

The mission of the VA is undermined each time a veteran receives substandard care. My bill would help ensure outside providers are held to the standard of providing high-quality mental healthcare and suicide prevention services.

Our efforts to stop veteran suicide need to focus on wider, better informed, and data-driven paths to tangible results so that we can save lives. This bill is about increasing transparency so that we can ensure that those who have served our Nation are not left behind when they return home.

I am grateful to my colleagues on the Committee on Veterans' Affairs who have reaffirmed their commitment to this issue and who have acted so quickly to respond to the veteran suicide crisis with the focus and resources it deserves.

Madam Speaker, I urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to support this bill.

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

Madam Speaker, I want to thank Congresswoman UNDERWOOD for submitting this legislation today. I think it is much needed. I have thought it all along. Let's find out what works and what doesn't work. I appreciate her doing this, and I feel like it will be supported by the entire body.

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

□ 1700

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

I want to thank Congresswoman UNDERWOOD for introducing H.R. 2372, and the tremendous, tremendous professional background she brings to her role in Congress, and for introducing legislation that will ensure that we hold private organizations to the same standard of care that we impose internally on the VA.

So I do urge all of my colleagues to join me in passing H.R. 2372, 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. 2372, 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.

ESTABLISHING VETERANS ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY AND TRANSITION ADMINISTRATION

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 2045) to amend title 38, United States Code, to establish the Veterans

Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration and the Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition of the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 2045

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

SECTION 1. ESTABLISHMENT OF VETERANS ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY AND TRANSITION ADMINISTRATION.

(a) VETERANS ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY AND TRANSITION ADMINISTRATION.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Part V of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new chapter:

“CHAPTER 80—VETERANS ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY AND TRANSITION ADMINISTRATION

“Sec.

“8001. Organization of Administration.

“8002. Functions of Administration.

“8003. Annual report to Congress.

“§8001. Organization of Administration

“(a) VETERANS ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY AND TRANSITION ADMINISTRATION.—There is in the Department of Veterans Affairs a Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration. The primary function of the Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration is the administration of the programs of the Department that provide assistance related to economic opportunity to veterans and their dependents and survivors.

“(b) UNDER SECRETARY FOR ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY AND TRANSITION.—The Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration is under the Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition, who is directly responsible to the Secretary for the operations of the Administration.

“§8002. Functions of Administration

“The Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration is responsible for the administration of the following programs of the Department:

“(1) Vocational rehabilitation and employment programs.

“(2) Educational assistance programs.

“(3) Veterans' housing loan and related programs.

“(4) The verification of small businesses owned and controlled by veterans pursuant to subsection (f) of section 8127 of this title, including the administration of the database of veteran-owned businesses described in such subsection.

“(5) The Transition Assistance Program under section 1144 of title 10.

“(6) Any other program of the Department that the Secretary determines appropriate.

“§8003. Annual report to Congress

“The Secretary shall include in the annual report to the Congress required by section 529 of this title a report on the programs administered by the Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition. Each such report shall include the following with respect to each such program during the fiscal year covered by that report:

“(1) The number of claims received.

“(2) The number of claims decided.

“(3) The average processing time for a claim.

“(4) The number of successful outcomes (as determined by the Secretary).

“(5) The number of full-time equivalent employees.

“(6) The amounts expended for information technology.”.

(2) CLERICAL AMENDMENTS.—The tables of chapters at the beginning of title 38, United

States Code, and of part V of title 38, United States Code, are each amended by inserting after the item relating to chapter 79 the following new item:

“80. Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration 8001”.

(b) EFFECTIVE DATE.—Chapter 80 of title 38, United States Code, as added by subsection (a), shall take effect on October 1, 2020.

(c) AUTHORIZATION FOR APPROPRIATIONS FOR VETERANS BENEFITS ADMINISTRATIONS.—There is authorized to be appropriated for fiscal year 2020 for the General Operating Expenses account of the Veterans Benefits Administration \$3,025,000,000.

