

## GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. ENGEL. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H. Res. 358.

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

There was no objection.

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of this measure.

I want to start by thanking Ms. BASS and Mr. SMITH for bringing forward this resolution, which calls on the Government of Cameroon and armed groups to respect the human rights of all Cameroonian citizens, to end all violence, and to pursue a broad-based dialogue without preconditions to resolve the conflict in the anglophone regions of Cameroon.

Since October 2017, the region has been mired in conflict, with both the Government of Cameroon and armed separatists fighting one another and perpetrating human rights abuses.

While armed actors refuse to pursue a negotiated settlement to the conflict, innocent civilians continue to suffer. According to UNICEF, more than 80 percent of the schools in the anglophone regions of Cameroon remain closed, putting at risk the future prospects of children who are being denied access to education. In addition, 1.3 million people, including approximately 650,000 children, are in need of humanitarian assistance.

This resolution urges the Government of Cameroon to respect the fundamental rights of all Cameroonian citizens and follow through on initiatives developed to address grievances in the anglophone region. It also urges separatist groups to engage with Cameroonian government officials, civil society, and religious leaders to express grievances and engage in efforts to resolve the conflict and to stop committing human rights abuses and inciting violence.

For several months, the Swiss Government has been attempting to mediate a peaceful resolution to this crisis, and I am pleased this resolution demonstrates Congress' strong support for a negotiated settlement.

Mr. Speaker, I am glad to support this resolution, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of H. Res. 358, calling on the Government of Cameroon and armed groups to respect fundamental human rights and pursue dialogue to resolve the crisis in the anglophone region of that country.

Mr. Speaker, I especially want to thank Congresswoman KAREN BASS, the chairwoman of the Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations Subcommittee, of which I serve as the

ranking member, for this resolution. It is a bipartisan resolution, and, again, I thank her for her leadership.

Mr. Speaker, I would note that in the last Congress, I chaired a hearing on this Cameroon crisis as it was festering, seeking a way forward for peace. Sadly, that effort and all efforts made by the international community have been elusive thus far.

The conflict in Cameroon has its roots in long-simmering tensions between that country's francophone majority and the anglophone minority, concentrated in the northwest and southwest regions.

In 2016, protests by anglophone teachers and lawyers over marginalization and the lack of government services were met with a heavy-handed response. The government failed to genuinely address those legitimate grievances, which further inflamed tensions.

Brutal fighting between government security forces and local armed groups who called for separatism continues.

Today, there are over 500,000 displaced persons in the anglophone region.

Mr. Speaker, entire communities have been burned to the ground. Humanitarian convoys struggle to reach local populations or are even blocked and attacked by armed groups. Over half of the health facilities and hospitals have been damaged and forced to close. Children have been out of school for over 2 years.

According to the U.S. Department of State's Human Rights Report on Cameroon from 2018: "Government security forces were widely believed to be responsible for disappearances of suspected anglophone separatists, with reports of bodies dumped far from the site of the killings to make identification difficult."

This, in turn, is fueling resentment and separatist violence.

This resolution reiterates the U.S. position that all parties must immediately cease fighting and come to the negotiating table without preconditions. The Swiss-led mediation process is a hopeful step in that direction, which deserves support.

I would also note the critical role that has been played by the Catholic church, in particular Cardinal Tumi, in trying to reach common ground, and the need to support such efforts.

Hopefully, by weighing in, Congress can help promote the cause of peace and justice in the Republic of Cameroon.

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

Mr. ENGEL. Mr. Speaker, I have no other speakers, and I yield myself the balance of my time.

Mr. Speaker, I again want to thank Ms. BASS and Mr. SMITH for their hard work. Again, as I mentioned before, Mr. SMITH is always working very, very hard to be on the side of justice.

For too long, the people in Cameroon's anglophone region have been

marginalized by the Cameroonian Government, and since 2017, conflict between the government and separatists have brought chaos and fear to those living in the region.

