

Delivering 21st century healthcare in buildings that were built during the latter half of the 19th century is far from ideal and certainly not what our veterans deserve.

Given the severity of underfunding as it relates to the VA's capital assets, we cannot afford to wait until the AIR Commission provides recommendations to Congress and the White House, as my colleagues across the aisle would advocate for. Life-safety and seismic issues across the portfolio must be recognized now. Regular maintenance should not be delayed because of budgetary concerns, nor should we delay retrofitting facilities to meet the VA's fastest-growing population, women veterans, or delay addressing the lessons learned from this Nation's first pandemic in more than 100 years.

If we are going to build back veterans' trust in the VA, we have to start making serious investments in the outdated infrastructure meant to serve them, and nearly three-fourths of Americans agree.

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

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 7500, the bill that would authorize VA major medical facility construction projects in Mississippi, New York, Texas, California, Kentucky, Oklahoma, Oregon, and Missouri.

It is well known that the VA healthcare system has very serious infrastructure issues. The average VA medical center is decades older than the average private-sector hospital.

Authorizing these projects won't fix that, but it will help thousands of veterans who live in those eight States to have better access to the care that they have earned and deserve.

I appreciate Congressmen Allred and Ellzey for their work introducing this important bill. It has my full support today. I encourage my colleagues to support this bill, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. TRONE. Mr. Speaker, I ask all of my colleagues to join me in passing H.R. 7500. I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. TRONE) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 7500.

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. BISHOP of North Carolina. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to section 3(s) of House Resolution 8, the yeas and nays are ordered.

Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, further proceedings on this motion are postponed.

PATIENT ADVOCATE TRACKER ACT

Mr. TRONE. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 5754) to amend title 38, United States Code, to improve the ability of veterans to electronically submit complaints about the delivery of health care services by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 5754

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 "Patient Advocate Tracker Act".

SEC. 2. SYSTEM FOR ELECTRONIC SUBMISSION OF COMPLAINTS ABOUT THE DELIVERY OF HEALTH CARE SERVICES BY THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

Section 7309A(c) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new paragraph:

"(3) Beginning not later than 18 months after the date of the enactment of this paragraph, the Director shall establish an information technology system that will allow a veteran (or the designated representative of a veteran) to electronically—

"(A) file a complaint that will be received by the appropriate patient advocate; and

"(B) at any time view the status of the complaint, including interim and final actions that have been taken to address the complaint."

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

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Maryland.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. TRONE. Mr. 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.R. 5754.

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

There was no objection.

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 5754, the Patient Advocate Tracker Act, sponsored by the gentleman from Michigan (Mrs. McCLAIN).

This bill will require VA to create a system to allow veterans to electronically submit complaints about the delivery of VA healthcare services and to track the resolution of those complaints by local VA patient advocates through an online system in real time. VA's existing IT system only allows VA employees to track complaint resolution, but not patients.

This bill has garnered the bipartisan support of an impressive 115 cosponsors since it was introduced 7 months ago. H.R. 5754 is also endorsed by numerous veterans service organizations, including the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Disabled American Veterans, Paralyzed

Veterans of America, and Student Veterans of America.

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

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 5754, the Patient Advocate Tracker Act. This is an excellent piece of legislation that is the brainchild of a veteran named Cameron Zbikowski.

Cameron worked on VA's patient advocate program as a student veteran fellow for the VFW and Student Veterans of America. During his fellowship, he recognized that veterans would be better served if they could submit complaints to VA patient advocates online and track the status of those complaints online as well.

Cameron was spot on, and this bill will require VA to make that happen. This will make patient advocates more accessible to veterans than ever before, and it will increase the transparency and accountability of the VA patient advocacy program so that we can make sure that it is working as it should for veterans across the country.

I know Cameron is watching today, and from one veteran to another, I thank him for his great work.

This bill is sponsored by the gentlewoman from Michigan (Mrs. McCLAIN). I thank her for her hard work on this legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I am a proud supporter of this bill today, and I hope that all of my colleagues will join me in supporting it. I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. TRONE. Mr. Speaker, I ask all of my colleagues to join me in passing H.R. 5754, the Patient Advocate Tracker Act, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. TRONE) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 5754.

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. BISHOP of North Carolina. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to section 3(s) of House Resolution 8, the yeas and nays are ordered.

Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, further proceedings on this motion are postponed.

VETERANS ELIGIBLE TO TRANSFER SCHOOL (VETS) CREDIT ACT

Mr. TRONE. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 6604) to amend title 38, United States Code, to improve the method by which the Secretary of Veterans Affairs determines the effects of a closure or disapproval of an educational institution on individuals who do not transfer credits from such institution, as amended.

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

H.R. 6604

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 Eligible to Transfer School (VETS) Credit Act”.

SEC. 2. CHARGE TO ENTITLEMENT TO EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE FOR INDIVIDUALS WHO DO NOT TRANSFER CREDITS FROM CERTAIN CLOSED OR DISAPPROVED PROGRAMS OF EDUCATION.

Section 3699(c)(2)(A) of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) by striking “An individual” and inserting “(i) An individual”;

(2) by designating the second sentence as clause (iv) and indenting appropriately; and

(3) by inserting after clause (i), as designated by paragraph (1), the following new clauses:

“(ii) In carrying out clause (i), the Secretary shall—

“(I) require an individual to certify in writing that the individual has transferred fewer than 12 credits as described in such clause;

“(II) require an individual who makes a certification under subclause (I) to acknowledge in writing that if the individual transfers 12 or more credits as described in such clause (i)—

“(aa) the individual may not be deemed under such clause to be an individual who did not receive such credits; and

“(bb) the Secretary shall rescind the certificate of eligibility provided under subclause (IV);

“(III) accept a certification under subclause (I) as proof of the individual transferring fewer than 12 credits; and

“(IV) provide to the individual who makes a certification under subclause (I) and makes the acknowledgment under subclause (II) a certificate of eligibility that the individual may provide to an educational institution as proof of the individual being covered by this paragraph.

“(iii) The Secretary shall notify individuals described in subparagraph (B) of being eligible to be covered by this paragraph.”.

SEC. 3. ELIMINATION OF REQUIREMENT TO SPECIFY AN EFFECTIVE PERIOD OF A TRANSFER OF POST-9/11 EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE TO A DEPENDENT.

Section 3319(e) of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) in paragraph (1), by adding “and” after the semicolon;

(2) in paragraph (2), by striking “; and” and inserting a period; and

(3) by striking paragraph (3).

SEC. 4. DETERMINATION OF BUDGETARY EFFECTS.

The budgetary effects of this Act, for the purpose of complying with the Statutory Pay-As-You-Go Act of 2010, shall be determined by reference to the latest statement titled “Budgetary Effects of PAYGO Legislation” for this Act, submitted for printing in the Congressional Record by the Chairman of the House Budget Committee, provided that such statement has been submitted prior to the vote on passage.

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

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Maryland.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. TRONE. Mr. 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.R. 6604, as amended.

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

There was no objection.

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

Mr. Speaker, I wish to speak in strong support of H.R. 6604, as amended, the Veterans Eligible to Transfer School (VETS) Credit Act.

This bipartisan legislation is a product of work from the gentleman from Florida (Mr. BUCHANAN) and the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. MURPHY) that, together, will make it easier for veterans and their dependents to use their earned benefits.

Representative BUCHANAN’s legislation would provide students that qualify a new provisional certificate of eligibility for benefits that may have been unfairly lost due to circumstances outside of their control. That means if a student veteran is left in the unfortunate situation where their school closes, they will be provided detailed information from the VA on how to reserve their benefits or have their benefits restored or transferred to a new institution.

H.R. 6604, as amended, would also ensure that clerical errors don’t rob veterans of transferring their benefits to a dependent. Under current law, if a servicemember accidentally makes a mistake on their paperwork, such as indicating an expiration date for the benefits, and the servicemember passes away before the benefits are used, there is no way for the paperwork to be changed to allow the dependent to use the benefits.

This bill clarifies existing law and ensures that clerical errors do not prevent dependents from receiving educational assistance.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the hard work of the members of the committee on this legislation, and I reserve the balance of my time.

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 6604, as amended, the Veterans Eligible to Transfer School Credit Act. This bill, authored by my friend from Florida (Mr. BUCHANAN), would help student veterans continue to use their GI Bill benefits if their school closes in the middle of a semester.

