

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

Mr. BARRETT. Mr. Speaker, I thank the chairman and the ranking member for their endorsement of this critical piece of legislation.

Mr. Speaker, the men and women who served and sacrificed for our Nation deserve the best healthcare that our country can offer, and they certainly shouldn't have to wait weeks or longer just to find out if they can make an appointment to see a doctor.

This is an issue that has plagued the VA healthcare system for decades. The good news is that the VA community care program is helping us turn things around by allowing veterans to receive medical services from local healthcare providers outside of the traditional VA hospitals and clinics right in their own communities closer to home. But the system is far from perfect.

Veterans across the country will tell you that community care appointments can be harder to schedule and too often are not even offered as an option.

This has led to longer wait times, farther drives to appointments, and greater inconvenience.

I personally experienced this myself when trying to get scheduled for a routine audiology appointment. I got called by a VA scheduler, then they had to call a number of providers, then they called me back, and when they actually set the appointment, it was on a date that I was here in Washington and not back home in Michigan. I had to reschedule the entire thing and start all over again.

Obviously, this isn't what we want for any of our veterans, and that is why I urge my colleagues to support my Veterans Community Care Scheduling Improvement Act, the bill before us today.

This bill would permanently require VA facilities to use a single digital interface called the External Provider Scheduling system to finally allow VA staff to simultaneously view all available appointments at both VA facilities and those participating in the community care program. It would all be in one centralized interface.

The VA has already rolled this out nationwide through internal process as we were working on this bill, and the results speak for themselves.

VA employees today can now book as many as 25 appointments each day compared to just a small handful through the manual process they were following before.

My legislation simply makes this positive change permanent by requiring the VA to keep this simplified, streamlined system in place beyond the pilot program they have today. Ensuring this progress is not undone by a future administration will give our veterans the access and certainty that they have earned.

It may sound simple, but the least we can do for those who served is make

sure they can get a doctor's appointment when they need it.

I thank Congresswoman BUDZINSKI for working with me on this important legislation to support our Nation's heroes, and I thank Chairman BOST and the full committee for bringing it to the floor.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to vote "yes."

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage my colleagues to vote "yes" on H.R. 3482, the Veterans Community Care Scheduling Improvement Act, as amended, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. BOST. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time.

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. 3482, 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.

FISCAL YEAR 2025 VETERANS AFFAIRS MAJOR MEDICAL FACILITY AUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. BOST. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (S. 2393) to authorize a major medical facility project for the Department of Veterans Affairs for fiscal year 2026 in St. Louis, Missouri, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

S. 2393

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 "Fiscal Year 2025 Veterans Affairs Major Medical Facility Authorization Act".

SEC. 2. AUTHORIZATION OF MAJOR MEDICAL FACILITY PROJECT OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS FOR FISCAL YEAR 2026 IN ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI.

(a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs may carry out a major medical facility project in fiscal year 2026 in St. Louis, Missouri, that consists of the construction of a new bed tower, clinical building expansion, consolidated administrative building and warehouse, utility plant, and parking garages, in an amount not to exceed \$1,762,668,000.

(b) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is authorized to be appropriated to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs for fiscal year 2026 or the year in which funds are appropriated for the Construction, Major Projects account, \$1,762,668,000 for the project authorized in subsection (a).

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 to revise and extend their remarks on S. 2393.

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 S. 2393, the Senate companion to my bill, H.R. 6710, the Fiscal Year 2025 Veterans Affairs Major Medical Facility Authorization Act, offered by Senator MORAN.

For veterans in southern Illinois, the St. Louis VA Medical Center is an essential part of the VA healthcare network.

S. 2393 authorizes up to \$1.76 billion to modernize and expand the St. Louis VA, including new clinical space, a bed tower, and a dedicated mental health and substance abuse clinic.

Many of the veterans I represent travel there for care, and this bill would help ensure that the campus is prepared to meet the needs of veterans across the region for years to come.

This new clinical space would give care teams more room to serve patients, while the mental health and substance abuse clinic would strengthen access to important services for veterans and their families.

Campus infrastructure improvements, including parking, utilities, and site work will also help the St. Louis VA operate more efficiently as a regional medical center.

The bill also supports the behind-the-scenes infrastructure that makes high-quality care possible, from upgraded utilities and a central utility plant to improved parking, security entrances, water systems, administrative space, and service facilities.

These investments would expand capacity, support specialized care, and improve the overall experience for veterans, caregivers, providers, and staff.

I am proud to support this bill because it is a practical, forward-looking investment in the veterans who depend on the St. Louis VA. This will help modernize care, improve access, and better serve veterans in my district and veterans across the country.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support S. 2393, and I reserve the balance of my time.

