibly important that

all those in the Capitol on the other side in the Senate do the same. I urge them to immediately take up the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act and care for all of our Nation's service-members.

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

I want to take a moment on this historic day to recognize the effort of former Veterans' Affairs Committee Ranking Member Tim Walz. He was a primary mover of the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act for 12 years while he was in Congress, and I know this effort was very important to him.

He said many times that compensating and providing care for toxic exposures is one of the greatest challenges the Veterans' Affairs Committee faces but that no veteran should ever have to wait more than 40 years again.

When he left, he challenged us to make sure that this pattern of denying benefits does not continue. As chairman of this committee, I will do what I can to meet Tim Walz's challenge.

Mr. Speaker, I know that Tim has a big smile on his face in the Governor's mansion back in Minnesota, and I just want him to know that he has had a big part in today's victory.

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

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

Mr. Speaker, we all know why dioxin, or Agent Orange, was sprayed in Vietnam. At the time we thought, our government thought, that we were protecting our troops by spraying this defoliant to expose the hiding places where they were being ambushed. We understand that. I get that.

Mr. Speaker, if you were at an air base in Thailand and you were being attacked on the perimeter, I understand why it was being done. It turns out it was a horrific mistake, and it is costing lives now.

It is time to do the right thing, and the right thing with 523 of us dying each day is to pass this bill, H.R. 299, and get it to the Senate. I believe the chairman and I would like to challenge the Senate to start hearing this and perhaps even vote on it before Memorial Day. That would be the right thing to do.

Also, I want to thank Congressman David Valadao, who is no longer here, along with my good friend Mr. Walz, who is now the Governor of Minnesota. Congressman Valadao was very helpful. There was not a day on the House floor that I was down here that David was not asking me: When are we going to get the Blue Water Navy bill passed? When are we going to pass this bill?

Mr. Speaker, it is time to stop talking about it, and it is time to do something about it. The reason that it is important to not let the courts decide is another court may decide just like 1997, when they changed what the VA was doing. So it is time to put this in the footprint of the law so that there is no question about what we do.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the chairman. I want to thank him for when he was a member of the committee when I was chairman of the last Congress, how hard we all worked in a bipartisan way to get this done.

Just so the public knows, last week, we passed 18 bills—this is one of them—out of our committee in a bipartisan way on a voice vote. Congress can work. This is one of the ways it does work very well. Again, I want to thank my staff and the majority staff for their help with this.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all of my colleagues to support this bill, and I yield back the balance of my time.

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

Mr. Speaker, passage of this legislation is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to right an injustice. I urge all my colleagues to champion this legislation, H.R. 299, as amended, so we can finally pass it into law and get justice for these veterans.

I associate myself with the challenge that the ranking member has made to the Senate. I would have rather they got it done by the end of the week, but I would be perfectly happy if we get the Blue Water Navy bill done by Memorial Day.

□ 1530

I, too, want to congratulate the hard work of my staff and your staff, for their working together. The solidarity that our staffs had in getting this bill to the floor, done, and tied with a ribbon and bow was really important. I appreciate the bipartisan spirit that not only exists between me and the gentleman, and the members of our committee, but also the spirit of cooperation that exists with our respective staffs.

Mr. Speaker, the Veterans' Affairs Committee is that corner of Congress that still works. It is with great pride today that I close out these remarks and urge my colleagues to support H.R. 299, as amended.

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

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak in support of H.R. 299, the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019.

During the Vietnam War, the United States Military sprayed approximately 20 million gallons of Agent Orange, across the southern half of Vietnam to destroy jungle foliage that concealed enemy personnel and supply routes. The Agent Orange was carried into rivers by soil and plant run-off. The hydraulic plumes from where the rivers met the coast mixed hundreds of miles of coastal water with contaminated river water. To make matters worse, rivers and harbors were also sprayed, contaminating the ocean water even further.