This resolution supports a negotiated settlement to the conflict that respects the basic human rights of its citizens, so Cameroon can become a country that is more peaceful and stable.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all Members to join me in supporting this bipartisan piece of legislation, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from New York (Mr. ENGEL) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the resolution, H. Res. 358.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the resolution was agreed to.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

#### PROVIDING BENEFITS INFORMATION IN SPANISH AND TAGALOG FOR VETERANS AND FAMILIES ACT

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 2943) to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to make all fact sheets of the Department of Veterans Affairs in English and Spanish, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 2943

*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 "Providing Benefits Information in Spanish and Tagalog for Veterans and Families Act".*

#### SEC. 2. FACT SHEETS.

(a) **LANGUAGES.**—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall make versions of all fact sheets of the Department of Veterans Affairs in English, Spanish, and Tagalog.

(b) **WEBSITE.**—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall establish and maintain a publicly available website of the Department of Veterans Affairs that contains links to all fact sheets of the Veterans Benefits Administration, Veterans Health Administration, and of the National Cemetery Administration. The website shall be accessible by a clearly labelled hyperlink on the homepage of the Department.

(c) **REPORT.**—Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit a report to Congress regarding fact sheets described in subsection (a) and details of the Language Access Plan of the Department of Veterans Affairs. The report shall include the following:

(1) What the Secretary determines constitutes a fact sheet of the Department for purposes of this Act.

(2) How such fact sheets are utilized and distributed other than on and through the website of the Department.

(3) How such Language Access Plan is communicated to veterans, family members of veterans, and caregivers.

(4) The roles and responsibilities of patient advocates in the coordination of care for veterans with limited English proficiency, family members of such veterans, and caregivers.

(5) *Other demographic information that the Secretary determines appropriate regarding veterans with limited English proficiency.*

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from California (Mr. TAKANO) and the gentleman from Florida (Mr. BILIRAKIS) 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 have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and to insert extraneous material on H.R. 2943, as amended.

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

There was no objection.

□ 1700

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of Mr. CISNEROS' bill, H.R. 2943, as amended, which would direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide all VA fact sheets in English, Spanish, and Tagalog.

One of my chief priorities as chair of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs is to remove barriers that stand between veterans and their benefits. A language barrier should not prevent veterans from accessing the benefits they earned, and the burden should not be placed on veterans to request and wait for the VA to provide a translator.

Mandating that fact sheets be provided in Spanish and Tagalog will break down a significant barrier that stands in between Latinx and Filipino veterans and their VA benefits.

Mr. CISNEROS' bill, H.R. 2943, as amended, mandates that all fact sheets be available in English, Spanish, and Tagalog. Our veterans answered the call to serve from places around the world, including the Philippines and Puerto Rico, where English is not the predominant language. There are communities across the U.S., including in my district, where Spanish is commonly spoken and understood. This fix is easy; it does not come at an increased cost; and it is the right thing to do.

The Department of Veterans Affairs produces fact sheets that explain many VA programs and benefits. The VA fact sheets provide key facts, such as eligibility criteria, documents needed to help support claims, and links to appropriate application forms. These fact sheets explain the process for getting a VA-guaranteed home loan, applying for disability compensation, using GI Bill benefits, and obtaining burial benefits for veterans and their surviving family members.

Brochures and fact sheets explain VA healthcare benefits to veterans and caregivers. These fact sheets also advise veterans on the supporting documentation they need to help them apply for benefits so they are correctly

identified as eligible or their claims are successfully adjudicated.

During the code I led to Puerto Rico this past weekend, I met with veterans who told me they are not receiving information on VA programs, and when they do receive information, it is in English, not Spanish. The one veteran who received a brochure on the MISION Act in Spanish said it was incomplete compared to the English materials.

This disparity should not exist. Veterans, regardless of the language they speak or where they live, should be able to understand how to access their benefits easily.

I ask my colleagues to help our veterans who have done so much to serve our country and join me in supporting H.R. 2943, as amended.

Madam Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

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

Madam Speaker, I commend the chairman for bringing these bills forward in committee. I also commend the Speaker of the House for putting these bills on the agenda today, as well as the majority leader and the minority leader. These are very important bills.

I rise today to support H.R. 2943, as amended.

This bill, which is sponsored by Representative GIL CISNEROS of California, would require the Department of Veterans Affairs to make all fact sheets available in English, Spanish, and Tagalog.