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of S. 2393, the Fiscal Year 2025 Veterans Affairs Major Medical Facility Authorization Act. Although the title says fiscal year 2025, this legislation will actually authorize funding for a major medical facility project in St. Louis, Missouri, for fiscal year 2026.

I thank our Senate counterparts for taking the lead on this annual bipartisan, bicameral exercise this year. I

understand this project is critical for the veterans of St. Louis and will expand capacity through the addition of a new bed tower, a clinical building expansion, and the construction of several administrative and infrastructure updates.

I will continue to strongly support investments in VA's infrastructure. While this project represents only a small fraction of the VA's overall infrastructure investment needs, this is an important project, and I am glad to support it today.

I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting this legislation to authorize a critical project for veterans, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. BOST. Mr. Speaker, I have no further speakers, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I ask all of my colleagues to join me in passing S. 2393, the Fiscal Year 2025 Veterans Affairs Major Medical Facility Authorization Act, as amended, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. BOST. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time.

Mr. Speaker, once again, 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, S. 2393.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds being in the affirmative, the yeas 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' TRANSITION TO TRUCKING ACT OF 2025

Mr. BOST. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 2954) to amend title 38, United States Code, to authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to approve multi-State apprenticeship programs for purposes of veterans educational assistance, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 2954

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' Transition to Trucking Act of 2025".

SEC. 2. AUTHORIZATION FOR SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS TO APPROVE MULTI-STATE APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMS PROVIDED BY COMMERCIAL TRUCK DRIVING SCHOOLS FOR PURPOSES OF EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

Section 3672(c)(1) of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) by redesignating subparagraph (B) as subparagraph (C);

(2) in subparagraph (A), in the matter before clause (i), by striking "The State" and inserting "Except as provided in subparagraph (B), the State"; and

(3) by inserting after subparagraph (A) the following new subparagraph (B):

"(B) The Secretary may act in the role of a State approving agency for purposes of approval of a multi-State apprenticeship program provided by a commercial truck driving school."

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 to revise and extend their remarks on H.R. 2954, 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. 2954, as amended, offered by my colleagues, the gentleman from New Hampshire (Mr. PAPPAS) and the gentleman from Virginia (Mrs. KIGGANS).

This bill, as amended, would allow the VA to approve the commercial driver's license apprenticeship program that operates in more than one State.

This bill would cut the red tape and stop an interstate company from having to seek approval in every State they operate in.

This bill would also allow more veterans to pursue careers in the trucking industry.

I come from a trucking family. As a former driver and a manager and operator of the family trucking business, I know how important it is to have qualified drivers. Trust me, I know.

The American Trucking Institute publishes a report that shows there is a shortage of 82,000 drivers and an anticipated shortage of 160,000 drivers by 2031. This bill would allow veterans to meet the demand by using their education benefits through the VA apprenticeship programs.

I am supportive of the intent of this bill as we must ensure that veterans find meaningful employment, while meeting the demand of an important industry in our Nation's economy. My committee will continue to seek ways to help create meaningful employment for veterans and streamlining veterans' programs.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all of my colleagues to support H.R. 2954, as amend-

ed, 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. 2954, the Veterans' Transition to Trucking Act.

The first year of a servicemember's transition to civilian life is often one of the most stressful. This period is marked by huge shifts in responsibilities, new family duties and new costs, like housing, food, and childcare. Veterans also must navigate finding employment which may involve translating military experience into something civilian employers will understand.

The Veterans' Transition to Trucking Act proposes to improve hiring through expediting training programs. By coordinating approvals for training institutions, more veterans can find employment faster.

Representative PAPPAS, a longtime member of our committee, authored this legislation. Trucking is the primary means for moving goods through his State. In New Hampshire, it is not uncommon to see a load of timber or even heating oil moving on the road. His constituents depend on this industry, and veterans seek employment in trucking.

While trucking isn't the fit for all veterans, I recognize that veterans who seek a role in the industry shouldn't have to fight to find a training institution.

With the price of goods and now fuel skyrocketing in the Trump economy, the last thing we should be doing is making it harder for veterans to find employment in logistics and shipping.

I thank Representative PAPPAS for serving as the ranking member on the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity where he is a strong voice for veteran employment opportunities.

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

Mr. BOST. I have no further speakers, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from New Hampshire (Mr. PAPPAS), my good friend and the ranking member of the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity and the author of this legislation.

Mr. PAPPAS. Mr. Speaker, I thank the ranking member for yielding, and I thank the chairman for his leadership and his endorsement of this common-sense legislation, the Veterans' Transition to Trucking Act, which is a bipartisan bill I introduced last year.

I have met too many veterans who struggle to find careers that are aligned with their goals and their skills when their military service ends.

We know that we all owe it to our heroes to do everything we can to support their transition to civilian life, including helping them find rewarding jobs and financial security.

Trucking is an essential sector of our economy, and they continue to hire more drivers.