

Veterans Association, other VSOs and advocacy groups, and the work of this committee.

I thank them for their collaboration with Congress on this legislation. Their only focus is to eliminate barriers and achieve universal access and equality for veterans living with disabilities. This is an important goal, and I believe the advisory committee is well justified.

I also share many of my colleagues' concerns about the growth of advisory committees in the Federal Government. There are simply too many. That is why this legislation would direct VA to eliminate or consolidate an inactive advisory committee.

This bill is a reasonable step forward to use VA resources wisely and ultimately improve access for veterans living with disabilities.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all of my colleagues to support H.R. 7342, as amended, and I reserve the balance of my time.

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 7342, as amended, the Veterans Accessibility Advisory Committee Act of 2024. This bill establishes an advisory committee that brings disabled veterans' voices into the fold and provides a seat at the table with top decisionmakers at VA.

Access is an issue I have sought to champion during my time in Congress, and particularly during my time with the Veterans' Affairs Committee.

Disabled veterans still face many barriers in accessing the care and services they have rightfully earned. Those barriers deserve the time and attention of a VA advisory committee so that experts can come together to improve how veterans with disabilities access their care and benefits.

Advocates like the Blinded Veterans Association, Paralyzed Veterans of America, and Disabled American Veterans, have been tireless voices in our communities, raising awareness of these issues.

Establishing a Veterans Accessibility Advisory Committee will provide a direct line for these voices to be heard and for change to be made at VA so that all veterans can access their care and benefits with ease.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to vote "yes" on this bill, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. BOST. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from California (Mr. VALADAO), who has sponsored the bill.

Mr. VALADAO. Mr. Speaker, I thank the chairman for yielding, and I thank him and his committee for all their help on getting this bill here.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to urge my colleagues to support my bill, the Veterans Accessibility Advisory Committee Act. Sadly, many disabled veterans in the Central Valley and across the country are facing barriers in accessing the critical services they need.

From struggling with physical infrastructure at VA facilities to navigating the red tape in the benefits process, disabled veterans are too often getting left behind.

Doorways that are too narrow, elevators that are constantly out of service, and exam rooms that aren't big enough to accommodate wheelchairs are just a few obstacles veterans face when trying to receive care.

Serving disabled veterans is a critical part of the VA's mission, but they need to do more to ensure the unique needs of disabled veterans are being heard.

By establishing a permanent advisory committee within the VA, my bill ensures disabled veterans have a seat at the table in providing feedback so they can easily access the benefits, services, and facilities they have earned.

We cannot leave our disabled veterans behind. Our veterans have sacrificed so much for our Nation, and they deserve a VA that is responsive to their needs.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all of my colleagues to support this legislation.

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I have no further speakers, and I yield myself the balance of my time to close.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all of my colleagues to join me in passing H.R. 7342, the Veterans Accessibility Advisory Committee Act of 2024, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. BOST. Mr. Speaker, once again, I encourage all Members to support this legislation to improve access to VA services for veterans with disabilities, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. BOST) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 7342, 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.

CLEAR COMMUNICATION FOR VETERANS CLAIMS ACT

Mr. BOST. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 7816) to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to seek to enter into an agreement with a federally funded research and development center for an assessment of notice letters that the Secretary sends to claimants for benefits under laws administered by the Secretary, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 7816

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 "Clear Communication for Veterans Claims Act".

SEC. 2. INDEPENDENT ASSESSMENT OF NOTICES THAT THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS SENDS TO CLAIMANTS.

(a) AGREEMENT.—Not later than 30 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall seek to enter into an agreement with an FFRDC for an assessment of notices that the Secretary sends to claimants.

(b) ASSESSMENT.—An FFRDC that enters to an agreement under subsection (a) shall submit to the Secretary a written assessment of such notices. The assessment shall include the following:

(1) The determination of the FFRDC, made in consultation with covered entities, whether each such notice may be feasibly altered to reduce paper consumption by, and costs to, the Federal Government.

(2) The recommendations of the FFRDC regarding how the Secretary may make such notices clearer to claimants, better organized, and more concise.

(c) REPORT; IMPLEMENTATION.—Not later than 90 days after the Secretary receives the assessment under subsection (b), the Secretary shall—

(1) submit to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and House of Representatives a copy of such assessment; and

(2) implement the recommendations in the assessment that are in compliance with the laws administered by the Secretary.

(d) DEADLINE FOR IMPLEMENTATION.—The Secretary shall complete the implementation of such recommendations pursuant to subsection (c)(2) by not later than one year after the date on which the Secretary commences such implementation.

(e) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

(1) The term "FFRDC" means a federally funded research and development center.

(2) The term "covered entities" includes—

(A) the Secretary of Veterans Affairs;

(B) an expert in laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs;

(C) a veterans service organization recognized under section 5902 of title 38, United States Code; and

(D) an entity that advocates for veterans.

(3) The terms "claimant" and "notice" have the meanings given such terms in section 5100 of title 38, United States Code.

SEC. 3. EXTENSION OF CERTAIN LIMITS ON PAYMENTS OF PENSION.

Section 5503(d)(7) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by striking "November 30, 2031" and inserting "December 31, 2031".

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. BOST) and the gentleman from California (Mr. TAKANO) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Illinois.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. BOST. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks on H.R. 7816, as amended.

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

There was no objection.

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 7816, as amended. This bill was introduced by my colleague, Representative DUARTE, and I am a proud cosponsor.

