

COMMUNICATION FROM THE CLERK OF THE HOUSE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Clerk of the House of Representatives:

OFFICE OF THE CLERK,
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
Washington, DC, June 24, 2019.

Hon. NANCY PELOSI,
The Speaker, House of Representatives,
Washington, DC.

DEAR MADAM SPEAKER: Pursuant to the permission granted in Clause 2(h) of Rule II of the Rules of the U.S. House of Representatives, the Clerk received the following message from the Secretary of the Senate on June 24, 2019, at 11:14 a.m.:

That the Senate passed without amendment H.R. 559.

With best wishes, I am,

Sincerely,

CHERYL L. JOHNSON.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

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

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

BOOSTING RATES OF AMERICAN VETERAN EMPLOYMENT ACT

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 2109) to amend title 38, United States Code, to authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, in awarding a contract for the procurement of goods or services, to give a preference to offerors that employ veterans.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 2109

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 “Boosting Rates of American Veteran Employment Act” or the “BRAVE Act”.

SEC. 2. PREFERENCE FOR OFFERORS EMPLOYING VETERANS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Subchapter II of chapter 81 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding after section 8128 the following new section:

“§ 8129. Preference for offerors employing veterans

“(a) PREFERENCE.—In awarding a contract for the procurement of goods or services, the Secretary may give a preference to offerors that employ veterans on a full-time basis. The Secretary shall determine such preference based on the percentage of the full-time employees of the offeror who are veterans.

“(b) ENFORCEMENT PENALTIES FOR MISREPRESENTATION.—(1) Any offeror that is determined by the Secretary to have willfully and intentionally misrepresented the veteran status of the employees of the offeror for purposes of subsection (a) may be debarred from contracting with the Department for a period of not less than five years.

“(2) If the Secretary carries out a debarment under paragraph (1), the Secretary shall commence debarment action against the offeror by not later than 30 days after determining that the offeror willfully and intentionally misrepresented the veteran status of the employees of the offeror as described in paragraph (1) and shall complete debarment actions against such offeror by not later than 90 days after such determination.

“(3) The debarment of an offeror under paragraph (1) includes the debarment of all principals in the offeror for a period of not less than five years.”.

(b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections at the beginning of such chapter is amended by inserting after the item relating to section 8128 the following new item:

“8129. Preference for offerors employing veterans.”.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from California (Mr. TAKANO) and the gentlewoman from American Samoa (Mrs. RADEWAGEN) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and to insert extraneous material on H.R. 2109.

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

There was no objection.

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 2109, the Boosting Rates of American Veteran Employment Act, or BRAVE Act.

We know that overall veterans’ unemployment rates are below the national average, and that includes a 3.5 percent rate for our younger post-9/11 veterans. However, this hides an alarming statistic: nearly one-third of veteran jobseekers are underemployed at a rate 15.6 percent higher than non-veteran jobseekers.

Both parties agree that men and women returning from our most recent conflicts deserve to come home to a reliable, good paying job. We owe them that.

We can start right here in the Federal Government. The VA establishes long-term contracts with private companies for medical equipment, construction supplies, services, and more.

Currently, the VA gives a preference for these contracts to veteran-owned small businesses.

The BRAVE Act would expand this contracting preference to allow the VA Secretary to give a preference to companies that actively employ veterans, a policy that would incentivize companies to hire more veterans, already a smart approach for companies, because veterans bring to a job the skills they earned and learned in their years of invaluable military training.

This bipartisan bill would not add any additional costs or burdens to the

taxpayers. It allows for the debarment of any company that knowingly misrepresents its proportion of veteran employees in order to receive a contracting preference.

The BRAVE Act represents a win-win for the private sector, the Federal Government, and most importantly, veterans themselves.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank Representative RICE for her hard work on this excellent bill, and Ranking Member ROE for beginning work on this bill last Congress. I urge my colleagues to support it today.

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

Mrs. RADEWAGEN. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself as much time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 2109, introduced by Representative RICE of New York.

Mr. Speaker, to improve employment opportunities for veterans and business opportunities for the companies that employ them, H.R. 2109 would authorize the Department of Veterans Affairs, VA, to consider the number of veterans who would be employed by a potential contractor and give the company that employs certain veterans credit for doing so during the contract approval process.

The bill would also allow VA to debar any contractor who willfully and intentionally misrepresents the number of veterans they employ.

Mr. Speaker, thanks to President Trump and Republican pro-growth policies, the veteran unemployment rate is at a near historic low of 2.7 percent.

I firmly believe that we should encourage businesses to provide job opportunities to veterans as well as provide VA with the authority to consider veteran hires when making contracting decisions. This legislation emphasizes that.

Mr. Speaker, I thank Representative RICE for her work on this bill, which has my full support. I urge all my colleagues to support H.R. 2109.

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

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I yield 5 minutes to the gentlewoman from New York (Miss RICE), my good friend, who is a member of the Veterans’ Affairs Committee and a member of the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity, and the sponsor of H.R. 2109.

Miss RICE of New York. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 2109, the Boosting Rates of American Veteran Employment Act, which I introduced along with PAUL COOK from California.

The BRAVE Act is commonsense, bipartisan legislation that will authorize the VA Secretary to give preference to contractors with high concentrations of full-time veteran employees when awarding Federal contracts.

