

without making meaningful attempts to reduce on every increasing national debt, this would be a vote not on a debt ceiling but more a debt recommendation.

The Congress would find themselves voting to increase the debt ceiling again, and again, and again. Enough is enough! Washington needs to stop spending money we do not have and not make our children and grandchildren pick up the tab for our reckless financial behavior.

I am even pleased that then Senator JOE BIDEN agrees with my thoughts, for in 2006, he stated: "This is a record of utter disregard for our Nation's financial future. It is a record of indifference to the price our children and grandchildren will pay to redeem our debt when it comes due. History will not judge this record kindly. My vote against the debt limit increase cannot change the fact that we have incurred this debt already, and will no doubt incur more. It is a statement that I refuse to be associated with the policies that brought us to this point."

Vice President BIDEN, I stand with you and refuse to be associated with the policies your Administration help precipitate, by spending beyond our means, and will not vote to raise the debt ceiling.

Mr. DEFAZIO. Mr. Speaker, today's debt limit vote will fail to pass because neither Republicans nor Democrats have made meaningful progress on balancing the federal budget. The Republican 2012 budget makes devastating cuts to transportation, education, ends Medicare as we know it. Despite these cuts, they fail to balance the budget for three decades. The Democratic 2012 budget would take even longer to restore balance. Neither is a serious long term plan to restore fiscal sanity.

Today's vote was necessary to conclude the debt limit theatrics and bring us closer to negotiating a comprehensive budget. Neither party has the necessary votes to extend the debt ceiling without a bi-partisan deal on the budget.

We need to pay our debts and obligations and I will be urging the Republican leadership to tie future debt ceiling legislation to a balanced budget amendment. I have long supported a balanced budget amendment and had it passed in 1995, we wouldn't be in this mess. A balanced budget amendment would force both sides to make some tough decisions on both budget cuts and raising revenue.

Balancing the budget does not need to be a partisan issue. For example, in his second term President Reagan increased taxes several times to reduce the massive deficits created by the failure of supply side trickle-down policies. Again in the late 1990s, Clinton and a Republican Congress balanced a budget from 1998 to 2001 because they compromised on both spending cuts and increased taxes.

With adoption of a balanced budget amendment Congress could balance the budget in ten years. This begins with repealing the Bush tax cuts, cutting the deficit in half. To reduce federal spending, Congress should bring our troops home from Iraq and Afghanistan, cut antiquated cold war weapons systems, and cut agriculture subsidies. Further cuts can be made by eliminating special interest tax breaks and subsidies for ethanol, big oil, and prescription drug companies. Finally, Congress should continuously scrub the rest of the budget for further reductions to ensure a balanced budget in ten years.

Mr. TERRY. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to oppose this legislation raising our nation's debt ceiling by \$2.5 trillion without any spending cuts or attempt to balance our nation's budget.

The fact that we have reached the \$14 trillion debt ceiling should concern every American. Congress has to get our fiscal house in order and everything needs to be on the table.

If we are going to have this debate, then let's bring everything to the table. Any discussion concerning raising our debt ceiling needs to include significant spending cuts, fiscal reforms to reduce the debt we are leaving our children, and a balanced budget amendment.

We can't afford to continue the same path of spending more and more taxpayer dollars and hoping our nation's debt will somehow go down. And we certainly cannot afford another blind increase in America's debt limit.

It is a fact of life. When you max out your credit card, you cut spending and pay down your debt. It is time Congress does the same.

We have the chance to do the right thing, but this measure—raising the debt ceiling without any attempt to curb spending—fell far short.

Mr. CAMP. I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. CAMP) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 1954.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds not being in the affirmative, the yeas have it.

Mr. CAMP. 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 and the Chair's prior announcement, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

VETERANS APPEALS IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 2011

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 1484) to amend title 38, United States Code, to improve the appeals process of the Department of Veterans Affairs and to establish a commission to study judicial review of the determination of veterans' benefits, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 1484

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 Appeals Improvement Act of 2011".