(d) LABOR RIGHTS.—Any labor rights, inclusion in the bargaining unit, and collective bargaining agreement that affects an employee of the Department of Veterans Affairs who is transferred to the Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration, as established under chapter 80 of title 38, United States Code, as added by subsection (a), shall apply in the same manner to such employee after such transfer.

SEC. 2. UNDER SECRETARY FOR VETERANS ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY AND TRANSITION.

(a) UNDER SECRETARY.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Chapter 3 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by inserting after section 306 the following new section:

“§306A. Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition

“(a) UNDER SECRETARY.—There is in the Department an Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition, who is appointed by the President, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate. The Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition shall be appointed without regard to political affiliation or activity and solely on the basis of demonstrated ability in—

“(1) information technology; and

“(2) the administration of programs within the Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration or programs of similar content and scope.

“(b) RESPONSIBILITIES.—The Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition is the head of, and is directly responsible to the Secretary for the operations of, the Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration.

“(c) VACANCIES.—(1) Whenever a vacancy in the position of Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition occurs or is anticipated, the Secretary shall establish a commission to recommend individuals to the President for appointment to the position.

“(2) A commission established under this subsection shall be composed of the following members appointed by the Secretary:

“(A) Three persons representing education and training, vocational rehabilitation, employment, real estate, mortgage finance and related industries, and survivor benefits activities affected by the Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration.

“(B) Two persons representing veterans served by the Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration.

“(C) Two persons who have experience in the management of private sector benefits programs of similar content and scope to the economic opportunity and transition programs of the Department.

“(D) The Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

“(E) The chairman of the Veterans' Advisory Committee on Education formed under section 3692 of this title.

“(F) One person who has held the position of Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition, if the Secretary determines that it is desirable for such person to be a member of the commission.

“(3) A commission established under this subsection shall recommend at least three individuals for appointment to the position of Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition. The commission shall submit all recommendations to the Secretary. The Secretary shall forward the recommendations to the President and the Committees on Veterans’ Affairs of the Senate and House of Representatives with any comments the Secretary considers appropriate. Thereafter, the President may request the commission to recommend additional individuals for appointment.

“(4) The Assistant Secretary or Deputy Assistant Secretary of Veterans Affairs who performs personnel management and labor relations functions shall serve as the executive secretary of a commission established under this subsection.”.

(2) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections at the beginning of such chapter is amended by inserting after the item relating to section 306 the following new item:

“306A. Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition.”.

(b) CONFORMING AMENDMENTS.—Title 38, United States Code, is further amended—

(1) in section 306(c)(2), by striking subparagraphs (A) and (E) and redesignating subparagraphs (B), (C), (D), and (F), as subparagraphs (A) through (D), respectively;

(2) in section 317(d)(2), by inserting after “Under Secretary for Benefits,” the following: “the Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition,”;

(3) in section 318(d)(2), by inserting after “Under Secretary for Benefits,” the following: “the Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition,”;

(4) in section 516(e)(2)(C), by striking “Health and the Under Secretary for Benefits” and inserting “Health, the Under Secretary for Benefits, and the Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition”;

(5) in section 541(a)(2)(B), by striking “Health and the Under Secretary for Benefits” and inserting “Health, the Under Secretary for Benefits, and the Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition”;

(6) in section 542(a)(2)(B)(iii), by striking “Health and the Under Secretary for Benefits” and inserting “Health, the Under Secretary for Benefits, and the Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition”;

(7) in section 544(a)(2)(B)(vi), by striking “Health and the Under Secretary for Benefits” and inserting “Health, the Under Secretary for Benefits, and the Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition”;

(8) in section 709(c)(2)(A), by inserting after “Under Secretary for Benefits,” the following: “the Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition,”;

(9) in section 7701(a), by inserting after “assistance” the following: “, other than assistance related to Economic Opportunity and Transition,”; and

(10) in section 7703, by striking paragraphs (2) and (3) and redesignating paragraphs (4) and (5) as paragraphs (2) and (3), respectively.

