

other eligible individuals who can demonstrate competencies or experience, training or skills through their military service.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to join me in support of this important legislation, which will take real steps to improve veterans and their families access to high-quality registered apprenticeship programs.

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

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

I rise today in support of S. 760, the Support for Veterans in Effective Apprenticeships Act. This bill would provide more opportunities for servicemembers within apprenticeship programs that align with their skills and their background.

As a veteran, one of the hardest things I did was transitioning back to the civilian world. I spent somewhere around 8½ years in conflict environments over the course of maybe 12 or 13, and it was easier to stay in Iraq or Afghanistan than it was to come back to the United States.

Now, we have got an outstanding military. It is resilient and bright; many fought in two wars. They have excellent leadership and technical skills, skills that would be used to close the skills gap. Veterans are more likely to be underemployed than their nonveteran counterparts. This is not because they lack the appropriate skills, rather, they lack the clear path that helps them to transition from the military service to good-paying jobs.

S. 760 ensures that veterans receive advanced standings in registered apprenticeship programs for their prior experience. This bill acknowledges the unique capabilities of veterans and simplifies the process for veterans transitioning from successful careers in the military to civilian life.

We have a wealth of experience right here in our country with our veterans. Let's tap into that pool of intelligent and hardworking heroes.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. THOMPSON).

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman from Nevada and the gentleman from Kansas for their support of this very important piece of legislation.

I rise in support of S. 760, the Support for Veterans in Effective Apprenticeships Act of 2019. I was proud to introduce the House companion bill, H.R. 5314, with my colleague, Representative KATHERINE CLARK.

Our Nation's veterans deserve our support while deployed and when they return home. One of the best ways to do that is to prepare them for the workforce outside of the military.

Our servicemembers have attained incredible skills during their service, many times, quite frankly, under fire. Sadly, when they return to civilian life, finding a good-paying, family-sustaining job may be difficult.

Many States have significant inconsistencies between the number of registered apprenticeships offered and the number of programs listed as approved for veterans' benefits. These discrepancies exist despite the simple, expedited VA approval process for apprenticeship sponsors who have gone through all the steps to register their programs through the Department of Labor at either the Federal or the State level.

The VA approval process still requires additional steps that not all sponsors follow through to completion. This makes it difficult in many States for veterans to have the full list of apprenticeship programs where they can use their earned benefits and apply their learned skills and knowledge.

H.R. 5314 helps streamline the process of attaining an apprenticeship and reduces roadblocks for our veterans.

The bill ensures programs are equipped to complete the expedited VA process for registered apprenticeships and expands coordination between the Department of Labor and the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Now, additionally, the bill clarifies that veterans are eligible for advanced placement and appropriate wage increases and instructs apprenticeship programs to account for a participant's competencies and prior experiences, including those gained during military service.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to support this bill, and I urge my colleagues to do the same.

Mrs. LEE of Nevada. Mr. Speaker, I am prepared to close, if the gentleman from Kansas is, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. WATKINS. Mr. Speaker, I am ready to close.

Mr. Speaker, S. 760 would help veterans transition to the civilian workforce and address our growing skills gaps that has led to 7 million unfilled jobs. This bill is a clear win for our country, and I urge my colleagues to vote "yes" on this bill.

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

Mrs. LEE of Nevada. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time.

The Support for Veterans in Effective Apprenticeships Act, S. 760, will assist our veterans and their families in accessing the high-quality pathways that registered apprenticeships provide.

As I said before, we owe it to our brave veterans to set them up for a life of self-sufficiency and dignity. This legislation does not create another bureaucratic layer that veterans must navigate, instead, it requires coordination. Coordination between the DOL and the VA that will reduce barriers for employers and veterans and accessing financial assistance they can use in connection with the registered apprenticeship program.

We have all heard stories of veterans having to navigate complex requirements to access benefits that, quite honestly, they have earned and de-

serve. This legislation proves that this Congress has heard our veterans, and we are taking concrete steps to reduce barriers by cutting red tape.

Mr. Speaker, I don't know why anyone would be opposed to that, which is why I urge my colleagues to support the legislation.

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

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentlewoman from Nevada (Mrs. LEE) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, S. 760.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds being in the affirmative, the ayes have it.

