

Unfortunately, there have been cases where VA can take months before offering them a position. Sometimes, people in the program are forced to break the agreement because of bureaucracy delays at the VA. They seek work elsewhere just to make ends meet.

Representative HAMADEH's bill would ensure that VA is properly staffed by making VA fulfill its end of the bargain.

This bill also includes language from Representative NEAL DUNN's bill, which would prohibit smoking on VHA campuses.

Since the nineties, VA has issued policies to provide safer smoking environments. Then, in March 2019, VA issued its most recent policy for a smoke-free VHA. This bill would align law with the current VA practice.

Patients and VA employees have a right to be protected from the harmful medical effects of secondhand smoke. This bill would do just that. Many private-sector healthcare systems already have smoke-free policies.

This bill, as amended, would take important steps to improve VA healthcare.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all of my colleagues to support H.R. 3767, 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 speak in support of H.R. 3767, the Health Professionals Scholarship Program Improvement Act of 2025, as amended.

For many years, the Health Professionals Scholarship Program has allowed VA to provide financial assistance to future medical professionals in return for a promise of service at VA facilities to ensure VA can meet its staffing needs. The program has had longstanding success in both ensuring prospective providers can complete their training and bolstering VA's workforce, especially in difficult-to-hire areas and for difficult-to-recruit professions.

However, some participants have expressed concerns that hiring delays at VA have prevented them from receiving their employment contracts in a timely manner. While there are many steps to onboarding new clinicians at VA, including necessary processes such as credentialing and privileging, we must make sure that VA does everything in its power to bring new staff on quickly, especially in the case of prospective providers who have proven themselves willing to serve the veteran community.

This legislation will ensure that VA provides employment contracts to graduates of the Health Professionals Scholarship Program within 90 days of completion of their programs or within 90 days of completing all necessary licensing and credentialing processes, whichever is later.

Participants in the Health Professionals Scholarship Program are dedi-

cated to service to the veteran community and are vital to ensuring VA has sufficient staffing across the Nation.

We should continue to seek additional ways to improve the hiring and onboarding process at VA, including through additional workforce investments and improving the use of expedited hiring authorities.

However, in the meantime, there is an important step in ensuring this program fulfills its purpose, both for participants and for VA's workforce needs.

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

Mr. BOST. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. HAMADEH), the sponsor of this bill.

Mr. HAMADEH of Arizona. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of my bill, H.R. 3767, the Health Professionals Scholarship Program Improvement Act of 2025.

As too many taxpayers well know, the VA spends millions of our hard-earned taxpayer dollars training healthcare professionals through scholarships, yet, these same qualified professionals are forced to wait months for employment contracts after graduation. All the while, our veterans suffer.

It is government inefficiency at its worst, and our veterans seem to always be paying the price. Veterans are sent to emergency rooms while skilled doctors are waiting to serve patients.

That is why I introduced this bipartisan legislation with my colleague, Congresswoman NIKKI BUDZINSKI, because we saw a program that required action. Bureaucratic red tape is the enemy.

The reports by the inspector general are a testament to what veterans in my district already know: Staffing shortfalls are more than a figure. They are missed appointments, endless long waits, and canceled procedures.

American heroes' lives are at stake. Back home in Arizona, the Phoenix VA Health Care System covers 100,000 veterans. The Southern Arizona VA Health Care System covers yet another 170,000. Every one of them deserves access to qualified providers.

Arizona's Eighth District alone has 65,000 veterans. These patients deserve better than bureaucratic incompetence when they need medical care. They did not wait to defend America, and America should not make them wait for healthcare.

My bill offers a simple and common-sense fix. HPSP scholarship recipients will be given offers of jobs within 90 days post-graduation. They will not wait. Veterans will not be forgotten. We are going to drain the VA swamp one regulation at a time.

Our bill also requires an annual report to Congress on hire dates and placement rates. Transparency generates performance.

We are not just addressing the issue today. We are ensuring bureaucrats cannot hide and escape tomorrow.

To those who would say 90 days is too aggressive, my response is: How long should a veteran wait? How long should a trained physician sit idle? The current state is intolerable. The status quo has failed, and it is time for genuine reform.