During the markup of this bill, the committee adopted an amendment that Ranking Member ROE offered to further require the VA to post all fact sheets on a clearly identifiable, easily accessible location on the VA's website and require the VA to report to Congress on the Department's language-access plan to assist veterans with limited English proficiency.

This would ensure that the entirety of our veteran population, as well as their families and caregivers, are able to access and comprehend important information about VA benefits easily. It would also ensure that any barriers to care that might exist for veterans with limited English skills, Madam Speaker, are identified and broken down.

I am grateful to Representative CISNEROS for introducing this bill, and I am proud to support it today.

Madam Speaker, I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting this bill, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from California (Mr. CISNEROS), my good friend and a member of the Veterans' Affairs Committee who is also a veteran himself, the author of this legislation.

Mr. CISNEROS. Madam Speaker, I thank Chairman TAKANO for his leader-

ship on this issue and for working with me to ensure this bill passed out of committee on a bipartisan basis. I also thank the gentleman from Florida for his support on this bill.

Madam Speaker, it is an honor to rise today to ask my colleagues for their support on my bill, H.R. 2943, the Providing Benefits Information in Spanish and Tagalog for Veterans and Families Act.

So many veterans have come from Puerto Rico, as well as the Philippines. The VA actually does have a hospital both in Puerto Rico and in the Philippines. This legislation would direct the VA Secretary to make all Department of Veterans Affairs fact sheets available in English, Spanish, and Tagalog.

According to the U.S. Census, as of July 1, 2017, the U.S. Hispanic population is approximately 59 million people, making up 18 percent of the Nation's total population, making people of Hispanic origin the Nation's largest ethnic or racial minority. The U.S. Census has also reported that Filipino Americans make up the third-largest AAPI subgroup, with an estimated 4 million people living in the United States.

With those changing demographics trending toward a more racially and ethnically diverse majority, the veteran population is diversifying at similar rates. The share of veterans who are Hispanic is expected to nearly double.

During my time in service, many of my proud brothers and sisters in arms were of Filipino descent.

With Spanish and Tagalog as the first language of an increasing number of veterans and their families, and our significant strategic national security footprint in Puerto Rico and the Philippines, it is important that fact sheets offered by the VA are made available to everyone.

This bill would serve as an initial step in ensuring veterans and their families with limited English proficiency have full access and information on VA services, without burden or barriers.

Madam Speaker, I urge my colleagues to join me in support of my bill to ensure we do not overlook veterans and their families who may need these important fact sheets.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Madam Speaker, I am prepared to close, and I yield myself the balance of my time.

Madam Speaker, this is a very important bill. We were just overseas and met with the troops, and we had quite a few servicemembers from Puerto Rico. I would like to say that most of them spoke perfect English, but they may not. They should have access to all the information in their first language.

Madam Speaker, I urge the passage of this bill, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I am also prepared to close, and I yield myself the balance of my time to render my final comments.

Our veterans and their survivors deserve the best care possible. The VA benefits application process can be confusing. Congress has taken action to reduce confusion and ease the application process.

I remember when, only a few years ago, initial claims were taking more than a year. Today, initial disability claims are being completed in less than 160 days. This is, in part, due to streamlining the application process and providing more information to veterans.

As I learned during the codel to Puerto Rico, in emergencies like Hurricane Maria, veterans need to know how the VA can help them prepare for the next storm. They need to know that they can get additional supplies of medication. Veterans need to know where to go in an emergency when communications are disrupted. They also need to know how to apply for assistance and emergency benefits after a disaster like Hurricane Maria because these disasters will happen again.

The VA fact sheet on natural disasters, which tells veterans and their families which website to go to and where to call when their benefits are interrupted due to natural disasters, is only available in English. Yet, both the Philippines and Puerto Rico experience natural disasters like hurricanes, typhoons, and earthquakes.

Mandating that VA fact sheets are made available in more than one language is yet another example of ways we can eliminate barriers for our veterans, streamline the application process, and help them get to the right resources when there is an emergency. Providing fact sheets in Tagalog and Spanish could even save lives.

Madam Speaker, I wholeheartedly support H.R. 2943, as amended, and, again, I ask my colleagues to join me in support of this bill.