Under current law, when a school closes, an eligible student can have their GI Bill benefits restored for the time they spent attending the shuttered school. This bill would streamline that process for these students to use their restored benefits at a new school. This will help student veterans quickly transfer to a new school and complete their degree using their GI Bill benefits.

H.R. 6604, as amended, also includes the text of Congressman MURPHY’s bill, H.R. 6458. This bill eliminates the existing requirement for the servicemember to set a specific date for when any transferred Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits would expire.

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Thus, this bill would prevent those who are entitled to these benefits from accidentally inputting the wrong date.

These wrong dates have led to dependents being barred from taking advantage of their education benefits. For example, there have been instances where a servicemember has put in their child’s 18th birthday by accident which then prevents the child from using the benefit. If the servicemember is alive, they can easily change this date in the system. However, if the servicemember has passed away before they make this change, then it is irreversible and the child can’t use their GI Bill benefit.

I thank the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors, or TAPS, for bringing this transfer issue and solution to us. I also thank both Congressman BUCHANAN and Congressman MURPHY for their hard work on these bills. I encourage all my colleagues to support H.R. 6604, as amended, and I reserve the balance of my time.

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

Mr. BOST. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. MURPHY).

Mr. MURPHY of North Carolina. Mr. Speaker, I thank Ranking Member BOST for yielding.

I rise today to advocate for H.R. 6604, as amended, the Veterans Eligible to Transfer Schools (VETS) Credit Act. It corrects issues that veterans are having when using their GI benefits when transferring schools after a school closure. The bill also includes provisions from my bill, H.R. 6458, which eliminates the requirement to specify an effective period of a transfer of post-9/11 educational assistance to a dependent.

I am grateful to Representative VERN BUCHANAN for attaching my bill to H.R. 6604.

As Members of Congress, we realize the overall importance of the Post-9/11 GI Bill. It has been a huge success in recruiting and retaining servicemembers. Many servicemembers use the added benefit of being able to transfer their education benefits to their family members. With the cost of college education so astronomical in this era, many servicemembers are using this opportunity.

Under current law servicemembers are eligible to transfer their 36 months of Post-9/11 GI Bill eligibility to their dependents if they have served at least 6 years and incur a service obligation to serve an additional 4 years.

The nonprofit Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors, otherwise known as TAPS, has brought to our attention that under current practice if a

servicemember accidentally puts on their GI Bill transfer form that the benefits for a child or other dependent expire on a certain date and the servicemember later dies before the benefit is used, there is no way for the record to be changed to allow a dependent to use the benefit.

If the veteran were still alive, they could go back in the system and change the date at any time. TAPS has seen this happen to several family members and has asked us to look into it and try to correct the problem. When we contacted the Department of Defense to see if they could address this with an administrative fix, we were told that a legislative correction was needed, and this is why we are here today to introduce my bill.

The bill, as amended, includes this change that would eliminate the requirement to specify a period of transfer of Post-9/11 GI Bill entitlement to a dependent. This would prevent those entitled to post-9/11 education benefits from accidentally inputting the wrong date and therefore preventing the dependent from taking advantage of the benefit.

It may seem a small detail, but for those individuals it is a very, very large benefit. I am grateful to TAPS for identifying this issue and grateful for Congressman BUCHANAN as well as Chairman TAKANO and Ranking Member BOST for their support. I would like to thank the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs for their assistance.

Mr. TRONE. Mr. Speaker, I ask all of my colleagues to join me in passing this important piece of legislation, H.R. 6604, as amended, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. BOST. Mr. Speaker, I encourage my colleagues to support this bill, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. TRONE) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 6604, 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. BISHOP of North Carolina. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to section 3(s) of House Resolution 8, the yeas and nays are ordered.

Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, further proceedings on this motion are postponed.

STRENGTHENING OVERSIGHT FOR VETERANS ACT OF 2021

Mr. TRONE. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (S. 2687) to provide the Inspector General of the Department of Veterans Affairs testimonial subpoena authority, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

S. 2687

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 "Strengthening Oversight for Veterans Act of 2021".

