

When you think about 20 people a day dying of suicide, by their own hands, it is heartbreaking. So I encourage all Members to vote for this.

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

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I also would like to take this moment to ask my colleagues to join me in passing H.R. 2359, as amended.

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

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. 2359, 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.

VET CENTER ELIGIBILITY EXPANSION ACT

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 1812) to amend title 38, United States Code, to furnish Vet Center readjustment counseling and related mental health services to certain individuals, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 1812

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 “Vet Center Eligibility Expansion Act”.

SEC. 2. EXPANSION OF VET CENTER SERVICES.

Section 1712A of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) by striking “clauses (i) through (iv)” both places it appears and inserting “clauses (i) through (vi)”; (2) by striking “in clause (v)” both places it appears and inserting “in clause (vii)”; (3) in subsection (a)(1)(C)—

(A) by redesignating clauses (iv) and (v) as clauses (vi) and (vii), respectively; and (B) by inserting after clause (iii) the following new clauses:

“(iv) Any individual who is a veteran or member of the Armed Forces, including a member of a reserve component of the Armed Forces, who served—

“(I) on active service in response to a national emergency or major disaster declared by the President; or

“(II) in the National Guard of a State under orders of the chief executive of that State in response to a disaster or civil disorder in such State.

“(v) Any individual who participated in a drug interdiction operation as a member of the Coast Guard, regardless of the location of that operation.”; and

(4) in subsection (h), by adding at the end the following new paragraphs:

“(4) The term ‘active service’ has the meaning given that term in section 101 of title 10.

“(5) The term ‘civil disorder’ has the meaning given that term in section 232 of title 18.”.

SEC. 3. PLAN TO PROVIDE VET CENTER SERVICES TO VETERANS LIVING IN AREAS WHERE NO VET CENTER IS LOCATED.

The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to the Committees on Veterans’ Affairs of the

Senate and House of Representatives a plan to provide Vet Center services to veterans living in geographic areas where no Vet Center is located, including in the United States insular areas.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from California (Mr. TAKANO) and the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. DAVID P. ROE) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and insert extraneous material on H.R. 1812.

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

There was no objection.

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

Madam Speaker, the VA is authorized to provide counseling through Vet Centers to a broad group of veterans and servicemembers. These veterans and servicemembers include National Guard and Reserve members, those who have served on Active Duty in any combat theater or area of hostility, veterans and servicemembers who experienced military sexual trauma, those who provided direct emergent medical care or mortuary services to casualties of war, or servicemembers and veterans who deployed to combat zones or areas of hostility in a direct support role.

However, members of the National Guard, Reserve, or Coast Guard who participated in a drug interdiction or who served in a response to a national emergency, major disaster, or civil disorder are currently not eligible to receive Vet Center care. This is all despite the effects such experiences can have on mental health.

H.R. 1812, as amended, the Vet Center Eligibility Expansion Act, introduced by Ranking Member ROE, would correct this oversight by extending eligibility for Vet Center care to these individuals.

It would also require the VA to submit a plan to Congress for providing Vet Center services to geographical areas in which no Vet Centers are located. These areas include territories of the United States, rural, and insular areas.

By assessing the steps necessary to provide access to Vet Centers for veterans living in these underserved areas, the Vet Center Eligibility Expansion Act is ensuring veterans, servicemembers, reservists, and members of the Coast Guard and National Guard are allowed access to the lifesaving services Vet Centers provide.

This legislation increases access to services that provide early intervention for mental healthcare issues, which can reduce the risks associated with suicide.

The sad statistics show that, of the 20 veterans and military servicemembers

who die by suicide, 14 of those 20 have not received VA healthcare. This bill is one step towards changing this tragic number.

Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague, Dr. ROE, for his work on this important measure, and I call upon all of our colleagues to join us in voting “yes” on this life-changing piece of legislation.

Madam Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

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

Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of my bill, H.R. 1812, as amended, the Vet Center Eligibility Expansion Act.

Every day, 20 of those who have worn our Nation’s uniform die by suicide. Of those 20 deaths, each one is a tragedy.

There are approximately four deaths among Active-Duty servicemembers and nonactivated members of the National Guard and Reserve.

The number of suicides among never federally activated members of the National Guard and Reserve, in particular, has increased from 2005 to 2016, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs’ most recent suicide data.

Many of these men and women have stepped up to serve their communities and our country honorably in dangerous and unpredictable situations. That service can have an understandable impact on mental health, but because they may not meet the legal definition of a veteran due to the nature of their service, these individuals may not be eligible for care from the VA.

This bill would address that issue by expanding eligibility for counseling and care at VA Vet Centers to those in the Reserve, National Guard, or Coast Guard who served in response to emergency situations in the wake of a disaster or civil disorder or support of drug interdiction operations who never deployed.

VA’s 300 Vet Centers are community-based facilities that provide readjustment counseling services to Active-Duty servicemembers, veterans, and their families.