□ 1630

Mr. Speaker, I have seen firsthand what occurs when the systems fail for those on the front lines overseas. We cannot allow failure at home. When I served as an Army intelligence officer overseas, we lived by a simple creed: Mission first, and no Americans left behind.

My bill is an embodiment to that promise. This isn't partisan posturing. This is about doing right by America's warfighters. The House Committee on Veterans' Affairs agreed. They voted for my bill by voice vote without opposition. There was zero dissent. There was complete consensus and stakeholder support. It is now time for the entire House to deliver.

Mr. Speaker, every day of delay is another day a veteran waits for care. It is another day a qualified professional can't serve. It is another day the system fails those who have served and protected us all. It is another day the swamp wins and our heroes lose.

We ask our veterans to wait for many things. Quality healthcare shouldn't be one of them, not in President Trump's America and not on our watch.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all of my colleagues to support the HPSP Improvement Act. Our veterans have waited long enough. We must deliver on the promise we made to the brave men and women who served our country. It is time to put veterans first.

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, once again, I urge my colleagues to vote "yes" on H.R. 3767, the Health Professionals Scholarship Act of 2025, as amended.

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

Mr. BOST. Mr. Speaker, 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. 3767, 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.

#### HONORING OUR HEROES ACT OF 2025

Mr. BOST. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 2721) to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish and carry out a pilot program to furnish a headstone or burial marker to veterans who died on or before November 1, 1990, and for other purposes, as amended.

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

H.R. 2721

*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 "Honoring Our Heroes Act of 2025".*

**SEC. 2. TEMPORARY AUTHORITY TO FURNISH HEADSTONES AND BURIAL MARKERS TO CERTAIN VETERANS.**

(a) *AUTHORITY.*—During the period of seven years following the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall furnish, pursuant to section 2306 of title 38, United States Code, and without regards to section 8041(b) of the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1990 (Public Law 101-508), an appropriate headstone, burial marker, or medallion for a veteran—

- (1) eligible for burial in a national cemetery;
- (2) who died on or after December 7, 1941; and
- (3) for whose grave the Secretary has not already provided a headstone, burial marker, or medallion.

(b) *WEBSITE.*—During such period, the Secretary shall ensure that the website of the National Cemetery Administration indicates the effect of this Act on eligibility for a headstone, burial marker, or medallion under such section.

**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 "February 29, 2032".*

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 may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks on H.R. 2721.

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. 2721, as amended. This bill would establish a 7-year pilot program to allow eligible survivors or veteran representatives to request a VA-furnished headstone or marker for veterans buried in private cemeteries, who died during or after World War II.

Under current law, the National Cemetery Administration may only furnish a headstone or marker for graves of eligible veterans who died on or after November 1, 1990. If this veteran and their family have not already received an equivalent benefit, this bill would allow the veteran's family to honor their military service.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all of my colleagues to support H.R. 2721, 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 in support of H.R. 2721, the Honoring Our Heroes Act of 2025, as amended, offered by Represent-

ative TIM KENNEDY, who is an outstanding member of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

Mr. Speaker, most Americans would be shocked to hear this, but servicemembers who passed away before 1990 are currently ineligible by law to request a government-issued headstone from the National Cemetery Administration.

In the haze of grief after a loved one passes away, families are often unaware of what benefits they may be eligible for. Oftentimes, they make short-term decisions they intend to revisit later but, for varying reasons, they do not.

Unfortunately, for the families of veterans, that sometimes means that they could have applied for a headstone for their loved one, only to find out years later they were arbitrarily cut off from accessing that benefit simply by the passage of time.

I think we can all agree that when a veteran passes away, they deserve the benefits they earned. That includes marking their place in history with a headstone or other marker that pays respect to their service. That should be true, regardless of when that veteran passes away.

Mr. Speaker, that is what the Honoring Our Heroes Act of 2025 seeks to do. It gives late veterans the burial rights they deserve, and it gives families a sense of pride and closure after their loss. We on the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs are continually guided toward equity in the veteran population. When our constituents bring an issue to us that highlights inequity or injustice, it is our duty to correct it.