Due to the constant churning of the seabed from U.S. Navy Vessels moving up and down the coast, the Agent Orange would rise to the surface where it would be picked up every time Navy ships converted the salt water into potable water. A University of Queensland study on the Australian distillation system, which is the identical system used in U.S.

ships, determined that the conversion process enriched the toxic chemical ingredient Tetrachlorodibenzo-p-Dioxin (TCDD) in Agent Orange to an even higher concentration in the filtered water. The contaminated water was then used by a ship's crew for cooking, cleaning, showering, laundry, and drinking, effectively giving our sailors a heavy exposure to Agent Orange during their deployment.

Medical research concluded that exposure to the dioxin found in Agent Orange causes numerous health issues including respiratory and blood cancers, prostate cancer, and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. According to a report from the Institute of Medicine, individuals with exposure to Agent Orange at an increased risk of developing serious heart problems and Parkinson's disease.

Until 2002, presumptive coverage for accessing health care for these side effects was provided to our Blue Water Navy Veterans. However, the Department of Veterans Affairs, failed to recognize the territorial seas as a part of the sovereign territory of Vietnam. The VA unilaterally decided that it would only provide presumptive coverage to those Veterans who served on land or on inland waterways.

Veterans that were exposed to these toxic chemicals, while serving their country have been neglected for too long. Congress must act on this pressing issue by passing this important piece of legislation that is supported by 333 co-sponsors. H.R. 299 extends the presumption of exposure for service connection for diseases associated with exposure to Agent Orange to U.S. Navy Veterans who served offshore during wartime missions and also lengthens eligibility for VA benefits to certain children with spina bifida who were born to Veterans who served in Thailand and were exposed to Agent Orange.

I urge my colleagues to support this bipartisan bill. Those Veterans who sacrificed their lives on behalf of America's freedom truly deserve better.

Ms. McCOLLUM. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019 (H.R. 299).

When our brave men and women sign up to serve, the American people make a promise to them. We assure them of clearly defined benefits that are guaranteed upon completion of their service. Unfortunately, for many veterans of the Vietnam era who served offshore of the Republic of Vietnam, our government fell short of this solemn duty.

In 1991, Congress passed the Agent Orange Act, legislation that instituted the presumption of service connection for certain diseases linked to exposure to defoliants and herbicides like Agent Orange. This law built upon the Veterans' Dioxin and Radiation Exposure Compensation Standards Act of 1984 that directed the Department of Veterans Affairs to develop a system of disability compensation for Vietnam era veterans who had been exposed to Agent Orange.

However, these laws failed to acknowledge that veterans who served in the territorial seas during the Vietnam War, known as Blue Water Navy Veterans, were also exposed to Agent Orange. In addition to handling toxic chemicals onboard naval vessels, many of these chemicals polluted rivers and streams in Vietnam that ran into the territorial seas. This contaminated water was then used by the U.S. Navy for drinking, bathing, and other purposes.

H.R. 299 finally acknowledges that our Blue Water Navy Veterans were exposed to these toxic chemicals. It remedies the inequity among veterans of the Vietnam era by extending the presumption of service connection for certain conditions to those who served offshore, and it is a long overdue step towards making these veterans whole. I hope that the Senate will swiftly take up this legislation once the House passes it today.

Mr. Speaker, I strongly urge my colleagues to support this legislation and finally welcome back home our Blue Water Navy Veterans.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. TAKANO) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 299, as amended.

The question was taken.

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

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

The yeas and nays were ordered.

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

REAUTHORIZING BULLETPROOF VEST PARTNERSHIP GRANT PROGRAM

Mr. JOHNSON of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 2379) to reauthorize the Bulletproof Vest Partnership Grant Program, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 2379

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

SECTION 1. BULLETPROOF VEST PARTNERSHIP GRANT PROGRAM REAUTHORIZATION.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Section 1001(a)(23) of title I of the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968 (34 U.S.C. 10261(a)(23)) is amended by striking “part Y” and all that follows and inserting “part Y, \$30,000,000 for fiscal year 2020, and each fiscal year thereafter.”

(b) PROGRAM NAME.—Part Y of title I of the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968 (34 U.S.C. 10531 et seq.) is amended by inserting before section 2501 the following:

“SEC. 2500. PATRICK LEAHY BULLETPROOF VEST PARTNERSHIP GRANT PROGRAM.

“The program under this part shall be known as the ‘Patrick Leahy Bulletproof Vest Partnership Grant Program’.”