(c) EFFECTIVE DATE.—Section 306A of title 38, United States Code, as added by subsection (a), and the amendments made by this section, shall take effect on October 1, 2020.

SEC. 3. TRANSFER OF SERVICES.

(a) REPORT TO CONGRESS.—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 Senate and House of Representatives a report on the progress toward establishing the Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration, as established under section 8001 of title 38, United States Code, as added by section 4, and the transition of the provision of services to veterans by such Administration.

(b) CERTIFICATION.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs may not transfer the function of

providing any services to veterans to the Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration, as established under section 8001 of title 38, United States Code, as added by section 4 until the Secretary submits to the Committees on Veterans Affairs of the Senate and House of Representatives certification that—

(1) the transition of the provision of services to such Administration will not negatively affect the provision of such services to veterans;

(2) such services are ready to be transferred.

(c) DEADLINE FOR CERTIFICATION.—The Secretary shall submit to the Committees on Veterans Affairs of the Senate and House of Representatives the certification required by subsection (b)—

(1) no earlier than April 1, 2020; and

(2) no later than September 1, 2020.

(d) FAILURE TO CERTIFY.—If the Secretary fails to submit the certification required by subsection (b) by the date specified in subsection (c)(2), the Secretary shall submit to the Committees on Veterans Affairs of the Senate and House of Representatives a report that includes—

(1) the reason why the certification was not made by such date; and

(2) the estimated date when the certification will be made.

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. 2045, as amended.

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, when our service-members conclude their military service, they are taxed with returning to civilian life after putting their lives on hold for years. This is the sacrifice they make for our security.

In exchange, we owe them more than a thank you and well wishes. We owe them a commitment that their transition to civilian life will go smoothly, and a VA that responds to their needs.

That is why we passed the first GI Bill nearly 75 years ago, and why we continue today to make improvements to provide veterans with the benefits they have earned.

Unfortunately, VA has struggled to track the effectiveness of education and employment programs and, consequently, Congress has struggled to determine the Department's resource needs. We have identified a contributing factor through hearings and discussions with our Veterans Service Organizations that the Veterans Benefits Administration is simply asked to do too much.

With the focus on managing countless compensation claims, the responsibility of managing transition education, and housing benefits often takes a back seat.

To put it in perspective, the Veterans Benefit Administration's structure has not significantly changed since the creation of the Department of Veterans Affairs in 1930.

During the last 89 years, the services needed by veterans have drastically changed, and that is why our committee has an Economic Opportunity Subcommittee. It is time for the VA to understand this as well.

The VET OPP Act, as amended, would create a new administration within the department to manage educational assistance, vocational rehabilitation and employment, education and career counseling programs, and broadly defined transition assistance programs that are shared across agencies.

Now, that means veterans' education, housing, and economic programs will have a dedicated Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition. The Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration will solely focus on fulfilling these promises to veterans, so that they get the education that they want, the housing they need, and the careers they deserve.

During our April 9 Economic Opportunity legislative hearing, this proposal received support from the Veterans of Foreign Wars, American Enterprise Institute, and the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors.

Now these organizations know firsthand how hard it is to navigate the process of using benefits, so I want to thank the hard work of our Economic Opportunity Subcommittee for holding hearings on H.R. 2045, as amended, where this legislation received universal acclaim from our VSO community.

I also want to thank our VSO community, and the American Federation of Government Employees, who worked with us to make this legislation work for all veterans and all employees currently employed at the VA.

This is a bipartisan bill because we are not trying to make a political point or attack the VA. Instead, we simply want to make the VA run more effectively for the veterans it serves.

Madam Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

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

Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 2045, as amended, the Veterans' Education Transition and Opportunity Prioritization Plan Act, or the VET OPP Act.