SEC. 2. TESTIMONIAL SUBPOENA AUTHORITY OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Section 312 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new subsection:

"(d)(1)(A) In addition to the authority otherwise provided by the Inspector General Act of 1978 (5 U.S.C. App.) and in accordance with the requirements of this subsection, the Inspector General, in carrying out the provisions of this section, may require by subpoena the attendance and testimony of witnesses as necessary in the performance of the functions assigned to the Inspector General by the Inspector General Act of 1978 (5 U.S.C. App.) and this section, which in the case of contumacy or refusal to obey, such subpoena shall be enforceable by order of any appropriate district court of the United States.

"(B) The Inspector General may not require by subpoena the attendance and testimony under subparagraph (A) of—

"(i) any current Federal employee; or
 "(ii) any witness as part of any criminal proceeding.

"(2) The authority to issue a subpoena under paragraph (1) may not be delegated.

"(3)(A) The Inspector General shall notify the Attorney General of the intent to issue a subpoena under paragraph (1).

"(B) Not later than 10 days after the date on which the Attorney General is notified pursuant to subparagraph (A), the Attorney General may object in writing to the issuance of the subpoena if the subpoena will interfere with an ongoing investigation and, if the Attorney General makes such an objection, the Inspector General may not issue the subpoena.

"(C) If the Attorney General does not object in writing to the issuance of the subpoena during the 10-day period described in subparagraph (B), the Inspector General may issue the subpoena.

"(4) Before requiring by subpoena under paragraph (1) the attendance and testimony of a witness, the Inspector General shall, to the degree practicable—

"(A) notify the witness of the intent of the Inspector General to issue the subpoena; and
 "(B) provide the witness an opportunity to attend and testify voluntarily.

"(5) Whenever requiring by subpoena under paragraph (1) the attendance and testimony of a witness, the Inspector General shall, to the greatest extent practicable, travel to residence of the witness, the principal place of business of the witness, or other similar location that is in proximity to the residence of the witness.

"(6)(A) Along with each semiannual report submitted by the Inspector General pursuant to section 5(b) of the Inspector General Act of 1978 (5 U.S.C. App. 5(b)), the Inspector General shall include a report on the exercise of the authority provided by paragraph (1).

"(B) Each report submitted under subparagraph (A) shall include, for the most recently completed six-month period, the following:

"(i) The number of testimonial subpoenas issued and the number of individuals interviewed pursuant to such subpoenas.

"(ii) The number of proposed testimonial subpoenas with respect to which the Attorney General objected under paragraph (3)(B).

"(iii) A discussion of any challenges or concerns that the Inspector General has en-

countered exercising the authority provided by paragraph (1).

"(iv) Such other matters as the Inspector General considers appropriate.

"(7)(A) The authority provided by paragraph (1)(A) shall terminate on May 31, 2025.

"(B) The termination of authority by subparagraph (A) shall not affect the enforceability of a subpoena issued under paragraph (1)(A) before the date of such termination."

(b) EFFECTIVE DATE.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Subsection (d) of section 312 of title 38, United States Code, as added by subsection (a), shall take effect on the date of the enactment of this Act.

(2) SEMIANNUAL REPORT.—Paragraph (6) of subsection (d) of such section, as so added, shall apply beginning on the date that is seven months after the first day of the first fiscal year beginning after the date of the enactment of this Act.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Ms. GARCIA of Texas). Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. TRONE) and the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. BOST) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Maryland.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. TRONE. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and insert extraneous material on S. 2687.

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

There was no objection.

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

Madam Speaker, I rise in support of this bipartisan bill, S. 2687, the Strengthening Oversight for Veterans Act, introduced by Senator TESTER. I thank Representative RICE and Delegate Radewagen for introducing the House companion to this bill.

This bill seeks to strengthen the VA Office of the Inspector General by granting the office testimonial subpoena authority, an essential tool for conducting oversight.

Too often, individuals with important information relevant to an investigation retire or move to a position in another agency, thereby evading OIG investigations. Currently, the inspector general cannot require testimony of these former employees. Questioning these individuals could shed light on wrongdoing or mismanagement that puts the care and safety of our veterans and their families at risk.

This bill has bipartisan support in Congress as well as from Veterans of Foreign Wars, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, and the Project on Government Oversight.

Again, Madam Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support the legislation. I reserve the balance of my time.

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

Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of S. 2687, which would provide the VA inspector general with limited subpoena power. In some investigations, VA employees who may have important information have left the Department. At that point, the inspector general has no authority to compel their