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. JOHNSON) and the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. COLLINS) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Georgia.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. JOHNSON of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on the bill under consideration.

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

There was no objection.

Mr. JOHNSON of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

The Bulletproof Vest Partnership Grant Program stands as a shining example of the public safety collaboration between Congress and local governments to improve public safety and protect the officers who protect us.

In the 20 years that the program has been in existence, Congress has allocated funds that have enabled local law enforcement agencies to purchase more than 1.3 million bulletproof vests. Through this program, thousands of officers have survived what would otherwise have been deadly shootings.

Without the Bulletproof Vest Partnership Grant Program, local jurisdictions that lack the financial means to purchase vests would simply be unable to do so.

As reauthorized under H.R. 2379, the program would give priority to small jurisdictions that apply for assistance. Those that most need the Federal support will continue to have priority.

An often-overlooked element of the program is the supporting role the National Institute of Justice plays in providing expert analysis on the quality and life expectancy of bulletproof vests, ensuring that officers who patrol our streets every day and every night wear vests that will give them the measure of safety that they deserve. Importantly, the Bulletproof Vest Partnership Grant Program has worked in recent years to ensure the vests that female officers are issued fit properly and provide the same protection as the vests that male officers are issued.

With H.R. 2379, the House today takes a crucial step toward ending an uncertainty concerning the future of the program by permanently authorizing its funding at \$30 million per year.

It is fitting that we consider this important legislation at the start of National Police Week, which honors those who serve and have paid the ultimate price and sacrifice in protecting our communities.

Since President John F. Kennedy first signed the proclamation designating National Peace Officers Memorial Day in 1962, officers and citizens assemble in our Nation’s Capital during Police Week to thank law enforcement officers for their service, dedication, and commitment.

It is in that spirit that we seek to reauthorize the Bulletproof Vest Partnership Grant Program. It is also fitting that this bill names the program in honor of the distinguished Senator from Vermont, PATRICK LEAHY, who played a critical role in conceiving it and who has been a consistent champion of its continuation and, now, its permanent reauthorization.

I thank Senator LEAHY for his leadership.

I would be remiss if I were not to recognize the tireless efforts of the author of H.R. 2379, my good friend Congressman BILL PASCRELL, who has worked diligently to bring this bipartisan bill to the floor today.

Mr. Speaker, this is an important bill that will help protect those who put their lives on the line to protect us. I urge my colleagues to support it today, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. COLLINS of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 2379, a bill to reauthorize the Bulletproof Vest Partnership Grant Program, and I would also like to thank Mr. PASCRELL for his work on this. This is something that we have seen over many years, and I appreciate the chairman and my friend from Georgia on the committee for bringing this forward as well.

The Bulletproof Vest Partnership, or the BVP, created by the Bulletproof Vest Partnership Grant Act of 1998, is a unique U.S. Department of Justice initiative designed to provide a critical resource to State and local law enforcement. The goal of the BVP is to support the purchase of body armor that has been tested and found to comply with applicable ballistic and stab standards promulgated by the National Institute of Justice.

For the past 20 years, the BVP has awarded more than 13,000 jurisdictions a total of \$467 million in Federal funds for the purchase of over 1.3 million vests.

From fiscal year 2015 through 2017, protective vests were directly attributable to saving the lives of at least 129 law enforcement and corrections officers. BVP funds helped purchase 21 of those vests.

In short, body armor saves lives. For 30 years, bullet-resistant body armor has protected law enforcement officers from ballistic and nonballistic incidents. As recorded by the IACP/DuPont Kevlar Survivors’ Club, more than 3,100 officers have survived potentially fatal or disabling injuries because they were wearing their body armor.

The bill before us today permanently reauthorizes this vitally important program. It will ensure our local heroes are protected from those who try to do them harm.

When a law enforcement officer leaves home in the morning, there is no guarantee he or she will return home safely that evening. This program makes it more likely, though, that these heroes will see their families again.

That is why I am an original cosponsor of H.R. 2379. As the son of a Georgia State trooper, I know what that means.

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

Mr. JOHNSON of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I yield 4 minutes to the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PASCRELL).

Mr. PASCRELL. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of the brave