Mrs. LEE of Nevada. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

#### FEDERALLY REQUIRING EARNED EDUCATION-DEBT DISCHARGES FOR VETS ACT

Mrs. LEE of Nevada. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 3598) to amend the Higher Education Act of 1965 to automatically discharge the loans of certain veteran borrowers, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 3598

*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 "Federally Requiring Earned Education-debt Discharges for Vets Act" or the "FREED Vets Act".

##### SEC. 2. AUTOMATIC LOAN DISCHARGE FOR CERTAIN VETERAN BORROWERS.

Section 437(a) of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1087(a)) is amended—

(1) by striking paragraph (2) and inserting the following:

"(2) DISABILITY DETERMINATIONS.—With respect to a borrower who has been identified under clause (i) or (ii) of paragraph (4)(A), the Secretary shall—

"(A) consider the borrower permanently and totally disabled for the purpose of discharging the loans of the borrower under this subsection;

"(B)(i) notify the borrower of the intent of the Secretary to discharge the loans of the borrower under this subsection; and

"(ii) only if section 108(f)(5) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 does not apply to such a loan discharge for the calendar year, include as part of such notice a statement informing the borrower that such loan discharge may be includable in the gross income of the borrower for purposes of such Code;

"(C) provide the borrower with an opportunity to opt-out of such loan discharge during the 60 day period beginning on the date on which the Secretary transmits the notice required under subparagraph (B) to the borrower; and

"(D) after the expiration of such period, discharge the loans of the borrower under this subsection, without any further action by the borrower (except that this subparagraph shall not apply to a borrower who opts

out of such discharge under subparagraph (C).”; and

(2) by adding at the end the following:

“(4) MATCHING PROGRAM.—

“(A) IN GENERAL.—Not less than twice per year, the Secretary of Education and the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall carry out a computer matching program under which the Secretary of Education identifies a borrower—

“(i) who has been assigned a rating of total disability by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs for a service-connected disability (as defined in section 101 of title 38, United States Code); or

“(ii) who has been determined by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to be unemployed due to a service-connected condition.

“(B) MINOR DISCREPANCIES.—With respect to each borrower who would have been identified under clause (i) or (ii) of subparagraph (A) but for a minor discrepancy between the information of the borrower maintained by the Secretary of Education and the Secretary of Veterans Affairs (such as a name discrepancy post-marriage, a missing hyphen, a transposed number or letter, or other typo), the Secretary of Education and the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall work together to correct such minor discrepancy of such borrower.”.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentlewoman from Nevada (Mrs. LEE) and the gentleman from Kansas (Mr. WATKINS) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Nevada.

#### GENERAL LEAVE

Mrs. LEE of Nevada. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and insert extraneous material on H.R. 3598, the FREED Vets Act.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from Nevada?

There was no objection.

Mrs. LEE of Nevada. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I rise in strong support of H.R. 3598, the Federally Requiring Earned Education-Debt Discharges for Vets Act or FREED Vets Act.

Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleagues, CONOR LAMB, BRIAN FITZPATRICK, and all the other coleads for their work to ensure that those who have served our Nation, and are now totally and permanently disabled, do not face additional burden to get relief from their student loan debt.

This legislation will improve the lives of nearly 40,000 veterans who have a service-related disability by requiring the Secretary of Education to automatically discharge their Federal student loan debt.

The Higher Education Act of 1965 requires the Secretary of Education to discharge the Federal student loans of individuals who are totally and permanently disabled but does not establish a process. For too long, veterans with a service-connected disability have fallen through the cracks. Because of that, they have been forced to navigate a complicated and confusing system, while being straddled with debt. We

owe our disabled veterans a better option.

So, in 2018, the Department of Education launched a data-sharing initiative with the Department of Veterans Affairs to identify borrowers eligible for relief from their student loan debt.

□ 1315

In 2019, the Department of Education started to automate loan discharge for these veterans, but it has been stalled. This bill will require the Secretary to continue matching borrowers with data from Veterans Affairs to identify and automatically discharge the debt of matched individuals, eliminating burden on our veterans.

These brave individuals who served our country and are now totally and permanently disabled should not have to carry the burden of their debt, especially when we have the information and the ability to eliminate all sorts of bureaucratic and, quite frankly, unnecessary red tape.

I am proud to support this legislation which creates a clear process for disabled veterans to receive the relief they are entitled to under the law.

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

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 3598, the Federally Requiring Earned Education-debt Discharges for Vets Act, or the FREED Vets Act. This bill would cancel student loan debt for some eligible veterans.

H.R. 3598 would remove administrative obstacles preventing veterans from receiving student loan discharges. It modernizes the administration of Federal student loans, and it is a wonderful way to honor veterans.

Most debate about student loans is highly contentious and very partisan, but this bill here and now is an example of Democrats and Republicans coming together for the benefit of American heroes.

Last year, President Trump signed an executive order eliminating a process for disabled veterans to become eligible for loan forgiveness. Today, we are here to ensure that this effort becomes permanent.

I am a veteran, and I have countless veteran friends, many of them disabled. I know this bill will matter. Our veterans could use this break after selfless service, most of whom fought in not one war, but two—or many, at least.

The FREED Act is just one example of this body’s commitment and America’s commitment to our Nation’s bravest.

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

Mrs. LEE of Nevada. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Connecticut (Mr. COURTNEY).

Mr. COURTNEY. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of the FREED Vets Act, a bipartisan measure led by my friend CONOR LAMB from Pennsylvania and BRIAN FITZPATRICK, Republican,

from Pennsylvania, that will automatically discharge Federal student loan debt for eligible permanently disabled veterans.

Mr. Speaker, there is about a trillion dollars of student loan debt overhanging the U.S. economy, and we have worked on the Education and Labor Committee to pass the College Affordability Act that would open a pathway for people who serve in public service to get that debt discharged after 10 years.

This bill is, in my opinion, a great example of bipartisan agreement that there is one population that should get immediate relief, which is the men and women who have worn the uniform of this country and who have suffered grievous injury, whether it is visible or invisible, and who are 100 percent disabled.

As again has been stated, the Education Department got off to a start in terms of trying to implement this type of approach. This bill just will again strengthen and support that effort to make sure that the minute the VA has identified an individual who is permanently disabled who served our Nation, that notice will go to the Education Department and the discharge will be automatic. No application process, no matching process, again, it will just happen by operation of law.

The statistics show that this is a real problem. There are 42,000 veterans with student loan debt who, again, are permanently disabled, and 25,000 of those are in default. Getting this bill passed, getting this in operation as soon as possible is the most powerful way this country can say thank you, to eliminate one additional burden on people who have just shown their commitment and patriotism to our country.

I congratulate the bipartisan sponsors of this bill, Mr. LAMB and Mr. FITZPATRICK, and urge all of us to come together and get this bill passed today, as soon as possible.

Mrs. LEE of Nevada. Mr. Speaker, I yield 5 minutes to the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. LAMB), the sponsor of the bill.

Mr. LAMB. Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for yielding. I thank my colleague from Kansas for his excellent support and work on this bill, as well.

People often ask me when I go home to western Pennsylvania whether we ever knock off all the fighting down here and do some actual work and work across the aisle between Congress and the White House to actually get things done. What you are seeing here in this Chamber today is an example of the fact that there are many of us down here who are very serious about making that happen and making it happen more often as we go forward.

The FREED Act responded to a very specific set of circumstances, which is that it has long been true that, if you are a 100 percent disabled veteran, you have your Federal student loans forgiven. But we all know there is a big difference between putting something

down on paper and making it happen in real life, and we were seeing huge numbers of disabled veterans not take advantage of this program either because they didn't know about it or because the process of applying for it was just too burdensome, there was too much paperwork, or it took too long.

If you have a 100 percent disability rating, there is a lot in your life you have to worry about besides doing paperwork; so Congressman WATKINS, Congressman FITZPATRICK and another great western Pennsylvanian, Congressman GUY RESCHENTHALER, and I were all looking at the same set of facts and said: We know what we need to do here. We already know these people have a 100 percent disability rating. Let's just make the loan forgiveness automatic. That was the genesis for this bill.

I want to acknowledge that the administration and President Trump did the right thing here. They noticed this same problem last year, and they began to automatically forgive these loans by executive order. The problem was that there was some legal uncertainty about exactly who had the authority to forgive the loans how fast and when.

Our understanding is that some disputes developed between OMB and the Department of Education, and it was slowing down the ability of veterans to take advantage of this thing that they are already entitled to by virtue of how much they have given to this country. So our bill was necessary to make sure that everybody involved knew they have the legal authority to forgive these loans.