First, this bill will reward companies that actively hire and invest in veterans, companies that seek out veterans and give them opportunities to bring their unique skills and training

and experience to the civilian workforce.

Second, it will create an incentive for other companies to do the same, which in turn will help bring more veterans into the workforce, and with good-paying jobs at that, the types of opportunities that give veterans and their families the stability they need as they transition to civilian life.

Most importantly, as more and more companies hire more and more veterans, they will ultimately see that investing in veterans is just good for business. That is what the real incentive should be, not just an advantage in securing Federal contracts, but getting the benefit of employees who have worn the uniform, who have been trained by the greatest military in the world, and who have learned to get the job done no matter what the job is or how tough it may be.

What business wouldn't want to have employees like that?

Lastly, it bears emphasizing that this bill will cost taxpayers absolutely nothing.

We need more businesses in the private sector to recognize the value of investing in the men and women who have served our country.

To be clear, this isn't an act of charity. Veterans are not looking for a handout. They just need an opportunity to show what they can do. That is what this bill will help accomplish.

The BRAVE Act will help ensure that more veterans have those opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank Chairman TAKANO and Ranking Member ROE for supporting this bill and for helping to bring it to the floor today.

This legislation passed unanimously in the last Congress, and I urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to once again give it the bipartisan support it deserves.

Mrs. RADEWAGEN. Mr. Speaker, I am prepared to close, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I urge all of my colleagues to support the legislation sponsored by Miss RICE, and 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. 2109.

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

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

REDUCING CREDIT HOUR REQUIREMENT FOR EDITH NOURSE ROGERS STEM SCHOLARSHIP

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 2196) to amend title 38, United States Code, to reduce the credit hour requirement for the Edith Nourse Rogers STEM Scholarship program of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The Clerk read the title of the bill. The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 2196

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

SECTION 1. REDUCTION IN CREDIT HOUR REQUIREMENT FOR EDITH NOURSE ROGERS STEM SCHOLARSHIP.

Section 3320(b)(4)(A)(i) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by striking "more than the standard 128 semester (or 192 quarter) credit hours" and inserting "at least the standard 120 semester (or 180 quarter) credit hours".

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from California (Mr. TAKANO) and the gentlewoman from American Samoa (Mrs. RADEWAGEN) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and to insert extraneous material on H.R. 2196.

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

There was no objection.

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 2196, a bill to reduce the credit hour requirement for the Edith Nourse Rogers STEM Scholarship program.

H.R. 2196 is a technical correction to the Edith Nourse Rogers STEM Scholarship, which was codified into law with the passage of the Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017, also known as the Forever GI Bill.

This STEM scholarship program, named after the former chairwoman of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, Edith Nourse Rogers, provides veterans who are enrolled in STEM programs with additional support if their GI benefits are exhausted before they complete an undergraduate degree.

Unfortunately, this much needed scholarship program is crippled by the qualification criteria, which necessitates that veterans must be enrolled in STEM programs that require more than 128 semester credit hours to graduate.

According to the Department of Veterans Affairs, these criteria only allow veterans enrolled in three programs at higher learning institutions to participate in this great scholarship program.

Now, this was not the intent of the Congress. H.R. 2196 would correct this oversight by reducing the required semester credit hours of a degree program from 128 to 120, to allow more programs at a wider array of institutions of higher learning to qualify for the program.

Now, veterans across the country are enrolling in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math based degree pro-

grams at rapid rates, and we should continue to encourage veterans to pursue STEM programs and employment in STEM fields.

By continuing to invest in our veterans, we are investing in the American economy and our great Nation.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank Representative BARR, Representative LEVIN, and Ranking Member ROE for their hard work on this excellent bill. I would especially like to thank Chairman LEVIN and the rest of the Economic Opportunity Subcommittee for their bipartisan work to get this bill to the floor in a timely fashion.

Mr. Speaker, I urge the rest of my colleagues to support this legislation, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mrs. RADEWAGEN. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself as much time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 2196. This bill, which is introduced by an outstanding new member of our committee, Representative BARR of Kentucky, would clarify the eligibility for the Edith Nourse Rogers STEM Scholarship program.

This program, enacted as part of the Forever GI Bill, authorizes extra GI bill funding to help veterans complete their undergraduate degrees in a STEM field.

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Mr. Speaker, we all know about the need to fill vacancies for high-paying jobs in the STEM field. The Smithsonian Science Education Center projected that, in 2018, 2.4 million STEM jobs went unfilled. This program is critical to ensure that veterans are the ones who fill these vacancies. However, because of the way the law was drafted, most students are prevented from using this new benefit due to a technical glitch that excludes all but a few STEM programs.

With this program going live on August 1, just over a month from now, I am grateful to Representative BARR for quickly stepping up to the plate and offering this bill to fix the law's language. Hopefully, with cooperation from our friends in the Senate, we can make this change before August.

I encourage all Members to support H.R. 2196.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Kentucky (Mr. BARR).

Mr. BARR. Mr. Speaker. I rise today in support of my bill, H.R. 2196, which would amend the credit hour requirement for the Edith Nourse Rogers Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math Scholarship program and the Forever GI Bill, named after Congresswoman Edith Nourse Rogers, who served 18 consecutive terms in Congress and was a tireless advocate for veterans throughout the 21st century. This legislation follows the spirit of this pioneering Congresswoman and ensures that our veterans are able to access the benefits that they have earned.

The Rogers STEM Scholarship provides up to 9 months of additional