

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—

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

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

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

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

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

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

(7) what the Secretary, in consultation with the covered officials and veterans service organizations determine to be successful outcomes for TAP;

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(c) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

(1) The term “covered officials” is comprised of—

(A) the Secretary of Defense;

(B) the Secretary of Labor;

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

(D) the Secretaries of the military departments.

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

SEC. 7. LONGITUDINAL STUDY ON CHANGES TO TAP.

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

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

(2) a cohort that attends TAP counseling after the Secretaries of Defense and Labor implement changes recommended in the report under section 6(b) of this Act; and

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

(b) PROGRESS REPORTS.—Not later than 90 days after the day that is one year after the date of the initiation of the study under subsection (a) and annually thereafter for the three subsequent years, the Secretaries of Veterans

Affairs, Defense, and Labor, and the Administrator of the Small Business Administration, shall submit to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and House of Representatives and the Committees on Armed Services of the Senate and House of Representatives a progress report of activities under the study during the immediately preceding year.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(10) The percentage of each cohort that achieves a successful outcome for TAP, as determined under section 6(a)(7) of this Act.

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

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 include extraneous material on H.R. 2326.

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 such time as I may consume.

Madam Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 2326, as amended, the Navy SEAL Chief Petty Officer William “Bill” Mulder (Ret.) Transition Improvement Act of 2019.

I would like to recognize the Economic Opportunity Subcommittee chairman and ranking member, Mr. LEVIN and Mr. BILIRAKIS, for their bipartisan focus on this issue, and the bipartisan way in which they have crafted this piece of legislation and have moved it forward.

Almost 30 years ago, the National Defense Authorization Act created the

first transition policy to assist service-members entering civilian life. This law provides that those who are being separated from Active Duty are provided services for counseling, training opportunities, finding employment, and other related information and services.

These services, more commonly known as the Transition Assistance Program, or TAP, were amended recently by the VOW to Hire Heroes Act of 2011. This legislation called for mandatory participation of all servicemembers and improved transition resources by lengthening the process and lowering the class sizes.

While our veterans have found the TAP program to be highly beneficial, they find the sheer amount of information too overwhelming to absorb. Today, I ask my colleagues to support H.R. 2326, as amended, which aims to solve this problem.

This legislation would do several things to make TAP more effective.

First, this act would create a pilot program offering transition training off military bases, making the transition process easier to access for veterans and spouses. A review by the Government Accountability Office concluded that a program held off base would be beneficial, and the committee believes that such a program is worth examining in further detail.

In my own visits to TAP classes, I heard from servicemembers who felt they needed to attend TAP multiple times before they transition to civilian life because the resources aren't available off base. The legislation would create a grant program for organizations to provide multiple transition assistance services such as resume assistance, interview training, and job recruitment training from one program, location, and source.

Next, this act would give the Department of Labor's Veterans' Employment and Training Service and VA access to the Social Security Administration's resources to track in real time when a participant receives a new job. This is going to help improve programs and provide a better accountability of services provided by the VA.

Lastly, this bill would require a 1-year independent assessment of the effectiveness of TAP, as well as a 5-year longitudinal study of TAP which compares the effectiveness of using the program.

The 1-year independent assessment of the Transition Assistance Program's effectiveness shall be conducted not later than 90 days after the enactment of this act. The legislation requires the VA enter into an agreement with an entity with experience in adult education to carry out an independent assessment of TAP.

It also requires the Secretary of Labor, Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and the Small Business Administration to conduct a 5-year longitudinal study of TAP to determine the need for TAP off base and determine if this program

would ease the process of participation for servicemembers, veterans, and spouses who may have had difficulty attending classes on bases.

Upon completion of the respective 1-year and 5-year studies, the Secretary of the VA shall submit the findings to Congress, where we can, again, assess the quality of transition resources provided to veterans and servicemembers.

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 H.R. 2326, as amended, the Navy SEAL Chief Petty Officer William “Bill” Mulder (Ret.) Transition Improvement Act of 2019.

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

I will allow Congressman JODEY ARRINGTON from Texas, who is an original cosponsor of the bill, to go into the specifics in a moment. Before I do that, I want to thank him, as the former chairman of the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity, for taking the time last Congress to sit down with stakeholders and really examine the transition process from the very beginning and look at the need for improvements.