By this time next year, assuming we are able to get this through the Senate and to the President's desk for his signature, that number you heard from Congressman COURTNEY of 25,000 veterans whose loans are in default and an even higher number of tens of thousands more who haven't taken advantage of that should be zero.

We are making an unequivocal statement today that, if you have given so much to this country that you have a 100 percent disability rating, you do not need to worry about your Federal student loans any longer.

It is our job to remove obstacles from the paths of people who have given so much to this country. We all believe that there is much to be done on the subject of student loans, but what we want to make sure is that these brave Americans are first in line when we do that, and that is what our bill does.

It is very common in America these days to hear people spot a veteran and say, "Thank you for your service." I think the important thing about this bill is that it is Republicans and Democrats, Congress and the President all working together to say, "Thank you for your service"—not only in words, but in actions. That is what this bill means.

I am so grateful to have had the support of so many hardworking Members

who look forward to seeing this bill pass today, and I urge all my colleagues to support it.

Mr. WATKINS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. FITZPATRICK).

Mr. FITZPATRICK. Mr. Speaker, the FREE Vets Act mandates that the Department of Education automatically discharge Federal student loan debt for eligible permanently disabled veterans. The staggering student loan debt crisis harms the financial security of many Americans, including the women and men who have honorably served our Nation.

Our Nation's veterans have sacrificed immensely for our freedom and our way of life, and it is unacceptable that many disabled veterans continue to be saddled with high levels of student debt. The least we can do for them, Mr. Speaker, is to forgive the Federal student loans for those who have served our country.

The VA established a program in 2018 to forgive veteran student debt, but the barrier of going through the processes meant that only 20 percent of those eligible veterans received the assistance they deserved. This strong bipartisan bill makes student loan forgiveness for these vets automatic.

I thank my friend, Congressman LAMB from Pennsylvania, for leading this bill, and I urge all my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to stand with our veterans today and vote for H.R. 3598.

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

I thank the President for all he has done for our veterans. I thank the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. LAMB) as well as the gentlewoman from Nevada (Mrs. LEE) for all of their hard work in making this piece of legislation a reality.

I urge my colleagues to vote "yes" on H.R. 3598.

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

Mrs. LEE of Nevada. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

As my colleagues have heard today, this legislation would require the Department to continue ensuring that veterans who are totally and permanently disabled can have their student loan debt discharged without unnecessary complexity.

Think about it, without unnecessary complexity.

All this legislation does is streamline a process so those who have been totally and permanently disabled can have peace of mind and economic freedom. We owe it to those who have served our country to make this process as simple as possible, and I urge my colleagues to support this legislation.

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

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. COURTNEY). The question is on the motion offered by the gentlewoman from Nevada (Mrs. LEE) that the House sus-

pend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 3598, 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.

#### RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess subject to the call of the Chair.

Accordingly (at 1 o'clock and 27 minutes p.m.), the House stood in recess.

□ 1530

#### AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mrs. DEMINGS) at 3 o'clock and 30 minutes p.m.

#### ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Proceedings will resume on questions previously postponed. Votes will be taken in the following order:

Suspending the rules and:

Agreeing to H. Res. 756; and

Agreeing to the Speaker's approval of the Journal.

The first electronic vote will be conducted as a 15-minute vote. Pursuant to clause 9 of rule XX, remaining electronic votes will be conducted as 5-minute votes.

#### MOVING OUR DEMOCRACY AND CONGRESSIONAL OPERATIONS TOWARDS MODERNIZATION RESOLUTION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, the unfinished business is the vote on the motion to suspend the rules and agree to the resolution (H. Res. 756) implementing recommendations adopted by the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress, as amended, on which the yeas and nays were ordered.

The Clerk read the title of the resolution.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentlewoman from California (Ms. LOFGREN) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the resolution, as amended.

The vote was taken by electronic device, and there were—yeas 395, nays 13, not voting 21, as follows:

[Roll No. 93]

YEAS—395

Abraham	Amodei	Balderson
Adams	Armstrong	Banks
Aderholt	Arrington	Barr
Aguilar	Axne	Barragán
Allen	Babin	Bass
Allred	Bacon	Beatty
Amash	Baird	Bera