It is with this change in mind that my esteemed colleague Representative KENNEDY took up the fight and spearheaded this effort on behalf of the families of veterans who, before November 1, 1990, by statute cannot request a headstone from the National Cemetery Administration.

I am thankful to Representative KENNEDY for his dedication to veterans' families on an issue that has been overlooked for far too long. I am also thankful to the families who highlighted this issue and who testified in support of this legislation.

As we continue to strive for veterans, their families, and survivors to access their earned benefits and as we continue to push commonsense changes that allow more of these deserving people to get what they are owed, we must remember that from military separation through healthcare and in death, they matter.

Mr. Speaker, I strongly support this legislation, and I urge my colleagues to do the same.

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

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

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I yield 5 minutes to the gentleman from New York (Mr. KENNEDY), my good friend

and author of H.R. 2721. He currently serves on our Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity and our Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations.

Mr. KENNEDY of New York. Mr. Speaker, we as a body have an obligation to honor our servicemembers for the sacrifices they have made for our country. This responsibility is always top of mind for me and my colleagues on the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

About a year ago, I discovered that military families in my district faced a painful reality. After their loved one's passing, they could not honor their service with a headstone issued by the VA. These are families who, often years or even decades after the death of a loved one, came to fully grasp the depth of that veteran's service and sacrifice to our Nation.

These include families like that of Technical Sergeant Florian J. Fenclau, a World War II veteran, a prisoner of war, a Purple Heart recipient, and proud member of the Greatest Generation.

Under current Federal law, the VA only provides a government-issued headstone for veterans who died after November 1, 1990. This wasn't always the case. That arbitrary date was put in place as a cost-saving measure to pass legislation that same year. It is just one more item cut on a spreadsheet to make the math work at the expense of our military families.

Our veterans deserve better than this. They are men and women who bravely answered the call to serve. As Members of Congress, we have a moral obligation to fully honor the heroes who fought for this country.

The families left behind are simply asking our government to properly recognize the bravery and dedication of their loved ones. These are Americans who were willing to make the ultimate sacrifice to protect the freedoms we all hold dear. The quality of a veteran's memorial should not be based on when they die but, rather, every memorial must provide dignity, respect, and lasting recognition for all who wear the uniform.

That is why I introduced the Honoring Our Heroes Act. It ensures veterans who passed before 1990 receive the VA-issued headstone they earned and to guarantee that no veteran's memory is ever forgotten.

Mr. Speaker, I thank Chairman BOST and Ranking Member TAKANO for working with me in advancing this commonsense legislation. With their help, we are now that much closer to helping our military families correct the wrongs of the past.

□ 1640

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, in closing, once again, I urge my colleagues to vote "yes" on H.R. 2721, the Honoring Our Heroes Act of 2025, as amended, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. BOST. Mr. Speaker, I have no further speakers.

In closing, once again, I stand in strong support of this legislation, 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. 2721, as amended.

The question was taken.

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

Mr. BOST. 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.

## VETERANS READINESS AND EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM INTEGRITY ACT

Mr. BOST. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 3579) to amend title 38, United States Code, to make certain improvements to the Veterans Readiness and Employment program of Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 3579

*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 “Veterans Readiness and Employment Program Integrity Act”.*

### SEC. 2. APPLICATION REQUIREMENT UNDER VETERANS READINESS AND EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

*Section 3106(a) of title 38, United States Code, is amended—*

*(1) by striking “necessary (1) to determine” and inserting “necessary to determine”;*

*(2) by striking “and (2) in the case” and inserting “and, in the case”;*

*(3) by inserting “(1)” before “The Secretary”;*

*and*

*(4) by adding at the end the following new paragraph:*

*“(2) The Secretary may not provide an initial evaluation of a veteran under paragraph (1) before the veteran submits to the Secretary an application containing the substantive work record and educational transcripts of the veteran that the Secretary determines appropriate.”.*

### SEC. 3. MAXIMUM DURATION OF EMPLOYMENT ASSISTANCE UNDER VETERANS READINESS AND EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

*Section 3117(a) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new paragraph:*