While this bill was a culmination of a bipartisan review and work, it is only one step in the process to ensure a successful transition for all servicemembers. I know that we all remain dedicated to making improvements to this process to reach this goal. We were unable to persuade the Senate to act on this bill last Congress, and I want to thank Mr. ARRINGTON, Chairman TAKANO, and subcommittee Chairman LEVIN for picking up where we left off in pushing this bill through yet again. I am confident, with their continued support, we can ensure it is on President Trump’s desk very soon.

Madam Speaker, I want to just say from a point of privilege, when I separated from the military, the U.S. Army in 1974, a long time ago, my transition: Was how quick can I get to the front gate? We have made huge improvements since the end of the Vietnam war. There really was no program for veterans then. It was a mistake then. I appreciate the efforts of my colleague to rectify this mistake.

Madam Speaker, I encourage all Members to support H.R. 2326, as amended, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from

California (Mr. LEVIN), my good friend, the chairman of the Economic Opportunity Subcommittee, and also the author of H.R. 2326.

Mr. LEVIN of California. Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 2326, the Navy SEAL Chief Petty Officer William “Bill” Mulder (Ret.) Transition Improvement Act of 2019.

Madam Speaker, I was proud to introduce this bipartisan legislation with my friend from Texas, Mr. JODEY ARRINGTON. Mr. ARRINGTON was a friend of Mr. Mulder and represents his hometown of Plainview, Texas.

William Mulder, or Bill as his friends knew him, passed away nearly 2 years ago on June 9, 2017. He was a decorated Navy SEAL of 20 years whose awards included three Bronze Stars with Valor. He was also a father, husband, brother, and friend.

This legislation honors him by better equipping servicemembers for the challenges and opportunities they will face as they transition from Active Duty military service to civilian life. Far too often, the men and women of our Armed Forces lack the support and coordinated resources they need to return to civilian life and we cannot leave them behind. We owe it to those who have served and their families to ensure that they have everything they need to connect with community organizations, to pursue educational opportunities, to launch new careers, or to start their own businesses. That is why we must improve the Transition Assistance Program.

This bill would extend a pilot program for off-base transition training, allowing veterans and their spouses more time and convenience to digest and access resources.

It would also create a grant program for organizations to provide multiple transition assistance services such as resume assistance, interview training, and job recruitment training from a central source.

We can also improve the program by expanding access to better employment data at the Departments of Labor and Veterans Affairs, which this bill does.

And, finally, it is important that we are constantly evaluating the effectiveness of the Transition Assistance Program, which is why this bill would require a 1-year independent assessment and a 5-year study of the program.

□ 1600

We have a solemn duty to ensure that our Nation’s heroes are able to readily access the best possible services when it comes time to transition back to civilian life.

I do not believe that we are living up to that duty right now, but this bipartisan bill will help change that. I strongly encourage my colleagues to vote in support today.

Madam Speaker, again, I thank the gentleman from Texas (Mr. ARRINGTON), my friend, and our original cosponsors: Mr. CISNEROS; ranking

member of the Economic Opportunity Subcommittee, Mr. BILIRAKIS; Mr. CUNNINGHAM; and Mrs. LEE.

Together, we can do more than pay lip service to our veterans. We can give them the support and the resources they have earned and deserve.

Mr. DAVID P. ROE of Tennessee. Madam Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Florida (Mr. BILIRAKIS), my good friend.

This is my sixth term in Congress, and I have served each one with GUS. I can assure you, there is nobody in this body, of the 435 of us, who is more supportive of our Nation’s veterans than GUS BILIRAKIS of Florida 12.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Madam Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 2326, the Navy SEAL Chief Petty Officer William “Bill” Mulder (Ret.) Transition Improvement Act of 2019.

As ranking member of the Economic Opportunity Subcommittee, I am proud of the work we have done in the subcommittee so far this year on a bipartisan basis and through regular order.

Last Congress, we worked together to make reforms to the Transition Assistance Program at the Department of Defense, enacting a portion of this bill in the National Defense Authorization Act. We created a more individualized process for servicemembers to undergo counseling and training for civilian life well before their discharge. I think that is the key.

The bill was formed as a result of multiple roundtables and hearings, which included stakeholders from my district who discussed the importance of community involvement in their transition process and stakeholders from all over the country, Madam Speaker. And yet, despite all the progress we have made, there is still more work to be done. I am grateful that we are revisiting this issue today.