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

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Ms. CASTOR of Florida). 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. 2943, 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 direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to make all fact sheets of the Department of Veterans Affairs in English, Spanish, and Tagalog."

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

#### HELPING EXPAND AND LAUNCH TRANSITIONAL HEALTH FOR WOMEN VETERANS ACT

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 2942) to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out the

Women's Health Transition Training pilot program through at least fiscal year 2020, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 2942

*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 "Helping Expand and Launch Transitional Health for Women Veterans Act" or "HEALTH Act".*

#### SEC. 2. ENCOURAGEMENT OF PARTICIPATION IN WOMEN'S HEALTH TRANSITION TRAINING PILOT PROGRAM.

(a) *DURATION.*—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall carry out the Women's Health Transition Training pilot program (in this section referred to as the "pilot program") until at least September 30, 2020.

(b) *REPORT.*—Not later than September 30, 2020, the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall jointly submit to the appropriate congressional committees a report on the pilot program that includes the following:

(1) *For the period since the commencement of the pilot program—*

(A) *the number of women members by military department (with respect to Department of the Navy, separately for the Navy and Marine Corps) who participated in the pilot program;*

(B) *the number of courses held under the pilot program; and*

(C) *the locations at which such courses were held, and the number of seats available and the number of participants at each such location.*

(2) *With respect to the number of members who participated in the pilot program as specified under paragraph (1)—*

(A) *the number who enrolled in the health care system established under section 1705(a) of title 38, United States Code; and*

(B) *the number who attended at least one health care appointment at a medical facility of the Department of Veterans Affairs.*

(3) *Data relating to—*

(A) *satisfaction with courses held under the pilot program;*

(B) *improved awareness of health care services administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs; and*

(C) *any other available statistics regarding the pilot program.*

(4) *A discussion of regulatory, legal, or resource barriers to—*

(A) *making the pilot program permanent to enable access by a greater number of women members at locations throughout the United States;*

(B) *offering the pilot program online for women members who are unable to attend courses held under the pilot program in person; and*

(C) *the feasibility of automatically enrolling pilot program participants in the health care system established under section 1705(a) of title 38, United States Code.*

(c) *APPROPRIATE CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEES DEFINED.*—In this section, the term "appropriate congressional committees" means the Committees on Veterans' Affairs and the Committees on Armed Services of the House of Representatives and the Senate.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from California (Mr. TAKANO) and the gentleman from Florida (Mr. BILIRAKIS) 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 to insert extraneous material on H.R. 2942, 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, women veterans are the fastest growing demographic within the veteran population yet underutilize VA healthcare resources. This is primarily due to misperceptions about eligibility and available resources.

Many women leaving the military may not realize that they are eligible to use VA services, nor that VA offers extensive gender-specific care, such as mammography; prenatal, maternity, and infertility care; and mental healthcare that addresses complex trauma, including military sexual trauma, otherwise known as MST, and combat-related post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD.

The VA and U.S. Air Force Women's Health Transition Training pilot program works to address issues commonly experienced by women veterans when accessing VA care. This successful improvement to the Transition Assistance Program, or the TAP, is jointly run by the USAF and VA. Transitioning women servicemembers can attend an additional day of TAP to learn about women's healthcare, counseling, and social services available at the VA to ensure that they receive a warm handoff between the Department of Defense and the Veterans Administration.

Mr. CISNEROS' bill would expand the Women's Health Transition Training pilot program to more locations and authorizes the program through the end of fiscal year 2020.

This great legislation has my full support.

Madam Speaker, although women are the fastest growing cohort of veterans, women veterans are less likely to seek care and services at VA. This bill aims to address that and make the VA more accessible and responsive to women veterans.

Madam Speaker, this pilot program educates transitioning servicewomen about VA's healthcare services. The data collected from this pilot program can be applied to the Transition Assistance Program to better meet the needs of all transitioning servicemembers.

Madam Speaker, I thank Mr. CISNEROS for his hard work on this legislation, and I reserve the balance of my time.

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

Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 2942, as amended, the Helping Expand and Launch Transitional Health, or HEALTH, for Women Veterans Act.

I thank and congratulate Representative CISNEROS on this very good bill,