Madam Speaker, investing in education and employment opportunities for our Nation's veterans is one of the Department of Veterans Affairs' most important but least recognized missions.

Today, programs concerning education and employment are embedded within the Veterans Benefit Administration which, understandably, devotes

most of its time, attention, and resources to disability compensation-related issues and backlogs that rise and fall with time.

The focus on compensation programs creates programs when other VBA programs need attention. An example of this was the implementation last fall of the Forever GI Bill which was, to say the least, rocky, the start was.

While I know that the VA has many dedicated employees who tried their best to prevent the delays that occurred, I do believe that if the implementation of this law had received more attention from senior leaders at VA, things could have been better.

The VET OPP Act is a means to mitigate these problems in the future. The bill would create a new, fourth administration at VA which would be called the Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration and led by a new Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition.

The new Under Secretary would oversee education benefits like the GI Bill, the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program, VA's home loan program, the Transition Assistance Program, or TAP program, and the small business programs. Creating a new administration within VA to house education and employment programs will ensure that those programs receive the focused leadership time and attention that they deserve.

I appreciate my friend and colleague, Congressman WENSTRUP from Ohio, for championing this legislation. It has my full support.

Madam Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from California (Mr. LEVIN), my good friend, chairman of the Economic Opportunity Subcommittee, and also a cosponsor of H.R. 2045.

Mr. LEVIN of California. Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 2045, the Veterans' Education Transition and Opportunity Prioritization Plan, or VET OPP Act of 2019.

Madam Speaker, I was proud to introduce this bipartisan legislation with my friend from Ohio, Mr. WENSTRUP. We have a responsibility to provide America's servicemembers with the best possible resources and opportunities as they transition back to civilian life, and we must do more to meet that responsibility.

Education, employment, housing, and transition assistance programs are critical to veterans' economic success. But many veterans aren't receiving these opportunities because of bureaucratic red tape at the VA. These programs are currently lumped with compensation programs under the Veterans Benefits Administration.

As chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs Economic Opportunity Subcommittee, one of my top priorities is ensuring that veterans are receiving their benefits as efficiently as possible, and it is clear that the current structure at the VA isn't meeting this need.

This bipartisan bill will allow us to deliver economic resources more effectively by creating a new Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration at the VA and bringing more oversight and accountability to economic programs for veterans.

I strongly urge my colleagues to support this bipartisan legislation.

Mr. DAVID P. ROE of Tennessee. Madam Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Florida (Mr. BILIRAKIS), my good friend, and a Member I have served with on the Veterans' Affairs Committee the entire time I have been in Congress. As I have said previously, there is no one in this body, in this House that I have seen that cares for veterans more than Congressman BILIRAKIS does, and he is the ranking member on the Economic Opportunity Subcommittee.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Madam Speaker, I rise today to strongly support H.R. 2045, the Veterans' Education, Transition, and Opportunity Prioritization Plan, or the VET OPP Act of 2019, which would create a significant structural change at the Department of Veterans Affairs to better align and specialize economic opportunity for our veterans, our true heroes.

As ranking member of the VA Economic Opportunity Subcommittee, I know this committee understands the importance of prioritizing veterans' education, workforce training, transition, and vocational rehabilitation programs.

However, the way the VA is structured, under the current system, it puts all benefit programs under one roof at the Veterans Benefits Administration. While I certainly understand that the VBA focuses a significant amount of time on processing disability claims and working to decrease its backlog of appeals, as the doctor stated, my colleagues and I on the committee have concerns that this has led to an imbalanced amount of attention away from other benefit programs, like the GI Bill education benefit and the employment programs, such as the vocational rehabilitation and employment, which is so very important as well.

I fear that this lack of attention was fully realized last year, again, as the doctor stated, as VBA failed to properly implement sections 107 and 501 of the Forever GI Bill.

This failure by the VA to update their IT systems caused massive delays in processing GI Bill claims for thousands of student veterans last fall, many of whom rely on their payments as the only source of income. And sadly, it was not the first time that the VA has failed to provide GI Bill payments on time. Hopefully, it's going to be the last time.