H.R. 2326 will provide access to veteran employment tracking information to the VA and to the Department of Labor. It will also reestablish a pilot program for an off-base TAP program for veterans and their spouses, made available at locations such as local high schools and community centers. Madam Speaker, I think it is so important to include the spouses.

H.R. 2326 would also create a 5-year grant program at the VA for qualified community organizations that provide innovative transition assistance services to veterans.

I know we have many of these organizations in my district in Florida and all over the country. One example of this is Veterans Alternative in Holiday, Florida. I am grateful for the great work that they do.

Finally, this bill would require the VA, DOD, DOL, and SBA to coordinate their efforts to conduct a 2-year independent assessment and curriculum review of TAP and the transition process, as well as a 5-year longitudinal study on the effectiveness of these TAP changes.

I am glad to see the bill being taken up today by my friend and the subcommittee chairman, MIKE LEVIN,

whom I have gotten the pleasure to know this year.

I think I don't have much more time, but I want to give him so much credit for doing a great job as chairman of the Economic Opportunity Committee, as well as Chairman TAKANO and my good friend, Republican Ranking Member ROE. I also commend Representative ARRINGTON for doing a great job. We are helping our veterans.

Let's pass this good bill and get it to the Senate and to the President so it can become law.

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. CUNNINGHAM), my good friend and member of the Economic Opportunity Subcommittee and cosponsor of H.R. 2326.

Mr. CUNNINGHAM. Madam Speaker, today, I rise in support of H.R. 2326, the Navy SEAL Chief Petty Officer William "Bill" Mulder (Ret.) Transition Improvement Act.

First, I thank my colleagues, Congressmen LEVIN and BILIRAKIS, for all their hard work on this bipartisan bill and for their leadership on the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity.

I am honored to have helped introduce this important legislation, which will improve the military's Transition Assistance Program and help to ensure that our men and women in uniform can successfully transition to life in the civilian world at the end of their service.

H.R. 2326 will streamline the transition process and allow the VA to partner with third-party organizations that teach veterans critical job-seeking skills. By creating a pilot program for transition training off-base, this bill will also make that stressful transition process more convenient and accessible for servicemembers and their families.

Finally, this legislation will allow policymakers to more effectively adjust the program to the needs of our veterans by directing an independent assessment of its effectiveness and by expanding the VA's access to Federal employment data.

The bottom line is, we have a responsibility to our servicemembers to make sure that they are equipped with the tools to succeed both on the battlefield and when they return.

Madam Speaker, I urge all my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to join me in supporting this legislation and ensuring every veteran has access to the support that they have earned.

Mr. DAVID P. ROE of Tennessee. Madam Speaker, I yield 4 minutes to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. ARRINGTON), my good friend who was a previous chairman of the Economic Opportunity Subcommittee on the Veterans' Affairs Committee, and have him tell you about this bill because this was his friend.

Mr. ARRINGTON. Madam Speaker, what a joy and a pleasure and an honor to serve under the ranking member's leadership in the 115th Congress, my first term. I thank him for letting me

lead the subcommittee and initiate the legislation that will have an impact—I believe a tremendous impact—on the lives of folks like my friend Bill, so I thank him.

Madam Speaker, I enjoyed working with Chairman TAKANO, and I congratulate him on his chairmanship. I thank him for being a great colleague and for being a friend to the veterans, most importantly.

Madam Speaker, I thank Chairman LEVIN for being such a gracious gentleman and statesman, to come up to me on the floor of the House and tell me he was going to pick up this ball and he was going to run it all the way down the field and into the end zone so that we can score points, not politically for Democrats or Republicans, but for the American people who expect that we take care of our veterans and, most of all, for our military men and women who are transitioning and have unique challenges in that regard, as Bill had. It meant so much to me.

If I don't say anything else here, I want to say thank you. I say that on behalf of Bill's family because I know it means a lot to them.

He is worthy. Bill Mulder is worthy to be on this legislation. Don't ask me, ask his teammates, his fellow Navy SEALs.

I mean, just look at him. He is Captain America. I am so jealous. I was always jealous. He was tough. He was strong. He was courageous.

Madam Speaker, I promise you this, that when he stood between you and me and the enemy, we were safe, and the enemy was scared, as they should be.