SEC. 2. WAIVER OF REGIONAL OFFICE JURISDICTION OVER INCORPORATION OF SUPPLEMENTAL EVIDENCE INTO PREVIOUSLY SUBMITTED CLAIMS.

(a) WAIVER.—Section 7104 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new subsection:

"(f) If a claimant or the claimant's representative submits new evidence in support of a case for which a substantive appeal has been filed, such evidence shall be submitted

to the Board directly and not to the agency of jurisdiction, unless the claimant or the claimant's representative requests that the evidence be reviewed by the agency of jurisdiction before being submitted to the Board."

(b) EFFECTIVE DATE.—Subsection (f) of section 7104 of title 38, United States Code, as added by subsection (a) of this section, shall apply with respect to evidence submitted on or after the date that is 90 days after the date of the enactment of this Act.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MILLER) and the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Florida.

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I rise today in strong support of the manager's amendment to H.R. 1484, the Veterans Appeals Improvement Act of 2011.

This legislation is a product of the committee's continued oversight of the disability claims process. We continue to look for ways to improve this laborious process and ensure that veterans receive their disability claims, and the decisions, in a timely and accurate fashion. Now, under current law, veterans who disagree with their initial claims decisions by the VA can appeal to the VA's Board of Veterans' Appeals. But if a veteran submits additional evidence before the board in support of his claims, it automatically goes back to the very beginning of the process.

The legislation before us would stop the shuffling of veterans back to the end of the line. It would direct that evidence submitted by a veteran in support of an appeal before the Board of Veterans' Appeals be considered by the board unless the veteran, himself or herself, elects to send it back to the very beginning of the process. This provision has garnered wide support from veterans' service organizations and the Department of Veterans Affairs. I believe it will reduce the frustration that many of our veterans face when appealing a ratings decision and that it will also reduce processing times.

□ 1750

I want to thank the ranking member, Mr. FILNER, for introducing this legislation, and I do urge all Members to vote in support of the manager's amendment to H.R. 1484.

I reserve the balance of my time.

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

I want to say first that I appreciate the chairman's cooperation in bringing these bills to the floor. We're a day after Memorial Day, but these are important to honor our veterans. I thank him and also urge that his manager's amendment, which took care of a funding issue, be approved.

So I am in strong support of this bill, and I thank the members of the Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs who have worked

very hard in moving this bill forward. It's been quite a long time coming to fruition, and I know that many of our stakeholders look forward to its passage today.

In the last Congress and this one, the Committee on Veterans' Affairs held a multitude of hearings on the language that is in the bill today. It was developed as a result of vigorous oversight hearings and meetings conducted in the past two Congresses. We received expert input from many of our stakeholders on the myriad systemic and vexing issues surrounding the whole process of claims appeals.

As such, section 2 of the bill would allow the Board of Veterans Appeals to review evidence submitted directly to it by the veteran or a survivor without issuing often unnecessary supplemental statements of the case that serve only to delay and to deny. I know that many stakeholders are anxious to see this provision enacted, including the VA itself.

Section 3 of the bill would have established a judicial review commission that would have been made up of 11 expert members to tackle other long-standing appellate review issues facing our veterans and survivors.

These issues have included whether to continue Federal Circuit Court review of the decisions of the Court of Appeals of Veterans Claims, whether to grant class action and associational standing to the Veterans Court, and whether to require decision on all issues raised on appeal, just to name a few.

The commission would have been required at that time to report on its findings and recommendations to Congress, and it would not sunset until 2 years after that time. However, we were not able to move this section forward because of certain de minimus costs associated with operating the commission, and I know that we all have a bit of "commission fatigue" anyway. But at some point, this is an unexamined area with divergent and broad concepts that are in dire need of concentrated and expert attention.