Vet Center employees, many of whom are veterans themselves, are on the forefront of the fight to prevent suicide among servicemembers and veterans, to assure their successful transition following the military, and to assist them in recovering from whatever trauma or challenges they may be facing.

I am proud to sponsor this bill and grateful to Congressman MIKE LEVIN from California for joining me as an original cosponsor.

I am also grateful to the Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States and the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America for their support of this legislation.

It is my sincere hope that this bill will allow all of those who served in the National Guard, the Coast Guard, or the Reserve component to get the

help they need and lower the number of suicides among this population of heroes.

Madam Speaker, before reserving, I do want to note my surprise that the bill received a discretionary score of \$55 million over 5 years from the Congressional Budget Office.

It appears that CBO estimated that VA would need to create costly new capacity within the Vet Centers to care for those individuals newly eligible in this bill.

Madam Speaker, I have been to many Vet Centers, and the brick and mortar is already there. You don't have to do anything. The personnel are there. So there would be, if any, minimal costs.

However, I understand from VA that excess capacity exists within the Vet Centers that this bill would help fill, at little additional cost to the Department. I hope that could be taken into account for this bill, moving forward.

Madam Speaker, I encourage all Members to support this bill today, and I reserve the balance of my time.

□ 1545

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from California (Mr. LEVIN), my good friend and fellow Californian, the chairman of the Economic Opportunity Subcommittee, and also a cosponsor of H.R. 1812.

Mr. LEVIN of California. Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 1812, the Vet Center Eligibility Expansion Act.

Madam Speaker, I was proud to introduce this bipartisan legislation with my friend from Tennessee and ranking member of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, Dr. ROE.

We must do more to address the epidemic of suicide among veterans in this country. We can start with ensuring all servicemembers have the mental health support they need.

Currently, most National Guard, Coast Guard, and Reserve servicemembers are precluded from receiving readjustment counseling services at vet centers. Guardsmen and Reservists often face emotionally challenging deployments to natural disasters, drug interdiction missions, national emergencies, or civil disorders that can have serious mental health consequences.

This bipartisan legislation is an important step in closing the mental healthcare gap for those servicemembers who compose four of the 20 veteran suicides we see each day in this country. As we continue to see veterans turn to suicide, often on the grounds of VA facilities, we must have an all-hands-on-deck approach, and this bill can play a critical role in this effort.

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

Madam Speaker, I encourage all Members to support this. I think it is a great step forward for our Guard and Reservists.

I will just pass along a quick story of one of the reasons why I have pushed this so hard. In my Tennessee Guard at home, my previous commander said that in the first 45 days he commanded the Tennessee Guard, he had four suicides. He knew he had to do something, so he instituted a program there to help lower veteran suicides.

We have lowered our suicide rate among our Tennessee guardsmen by 70 percent. We would like to make sure that all Guard and Reservists have access to the benefits they need, the therapy they need, and the help they need for their families by allowing them to get this help at the vet center.

Madam Speaker, I encourage all Members to support this, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I urge all of my colleagues in the House to support H.R. 1812, as amended, so we can finally pass it into law and get justice for these veterans.

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

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. 1812, 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.

NAVY SEAL CHIEF PETTY OFFICER WILLIAM "BILL" MULDER (RET.) TRANSITION IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 2019

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 2326) to amend the Social Security Act, to amend the Dignified Burial and Other Veterans' Benefits Improvement Act of 2012, and to direct the Secretaries of Veterans Affairs, Defense, Labor, and Homeland Security, and the Administrator of the Small Business Administration, to take certain actions to improve transition assistance to members of the Armed Forces who separate, retire, or are discharged from the Armed Forces, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 2326

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

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Navy SEAL Chief Petty Officer William "Bill" Mulder (Ret.) Transition Improvement Act of 2019".

SEC. 2. TAP DEFINED.

In this Act, the term "TAP" means the Transition Assistance Program under sections 1142 and 1144 of title 10, United States Code.

SEC. 3. ACCESS FOR THE SECRETARIES OF LABOR AND VETERANS AFFAIRS TO THE FEDERAL DIRECTORY OF NEW HIRES.

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

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

SEC. 4. PILOT PROGRAM FOR OFF-BASE TRANSITION TRAINING FOR VETERANS AND SPOUSES.

(a) EXTENSION OF PILOT PROGRAM.—Subsection (a) of section 301 of the Dignified Burial and Other Veterans' Benefits Improvement Act of 2012 (Public Law 112-260; 10 U.S.C. 1144 note) is amended—

(1) by striking "During the two-year period beginning on the date of the enactment of this Act" and inserting "During the five-year period beginning on the date of the enactment of the Navy SEAL Chief Petty Officer William "Bill" Mulder (Ret.) Transition Improvement Act of 2019"; and

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

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

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

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

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

SEC. 5. GRANTS FOR PROVISION OF TRANSITION ASSISTANCE TO MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES AFTER SEPARATION, RETIREMENT, OR DISCHARGE.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SEC. 6. ONE-YEAR INDEPENDENT ASSESSMENT OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF TAP.

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