Thank God for Bill Mulder, and thank God for our men and women who wear the uniform.

Our country makes a tremendous investment in preparing our citizen soldiers to be freedom fighters, to be part of the greatest fighting force in all the world, but then we invest a fraction of that in their transition back to civilian life.

This is an investment in prevention, as has been said. If we can do a better job on the front end, then we can prevent folks from struggling with addiction, unemployment, homelessness, suicide, and a number of challenges that disproportionately affect our veterans.

Next Monday, we will celebrate Memorial Day and take time to pay tribute to those who not only served but made the ultimate sacrifice, those American heroes who never made it home.

However, even when our soldiers do return home from war, it doesn't always mean that the conflict is over for them. There is often a battle that continues to rage on. It is a big reason that we see so many soldiers take their own lives.

One of those veterans, sadly enough, was my friend Bill, my fellow Plainview Bulldog for whom this bill was named. I am so proud that this legisla-

tion bears his name, and I am so grateful that you guys kept it that way.

Bill was a warrior's warrior. He served this country with honor and distinction.

Like many veterans, Bill's greatest fight wasn't on the battlefield. It was the struggle that often ensues from the mental, emotional, and physical wear and tear of military service.

After 20 years as a combat Navy SEAL, Bill bore scars you couldn't see, and he struggled to make that transition from Active Duty to civilian life.

For a lot of these folks, it is not the skills gap that is important. It is not always the education gap. It is not even redefining your mission and purpose after such a sacred calling as to wear the United States uniform. Sometimes, it is a mental health issue.

I am grateful that we have included that in that comprehensive assessment and in this legislation because that was the case for Mr. Mulder.

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

Mr. DAVID P. ROE of Tennessee. Madam Speaker, I yield an additional 1 minute to the gentleman from Texas.

Mr. ARRINGTON. Madam Speaker, I am sorry for going on a little long.

Let me just say, we owe this to the likes of Bill Mulder.

I really believe, Ranking Member, Chairman TAKANO, and Chairman LEVIN, of all the things I worked on, on the Veterans' Affairs Committee—and it was a tremendous honor; I didn't serve our country in the military, so this was my way of serving those who served—I don't believe anything is going to have a greater impact. And it may just save lives. I believe it will. I really do.

Madam Speaker, I am proud to be a small part of it. God bless our veterans. God bless those guardian angels that keep guard over us every day. God bless the United States of America.

Mr. DAVID P. ROE of Tennessee. Madam Speaker, I have no further speakers. I am prepared to close, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, let me say that I extend my commendations to the work of my colleague from Texas (Mr. ARRINGTON). I thank him also for naming the bill after such a distinguished warrior and someone who exemplifies the need for this legislation. We certainly wish Chief Petty Officer Navy SEAL Bill Mulder all the success in the world.

Madam Speaker, I have no further speakers, and I am prepared to close, so I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. DAVID P. ROE of Tennessee. Madam Speaker, I think it is appropriate, as we approach this Memorial Day, as many families go on picnics, to remember what it means. We not only memorialize those whom we lost in combat, but I think we also memorialize those who are lost because of the invisible wounds of combat.

I can't think of a more fitting time to pass this bill for Navy SEAL Chief

Petty Officer Bill Mulder. It is a small consolation for his family, but I think they know his memory can live on by helping other veterans. I encourage all Members to support this legislation.

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

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

Madam Speaker, before I begin my closing comments, I want to correct my remarks. I misunderstood. Chief Petty Officer Bill Mulder is deceased, and so I mean no disrespect to his family. We certainly are honored to have this piece of legislation carry his name in the hopes that it is going to serve many more veterans.

In his memory, I am most honored and privileged to make sure that this legislation passes.

□ 1615

Madam Speaker, I want to thank Mr. LEVIN and Mr. BILIRAKIS for these necessary improvements to the Transition Assistance Program. A testament to their work is the broad support they received from committee members on this bill, and I look forward to their future work on this as they continue to focus on and redefine the program.

Madam Speaker, I ask my colleagues to join me in passing H.R. 2326, as amended, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mrs. BEATTY). 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. 2326, 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.

SUPPORT FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION COORDINATORS ACT

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 2333) to direct the Comptroller General of the United States to conduct an assessment of the responsibilities, workload, and vacancy rates of Department of Veterans Affairs suicide prevention coordinators, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 2333

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 “Support for Suicide Prevention Coordinators Act”.

SEC. 2. COMPTROLLER GENERAL ASSESSMENT OF RESPONSIBILITIES, WORKLOAD, AND VACANCY RATES OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS SUICIDE PREVENTION COORDINATORS.

(a) ASSESSMENT REQUIRED.—The Comptroller General of the United States shall conduct an assessment of the responsibilities, workload, training, and vacancy rates

of Department of Veterans Affairs suicide prevention coordinators. Such assessment shall include a determination of—

(1) the extent to which the use and staffing of suicide prevention coordinators varies between Department facilities; and

(2) the extent to which the Secretary provides oversight of suicide prevention coordinators.

(b) REPORT TO CONGRESS.—Not later than one year after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Comptroller General shall submit to the Committees on Veterans’ Affairs of the Senate and House of Representatives a report containing the findings of the assessment required by subsection (a).

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 have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 2333.

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 such time as I may consume.

Madam Speaker, according to the National Suicide Data Report for 2005–2016, approximately 20 veterans, Active Duty servicemembers, and members of the National Guard and Reserves die by suicide each day.

This rate is disproportionately higher than that of the civilian population. Of those 20 a day, 14 are not enrolled in the VA healthcare system. Part of the VA’s effort to combat veteran suicide is by strengthening the role of the suicide prevention coordinator. The VA is the only healthcare system that has full-time employees dedicated to suicide prevention.

Suicide prevention coordinators identify high-risk veterans and ensure they receive appropriate care, conduct outreach, and promote awareness and best practices within the VA system. As of April 2019, the VA had approximately 444 suicide prevention coordinators stationed at medical centers across the country.

These coordinators manage care for almost 30,000 veterans who are high risk for suicide, in addition to managing their other duties as assigned.

In fiscal year 2018, these coordinators conducted more than 20,000 outreach events, reaching almost 2 million people. During the oversight trips to VA facilities, VA committee staff heard from coordinators who are overworked and struggled to keep up with their casework.

Last week, I visited the Atlanta VA Medical Center and one of three Veterans Crisis Line call centers. Last year, the Atlanta VA crisis line received 3,600 referrals. The Atlanta suicide prevention team is staffed with

only eight social workers and one employee for administrative support to respond to all crisis line referrals and approximately 200 veterans identified as high risk for suicide.

Let me repeat that. They have eight social workers to manage 3,600 referrals and 200 high-risk patients a year. This team does all it can to keep up with the staggering number of referrals, but they simply do not have the capacity to conduct outreach to veterans in the community who may need help.

Suicide prevention team staffing shortages in Atlanta and at VA medical facilities across the country is why H.R. 2333, introduced by Congressman BRINDISI, is so important.

It would direct the Government Accountability Office to access the workload and vacancy rates of VA suicide prevention coordinators. This report is essential to better informing Congress of the current state of suicide prevention coordinators, the resources at the facilities where they work, and the challenges they face in addressing the needs of our most vulnerable veterans.

The role of these coordinators is vital to combating veteran suicide, and this report will illustrate where the gaps in care delivery exists, especially for the clinicians, social workers, and suicide prevention coordinators working on the front lines.

I fully support this bill and I really want to thank Mr. BRINDISI for championing this legislation, and I urge my colleagues to vote “yes” on H.R. 2333.

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 H.R. 2333, the Support for Suicide Prevention Coordinators Act. This bill would require a Government Accountability Office report on the responsibilities, management, workload, training, and vacancy rates of Department of Veterans Affairs suicide prevention coordinators. The VA employs at least one suicide prevention coordinator in every VA medical center to coordinate, care for, and conduct outreach to servicemembers and veterans at risk of suicide.

These men and women are on the front lines of the fight against the tragic loss of 20 of our Nation’s servicemembers and veterans every day to self-harm. We must ensure that they are appropriately staffed, supported, and overseen as they go about their difficult and incredibly important work. Passage of the Support for Suicide Prevention Coordinators Act today will help us do just that.

This is a bipartisan bill sponsored by several members of the Veterans’ Affairs Committee, including Congressman JIM BANKS from Indiana, ranking member of the Subcommittee on Technology Modernization; Congressman MIKE BOST of Illinois, the ranking