To help solve this inequity, H.R. 2045, the VET OPP Act, would create a fourth administration at VA called the Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration, led by the new VA Under Secretary appointed by the

President of the United States. This new Under Secretary would be tasked with managing all education, home loans, small business certification, transition assistance, and vocational rehabilitation and employment benefits within the VA.

This bill is a smart, commonsense policy that will allow VA to improve outcomes for our Nation's veterans seeking better economic opportunities.

Finally, the bill will allow Congress to provide significantly better oversight and accountability of those running these programs.

I want to thank the sponsor of H.R. 2045, Dr. BRAD WENSTRUP, for introducing this legislation this Congress.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mrs. AXNE). The time of the gentleman has expired.

Mr. DAVID P. ROE of Tennessee. Madam Speaker, I yield the gentleman from Florida an additional 30 seconds.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Madam Speaker, I also want to thank the chairman of the subcommittee, my good friend, MIKE LEVIN, who is doing an outstanding job for co-leading the bill with us.

I urge my colleagues to pass H.R. 2045, as amended.

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON LEE), my good friend.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Madam Speaker, I thank the sponsor of this legislation for really tapping into something that every single Member must face with their veterans, and certainly those who have been out of the military for a period of time, and then all of our new veterans who are coming in from some of the more recent conflicts that we have had, and wars that we have had.

Just about a week or so ago, I was meeting with veterans from a certain battalion that had flown into Houston to share with us their concerns about the state of mind and the increasing amount of suicides among veterans, but, in addition to those conversations and ones that I have had, the idea of a Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration and the Under Secretary of Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition of the Department of Veterans Affairs to oversee vocational rehabilitation employment, educational assistance, veterans housing loans, and the verification of small businesses.

□ 1715

I think this is important because veterans want to know that they can fully integrate into society when they return home.

One of the initiatives that I had was to ensure that their service-related professions, whatever their assignments were in the military, would equate in civilian life and that they would be respected for their hierarchy of rank and also responsibility.

Having an office like this one helps those veterans with creative minds who want to start small businesses.

When we had the impact of Hurricane Harvey, one of the hardest hit groups were small businesses. We carved out dollars to help small businesses by grants and not loans because that is the economic engine of this Nation.

With respect to veterans, they are very creative. They see solutions where there are problems. To have an office that would focus on their vocational rehabilitation, employment, and giving them educational assistance, that is also very important.

I have gone to my college campuses and met many, many, many veterans who are using some of the dollars that this House provided for them back during the first time Speaker PELOSI was Speaker, when we voted on major reformation of the process of giving dollars to veterans for their educational assistance, a great bill dealing with Iraq and Afghanistan veterans that has helped them a lot.

I see the impact that getting a home has on veterans as well, and I have been involved in projects where organizations are in the business of donating homes to disabled vets. What a difference it makes in their lives.

Madam Speaker, I applaud the author of this legislation and the Veterans' Affairs Committee as well because you are now looking holistically at these veterans and giving them a hand up, as they want, and not a hand out.

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

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I yield the gentlewoman an additional 30 seconds.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Madam Speaker, I thank the gentleman for his courtesies.

Madam Speaker, I rise to support this bill, H.R. 2045, because, as I have said, whether it is a homeless vet, whether it is a vet who has been a veteran for a long period of time or those in the recent conflicts or those coming home today, this is a package that they need.

This is what Members of Congress try to help them with, in their offices. If we knew that we had an office in the Veterans Affairs Department that deals with education, vocational rehabilitation, and small business, and it is a one-stop shop, I think that our veterans will appreciate that very much.

Madam Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding, and I ask my colleagues to support H.R. 2045.