So I hope, Mr. Speaker, that we find a way to fund this commission in the near future, and I look forward to working with Mr. MILLER in a bipartisan manner to make this a reality. I ask all my colleagues to support the bill in its amended form.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I am happy to yield as much time as he may consume to the chairman of the Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. RUNYAN).

Mr. RUNYAN. I thank the chairman for the time.

I rise today in support of the manager's amendment to H.R. 1484, as amended, and the Veterans Appeals Improvement Act of 2011.

The veterans disability claims policy is very complex, and all of us on the Veterans' Affairs Committee are con-

stantly seeking ways to improve the process for both our veterans and the VA. This bill is a good first step in accomplishing the goal by improving upon the current process. Specifically, section 2 will work to simplify the process for submitting evidence to the Board of Veterans Appeals by allowing veterans to keep their place in line at the Board of Appeals for Veterans Claims when they submit new evidence in support of their claim.

Under current law, if a veteran submitted new evidence to their case with the intention of expediting their adjudication, they may have actually made the adjudication take longer due to the VA's archaic rules that require the agency to resubmit the claim back to the regional offices. This bill corrects that problem.

While I'm hopeful that the VA's new electronic processing system, which is currently being developed, will alleviate the backlog, we must do right by our veterans by continually improving the claims process and continuing to make changes, no matter how small, to help our veterans who are currently stuck in a failed paper-based system.

This bill is one of many steps my subcommittee will take in this Congress to address the backlog of veteran disability claims. On Thursday, the subcommittee will be holding a hearing on underperforming regional offices, and my staff is currently working on ways to improve training and accountability at all VA regional offices. Every veteran has the right to have their claim adjudicated in a prompt and accurate fashion.

I am proud that many veteran service organizations, as well as the VA, have expressed support for H.R. 1484, as amended; and I urge all Members to support H.R. 1484, as amended.

Mr. FILNER. I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to point out to the chair of the subcommittee—and I guess the chair of the committee also—we're taking an important step today, but it is a small step. And the chair, the gentleman from New Jersey, mentioned other small steps. We aren't going to clean up this backlog, which approaches 1 million cases, without a major step, a major blowing up of the whole way we do this stuff. We just hired 10,000 new people, and the number of claims doubled. So we're not getting anywhere with this brute force kind of thing.

I have suggested many times to just cut out the red tape completely, at least in the short term, to clean up the backlog, to say to those who have submitted claims that are backed up both by the medical evidence and with help from veteran service officers—of which we have thousands certified across the Nation—that we ought to accept those claims and honor the service of our veterans. Until we get to a mindset that says blow up the bureaucracy in this thing, we're not going to solve the problem.

So all these small steps will be taking forever. Let's pass this small step today, but let us take on a much bigger honoring of our veterans as we just talked about on Memorial Day by saying, you know, some of you have died while waiting for this process to continue, some of you have lost your homes because you didn't get a disability check. Let's really honor our veterans this Memorial Day and say let's change the whole system that we have and stop trying to fool around with these small steps.

Mr. Speaker, I urge adoption of the bill, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. MILLER of Florida. I associate myself with the remarks of my colleague, the ranking member. This issue of the disability claims backlog has haunted this Congress and this committee for many, many years; but nobody is more haunted by it than the veterans who have to go through that process. We, together, in a bipartisan way are looking for a way to try to solve this issue, and it's obvious that money and bodies are not the way to do it.

So together, Mr. FILNER and I and the members of our committees will work together and try to bring a reasonable solution to this Congress that will help resolve the million veterans that are out there right now in backlog waiting for their disability claims.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and submit extraneous material on the manager's amendment to H.R. 1484, as amended.

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

There was no objection.

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Once again, I encourage all Members to support the manager's amendment to H.R. 1484, as amended, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MILLER) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 1484, 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. MILLER of Florida. 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 and the Chair's prior announcement, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

□ 1800

ESTABLISHING VETSTAR AWARD PROGRAM

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass