

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.

APPROVING REQUEST OF SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS FOR WAIVER UNDER SECTION 1703E(f) OF TITLE 38, UNITED STATES CODE

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the joint resolution (H.J. Res. 80) approving the request of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs for a waiver under section 1703E(f) of title 38, United States Code.

The Clerk read the title of the joint resolution.

The text of the joint resolution is as follows:

H.J. RES. 80

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That Congress approves the request for a waiver under section 1703E(f) of title 38, United States Code, as submitted by the Secretary on December 6, 2019.

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 to insert extraneous material on H.J. Res. 80.

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

There was no objection.

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

Madam Speaker, I rise in support of H.J. Res. 80 introduced by Representative ROE of Tennessee, the ranking member of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

This resolution would grant VA limited authority to conduct a dental health access pilot, which VA has proposed under section 152 of the VA MISSION Act of 2018.

Under section 152, VA can pilot healthcare payment and service delivery models through its Center for Innovation for Care and Payment.

On December 6, 2019, VA submitted a section 152 report to Congress proposing the Care Coordination for Dental Benefits program.

Through this pilot, VA would refer veterans who are ineligible for dental benefits to private providers or community programs that offer pro bono or discounted dental services. VA will not pay private providers for the cost of these services under the pilot. To carry

out this dental referral service, the section 152 report contained a request that Congress narrowly exempt or "waive" VA's authorizing statute.

When a section 152 report contains a request from VA to "waive" its authorizing statute, Congress must pass a joint resolution to approve a waiver so VA can proceed with a pilot program. By passing this joint resolution, we are approving VA's waiver request so it can pilot the referral of veterans for free or low-cost dental care.

Madam Speaker, currently VA provides dental services for only about 8 percent of veterans who are enrolled in the VA healthcare system. Generally, to receive dental care at VA's expense, veterans must have a dental condition that is related to a service-connected disability, be a former prisoner of war, be rated as 100 percent permanently and totally disabled, or need dental services in preparation for a hospital admission.

Under this pilot, VA will be able to coordinate dental care for the remaining 92 percent of veterans ineligible for dental care. Specifically, VA will provide administrative support potentially through a call center and online self-service portal to educate and assist these veterans in accessing community programs and providers that offer pro bono or discounted dental services. According to VA, community dental programs are available through federally qualified health centers, community health centers, and the American Dental Association.

Through this pilot, VA staff will be able to assist veterans in scheduling appointments with dentists that participate in these programs. VA staff will be authorized to obtain records from the dental visits and provide them to veterans' VA primary care providers.

I support granting VA this limited waiver because it will not permit VA to outsource more healthcare to private providers beyond its current authority, and it will not drain precious resources from VA hospitals and clinics.

I support this pilot because it has the potential to improve veterans' access to dental care, and to improve the timeliness of that care. Neglecting oral health can have serious medical consequences. For example, clinical researchers have identified links between poor oral health and other medical conditions such as heart disease, bacterial pneumonia, and stroke.

VA estimates this pilot will be cost neutral, as there will be cost savings from reducing emergency department visits associated with delayed treatment or nontreatment of oral health issues.

I urge all of my colleagues to join me in supporting H.J. Res. 80.

Madam Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

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

Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of H.J. Res. 80, approving the re-

quest of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs for a waiver under the law established by the VA MISSION Act of 2018.

Specifically, this bill would approve VA's first request for a waiver under section 152, as the chairman mentioned, the authority for the Department of Veterans Affairs Center for Innovation for Care and Payment contained within the VA MISSION Act of 2018.

The MISSION Act is one of the most transformative pieces of legislation passed in recent history. Over the next several years, given the authorities provided in the MISSION Act, the VA healthcare system that we know today will evolve into one that is stronger, more efficient, and better able to meet the healthcare needs of veterans now and for generations of veterans to come.

In addition to streamlining numerous community care programs, establishing a process to review and modernize VA assets and infrastructure, expanding the caregiver program, and enhancing the internal capacity of the VA healthcare, the MISSION Act created a Center for Innovation for Care and Payment.

The Innovation Center is charged with establishing pilot programs designed to test potential payment and service delivery models, models currently not in VA's authority to pursue without a waiver, with the goal of reducing expenditures while preserving or enhancing the quality and access to care furnished by VA.

Under the terms of the MISSION Act, the joint resolution we are considering today meets the requirements set forth in law with regard to approving waivers. The substance of this waiver is very modest. It will allow VA to expand its role in assisting veterans who aren't eligible for VA-provided dental care by establishing a pilot program to connect veterans with community-based discounted or pro bono dentists.

The objective of the pilot is to improve the overall health of currently enrolled veterans who are ineligible for VA dental services. The waiver specifically allows VA administrative staff to coordinate community-provided care while also educating veterans on the dental care options available to them within the community.

This proposed pilot is a commonsense approach to improving the wellness of veterans. Research has shown that poor oral health can have a significant impact on overall health with numerous connections between gum disease and other illnesses. Poor oral health is also correlated with potentially avoidable and costly emergency department visits.

Additionally, the approval of this waiver holds open the opportunity for VA to pursue other ideas that can enhance the care and services provided to veterans while also respecting the resources provided by the American taxpayer.

I look forward to working with the VA through the Center of Innovation

in identifying additional out-of-the-box approaches that could potentially transform the VA even further for the future.

I thank Chairman TAKANO for working with me to get this joint resolution to the House floor in a timely manner.