Mr. DAVID P. ROE of Tennessee. Madam Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. WENSTRUP), my good friend, a Congressman, doctor, colonel, Iraq war veteran, and in the previous Congress, chair of the Health Subcommittee on the Veterans Affairs Committee, and currently a member of the House Committee on Armed Services and the House Select Committee on Intelligence.

Mr. WENSTRUP. Madam Speaker, I thank Dr. ROE for yielding. I appreciate

his leadership on the Veterans Affairs' Committee for the many years that he has been here and has always been a leader.

As an Iraq war vet and an Army reservist, I know how important it is to help our warfighters succeed in their transition from Active Duty to civilian life. We should prepare our warfighters for success outside the military from the day they take their oath of enlistment to the day they begin their civilian careers. I think we have ignored this for too long.

Leaving the military with a plan and a purpose is key to the long-term well-being of all of our servicemembers.

I know when I came back from Iraq as a reservist, they said, "You have 90 days before you have to go back to work." I said, "I am going next week. What am I going to do, sit around my house and just look at the walls?"

You go from having a job in the military, where you have a purpose and a meaning, and it is important that when you get out that you have the same. That makes the transition and your life that much better.

Economic opportunity and transition programs are critical support for veterans when they complete their service. The current structure of the VA allows economic opportunity and transition programs for our veterans to fall by the wayside. These programs should be treated with the same importance as health, compensation, and other benefits.

The Veterans' Education, Transition, and Opportunity Prioritization Plan Act, known as the VET OPP Act, aligns transition, education, and employment programs in a fourth administration within the VA. This ensures that these opportunity-focused programs get the high priority they deserve and the oversight they need to better serve our veterans.

The VET OPP Act would streamline services and help the VA empower veterans and set them on a path to a successful civilian life.

Mr. DAVID P. ROE of Tennessee. Madam Speaker, I yield myself as much time as I may consume. I have no further speakers, and I am prepared to close.

Madam Speaker, I strongly encourage my colleagues to support this bill. When I first got here to Congress in 2009, the Veterans Benefit Administration had 1 million backlogged disability claims. It is hard to focus on something else when you have that much on your plate.

I think we have recognized that over the last several years, and I commend Dr. Wenstrup and others for bringing this up.

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

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

Madam Speaker, if anyone thinks that business as usual is working at

the VA, I would only ask you to look at the implementation of the Forever GI Bill. My good friend the ranking member knows that there were definite issues with the implementation. It did not go well. We are still months away from implementation, which should have happened last year.

When the IG and others evaluated what went wrong, one thing was very clear: There was no accountable leader.

That is what happens when programs are buried in layers of bureaucracy, and that is why I urge my colleagues to join me in passing H.R. 2045, as amended, the VET OPP Act, which will establish an accountable leader at VA for all of those programs that we have under the purview of our Economic Opportunity Subcommittee.

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. 2045, as amended.

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

The title of the bill was amended so as to read: "A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to establish in the Department the Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration, and for other purposes."

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

EXEMPTING CERTAIN TRANSFERS OF FUNDS TO DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS FROM CERTAIN PROVISIONS OF THE ECONOMY ACT

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 1947) to amend title 38, United States Code, to exempt transfers of funds from Federal agencies to the Department of Veterans Affairs for nonprofit corporations established under subchapter IV of chapter 73 of such title from certain provisions of the Economy Act, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 1947

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

SECTION 1. EXEMPTION OF CERTAIN TRANSFERS.

Section 7364(b)(1) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new sentence: "Any amounts so transferred after September 30, 2016, shall be available without regard to fiscal year limitations, notwithstanding section 1535(d) of title 31."

SEC. 2. IMPROVEMENTS TO ASSISTANCE FOR CERTAIN FLIGHT TRAINING AND OTHER PROGRAMS OF EDUCATION.

(a) USE OF ENTITLEMENT FOR PRIVATE PILOT'S LICENSES.—Section 3034(d) of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) in paragraph (1) by striking the semicolon and inserting the following: "and is required for the course of education being pursued (including with respect to a dual major,