*“(3)(A) Subject to subparagraph (B), a veteran may not receive assistance under this subsection for more than 365 days.*

*“(B) A veteran may receive an additional 180 days of such assistance if an individual who provides counseling under this chapter to such veteran certifies that the veteran is actively seeking employment.”.*

### SEC. 4. REPORTING AND DATA COLLECTION REQUIREMENTS UNDER VETERANS READINESS AND EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

*(a) IN GENERAL.—Chapter 31 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new section:*

#### “§3123. Requirements for data collection and reporting

*“(a) DATA COLLECTION.—The Secretary shall submit to the Committees on Veterans’ Affairs of the Senate and House of Representatives a report regarding the employment of veterans who participate in a vocational rehabilitation program under this chapter. Such information shall include, for each such veteran—*

*“(1) the regional office responsible for the provision of the program; and*

*“(2) the annual wages of the veteran before and after the completion of the program.*

*“(b) PUBLICATION OF WAIT TIMES.—On an annual basis, the Secretary shall make publicly available, on an appropriate website of the Department, the average time between the date on which a veteran requests a vocational rehabilitation program under this chapter and the date on which the veteran first meets with a counselor as part of the veteran’s program.”.*

*(b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections at the beginning of such chapter is amended by adding at the end the following new item:*

*“3123. Requirements for data collection and reporting.”.*

*(c) INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF PROGRAM.—*

*(1) REVIEW REQUIRED.—Not later than one year after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall seek to enter into a contract, with a non-Department entity that has expertise in vocational rehabilitation, pursuant to which the entity shall conduct a review of rehabilitation programs (as such term is defined in section 3101 of such title) under such chapter.*

*(2) REPORT.—Not later than one year after the date of such a contract, the entity shall submit to the Secretary a report containing recommendations regarding how to improve and modernize such rehabilitation programs.*

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 to revise and extend their remarks on H.R. 3579, 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. 3579 offered by my friend and colleague, Representative CISCOMANI of Arizona. This bill would make needed modernizations to the VA’s Veterans Readiness and Employment program, the VR&E program.

Over the last 2 years, our committee has uncovered disastrous wait times, fraud, waste, and abuse in the VA’s VR&E program. This bill would steer the ship in the right direction by establishing more oversight of the program.

It is the duty of Congress to make sure that veterans who complete this

workforce program are earning more and are in a better spot than they were before entering the program. VR&E currently does not track those results.

At a recent hearing, VA told the committee that 45 percent of veterans who successfully complete the program reenter it later. This does not show that the program is working for veterans. In fact, Mr. Speaker, it shows that the VR&E needs an overhaul. It is time to reform VR&E so that veterans can receive the training they need to find a meaningful career field that is fit for them.

This bill would also implement better practices for transparency on wait times to allow veterans to better plan for their future.

Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend, Representative CISCOMANI, for sponsoring this bill to improve job training access for veterans. My committee will continue to seek ways to level the playing field for veterans seeking employment so that every veteran has access to the opportunity they want all the while protecting the taxpayers’ investment in these programs.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all of my colleagues to support H.R. 3579, 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. 3579, as amended, the Veterans Readiness and Employment Program Integrity Act.

The VA Veteran Readiness and Employment program, otherwise known as VR&E, is also known as Chapter 31. It is a comprehensive benefits program designed to help veterans with service-connected disabilities find and maintain suitable employment. It offers personalized assistance, including career counseling, vocational training, and educational support to help veterans overcome employment barriers.

The program’s ultimate goal is to empower disabled veterans to achieve independence and a successful career in the civilian workforce.

I take great pride in my work on the Honoring our PACT Act that resulted in hundreds of thousands of veterans finally having their disability recognized, making them eligible for the VR&E program. However, that massive influx of new applicants has brought to light improvements that are needed for the VR&E program.

This legislation seeks to add some good-governance steps to the program, to make sure veterans are aware of how the benefit works upon sign up and ensures that veterans are actively seeking employment as they are prepared to exit the VR&E program.

This legislation also includes data reporting for Congress and veterans so wait times and wage data are public.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues in the House, and Senate as well, to support this bill, and I reserve the balance of my time.