This bill, H.R. 7816, as amended, would require VA to contract with a

research entity to improve the notice letters VA sends to veterans and survivors who file claims for VA benefits.

VA is required to provide information throughout the VA claims process to veterans and their survivors who have filed claims for VA benefits.

However, at a recent oversight hearing, we heard from veterans and their advocates that VA's notice letters are difficult to understand, too long, filled with legal jargon, and contained information that is not relevant to a veteran's or survivor's overall claim.

These complex letters have caused veterans and survivors confusion and stress. Some have become so overwhelmed that they abandon their claims.

This is unacceptable. As a veteran myself, I have also received these complex letters. A veteran shouldn't have to be a Member of Congress or an attorney to understand his or her rights under the claims process.

H.R. 7816, as amended, would ensure that VA's notice letters do not discourage veterans from accessing the benefits they have earned.

This legislation would ensure that VA sends veterans and survivors understandable notice letters so that they can make informed decisions about their claims.

I thank the veterans service organizations for their support and help in drafting this bill.

I also thank Ranking Member TAKANO and his staff for working with Representative DUARTE and me to make the changes necessary to move this bill forward.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 7816, as amended, and I reserve the balance of my time.

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise to express my support for H.R. 7816, the Clear Communication for Veterans Claims Act, as amended.

When a veteran applies for benefits at VA, the agency corresponds with that veteran at multiple points in the process regarding their claim. This communication is often through letters which can be densely laden with legal jargon and confusing information which makes it hard for the veteran to understand what is required of them or the benefits decision VA has arrived at.

Now, this can lead the veteran to miss important deadlines or fail to submit proper documentation which can ultimately lead to the rejection of their claims.

Now, VA has launched an internal review of these notice letters and has already redrafted many of them to be more direct and easier to understand. However, VA can also use some outside help in reviewing the literally thousands of different possible letters they might send a veteran.

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H.R. 7816 seeks to provide that assistance. Specifically, it mandates that VA

make its notice letters, documents that explain decisions on benefits, shorter, clearer, and easier for veterans and their families to understand.

This bill requires the VA to contract with a third party to assess and recommend improvements to these letters, which often contain complex legalese that can confuse veterans.

The bill also sets deadlines for action. The VA must contract with a federally funded research and development center, or FFRDC, to evaluate these communications within 30 days of the bill's enactment and submit its recommendation within 90 days. This effort aims to streamline the claims process and reduce the stress and confusion many veterans face when dealing with their benefits.

Mr. Speaker, I support H.R. 7816 and urge my colleagues to do the same, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. BOST. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from California (Mr. DUARTE), our colleague who is the sponsor of this bill.

Mr. DUARTE. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. BOST) for yielding.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of my bill, the Clear Communication for Veterans Claims Act. I am proud that the House is considering my bill on the floor today and for the support of Democrats and Republicans so that veterans can obtain the benefits they have earned in service to our Nation.

I thank the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. BOST) for his support of this bill and my Democrat co-lead, the gentleman from Illinois (Ms. BUDZINSKI), for joining me on this important legislation. This bill is a testament to what Congress can achieve when working across party lines.

Since coming to office, I have led several veterans' townhalls across California's Central Valley. One topic that continues to come up is the daunting challenge that our veterans, young and old, face when applying for and receiving benefits through the VA after their service to our Nation, and this is unacceptable.

Currently, when a veteran applies for benefits or files a claim with the VA, the VA responds in writing and often provides updates in writing.

At a Veterans' Affairs Committee hearing in March 2024, it became clear that the VA's effort to make these letters easy to understand, to guide veterans through the process, have failed. We learned the VA letters are often lengthy, packed with indecipherable legal jargon, sometimes omit crucial information needed to advance a claim, and can be over 20 pages long. These letters cause confusion, anxiety, and stress among our veterans, and some veterans are so overwhelmed that they give up on their claims entirely.

The Clear Communication for Veterans Claims Act would require the VA to work with a federally funded research and development center to sim-

plify the notification letters for VA benefits, including disability compensation, disability ratings, health benefits, and education.

This bill would require the VA to contract with a FFRDC to assess the letters sent to veterans within 30 days. Within 90 days of receiving the assessment, the VA would be required to notify Congress and implement any recommendations from the FFRDC.

This legislation is supported by numerous veterans' groups across California, including the Paralyzed Veterans of America, Disabled American Veterans, the National Organization of Veterans' Advocates, the American Legion, as well as the Stanislaus County Veterans Advisory Commission.

Their endorsements underscore the vital need for this reform. We must uphold our commitment to those who have bravely served our country. As a Congressman, I am always honored to help Central Valley veterans get their benefits. This bill is a step toward correcting the flawed VA claims process to help ensure our veterans get the care and benefits they earned from a grateful Nation.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. BOST) for supporting the Clear Communication for Veterans Claims Act. I urge my colleagues to support this bill.

Mr. BOST. Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time, and I am prepared to close.

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, in closing, I ask all my colleagues to join me in supporting H.R. 7816, the Clear Communication for Veterans Claims Act, as amended, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. BOST. Mr. Speaker, in closing, I encourage all Members to support this 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 Illinois (Mr. BOST) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 7816, 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.

COLONEL OLA LEE MIZE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS CLINIC

Mr. BOST. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 5464) to name the Department of Veterans Affairs community-based outpatient clinic in Guntersville, Alabama, as the "Colonel Ola Lee Mize Department of Veterans Affairs Clinic".

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 5464

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