I urge all of my colleagues to support H.J. Res. 80, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I have no further speakers, and I am prepared to close.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. DAVID P. ROE of Tennessee. Madam Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Florida (Mr. BILIRAKIS), my good friend and a great friend of the Veterans' Affairs Committee. There has been no more consistent member of that committee, who has numerous advocates, and I really appreciate his support of this joint resolution.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Madam Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding. It has been a great experience to work with Representatives ROE and TAKANO to improve the lives of our heroes.

Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of H.J. Res. 80, which will approve the VA secretary's request for a waiver under the MISSION Act, allowing for innovative collaborations to expand dental care for veterans.

As a member of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, I was proud to be a strong advocate in support of the VA MISSION Act last Congress. One of the provisions of this new law established the VA Center for Innovation for Care and Payment, allowing the VA to create pilot programs that test innovative approaches to payment and service delivery models to improve the quality of care at the VA subject to congressional approval.

Many studies suggest that regular dental care, as the good doctor said, equates to lower overall healthcare cost and better health outcomes. Earlier this year I introduced H.R. 2628, the VET CARE Act, designed to determine the potential health benefits to veterans and potential cost savings to the VA associated with periodontal care. One provision specifically authorizes the VA to provide administrative support to local providers who agree to furnish dental care at low to no cost, including information about the VA Dental Insurance Program, which provides a discounted low-cost insurance plan provided by private insurers. At a legislative hearing on my bill, the VA testified its strong support for this particular section.

Currently, the VA only provides outpatient dental services to a limited number of the disabled veteran population. Some may be eligible to sign up for the VADIP, but I believe we can do more to move this issue forward and I am glad to see that the VA agrees with me on this particular issue.

Last month, the VA finalized a rule requesting congressional approval to allow coordination of care between vet-

erans and dental providers in the community.

I applaud VA for recognizing the need to increase access and coordination of care to dental providers and educate veterans on the potential opportunities available to them in the local community.

I thank Dr. ROE for sponsoring this joint resolution, and I urge the Senate to take this up as soon as possible so that the VA can get to implementing this pilot program and better providing access to much-needed dental care our veterans have earned and deserve.

Madam Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this joint resolution.

Mr. DAVID P. ROE of Tennessee. Madam Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time.

Madam Speaker, this is a very simple resolution. I urge all of my colleagues to support H.J. Res. 80, and I yield back the balance of my time.

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

As we welcome the new year and a new decade, I also want to take a moment to recognize my colleague and ranking member of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Dr. PHIL ROE, who has announced he will be retiring at the end of this Congress.

I salute my friend as a Vietnam veteran, as a doctor, and as a tireless advocate for veterans across the country. I have served with Dr. ROE since I was first elected to the House of Representatives in 2013, and I am proud of the bipartisan work we have done since then to ensure we honor our Nation's commitment to our veterans.

Madam Speaker, this Congress alone, we have passed 40 bills out of this committee with 36 passed out of the House and five signed into law. Despite the political rancor, which takes up much of the oxygen in Washington, D.C., this committee has set the standard for bipartisanship in this body.

In 2015, though I was still fairly new to this committee, then-Chairman ROE invited several Members to join him on a congressional delegation to Afghanistan to meet with servicemembers over the Thanksgiving holiday. He set a great example, and I have worked to replicate that example during my time as chairman. This past Thanksgiving, we did just that. I took freshmen Members to spend the holidays with those away from their families in service to our country.

□ 1645

During Dr. ROE's tenure as chairman of this committee, he was gracious in approving travel to the border so I could better understand the issues facing deported veterans. Following that trip, I, along with fellow members Ranking Member Tim Walz and Representatives VARGAS and COFFMAN, requested additional information from the Department of Homeland Security on this veteran population.

As a result, we learned that ICE did not know how many veterans it had deported and failed to follow policies already in place that could have shielded veterans from deportation.

Dr. ROE also has built on the hard work of former Ranking Member Walz and helped lay the groundwork for our success in finally passing the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019. He helped me bring this long-overdue legislation across the finish line, and I trust that he will continue to work with me to ensure our true intent of the law is implemented.

Madam Speaker, we have always worked to find common areas of agreement. Because of his agreement to include key protections for whistleblowers in the last Congress' VA Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act of 2017, I reluctantly supported that legislation, but it is clear today that these protections are nowhere near as strong as they should be. I hope Dr. ROE will join me in pressing this administration to implement these to their true intent and help ensure whistleblowers can come forward when they need to, free from retaliation.

Madam Speaker, I thank Dr. ROE for supporting this committee's bipartisan work to preserve the power of veterans' voices and combat online disinformation campaigns perpetrated by foreign trolls and internet actors. I look forward to working with him to continue to speak with a unified voice and help prevent the targeting of veterans and servicemembers.

Madam Speaker, I congratulate Ranking Member ROE on more than 11 years of hard work for the people of Tennessee and decades of service to our country.

It is my hope that, despite it being an election year, we can continue to come together and finish our work for our Nation's veterans.

Madam Speaker, I ask that all of my colleagues join me in honoring Dr. ROE for his many years of service but also in passing H.J. Res. 80.

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 joint resolution, H.J. Res. 80.

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

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

HOMELESS ASSISTANCE ACT OF 2019

Mr. SAN NICOLAS. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 4302) to authorize public housing agencies to share certain data regarding homeless individuals and families for the provision of housing and services, and for other purposes, as amended.