

(b) COMPLIANCE ASSESSMENT.—The Secretary shall request the Director of the Office of Government Information Services of the National Archives and Records Administration to conduct an assessment of the compliance by the Department of Veterans Affairs with section 552 of title 5, United States Code.

(c) REPORTS.—

(1) INITIAL REPORT.—Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall submit to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Representatives and the Senate a report on implementing subsections (a) and (b). The report shall include the following:

(A) The plan established under subsection (a).

(B) An analysis of the root causes of the backlog of FOIA requests.

(C) Recommendations with respect to any additional resources or legislative action the Secretary determines necessary for such implementation.

(2) ANNUAL REPORTS.—During the five-year period following the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall submit to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Representatives and the Senate annual reports on—

(A) carrying out the plan under subsection (a), including any updates or changes made to the plan; and

(B) the compliance by the Department as described in subsection (b).

(3) PUBLICATION.—The Secretary shall make publicly available on the internet website of the Department the reports under paragraphs (1) and (2) by not later than 30 days after the date on which the Secretary submits the reports to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Representatives and the Senate.

(d) BACKLOG OF FOIA REQUESTS DEFINED.—In this section, the term “backlog of FOIA requests” means the number of requests, as reported by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to the Attorney General in the Annual FOIA Report, made by individuals to the Secretary pursuant to section 552 of title 5, United States Code, for documents or information that the Secretary has not fulfilled or provided a response to the individual.

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

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. TAKANO. Madam 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. 2726.

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

There was no objection.

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

Madam Speaker, I am pleased to support H.R. 2726, the VA FOIA Reform Act of 2021, introduced by Representative GALLEG0, a member of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

This bipartisan legislation is cosponsored by Representative MURPHY from North Carolina and would modernize the Department of Veterans Affairs'

Freedom of Information Act, or FOIA, process to help VA meet statutory requirements and improve efficiency.

The FOIA process is essential for ensuring a transparent and accountable VA by allowing the public insight into the workings of a Department that serves millions of veterans each year. However, an enduring backlog of open requests and out-of-date technology have made it difficult for the Department to provide timely access to requested information.

Madam Speaker, this bill would require VA to establish a plan in order to meet all statutory FOIA requirements, identify its technology needs, and carry out this plan within 5 years.

Veterans and their families, employees, and the public who have made FOIA requests at VA have been kept waiting for too long. I hope this bill puts VA on a path to providing FOIA information in a timely manner.

Madam Speaker, H.R. 2726 was reported favorably by the committee, and I ask my colleagues to support the bill.

Madam Speaker, 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 H.R. 2726, the VA FOIA Reform Act of 2021.

Madam Speaker, over the last few years, VA has worked hard to reduce the Freedom of Information Act, or FOIA, requests backlog. These efforts have achieved some success, but the VA still has a long way to go.

At the end of fiscal year 2020, VA reported 4,206 pending requests. This bill would require VA to carry out a plan to reduce the backlog and comply with existing FOIA requirements.

It would also require VA to report to Congress on a plan and the Department's work. This will help Congress oversee VA's efforts to reduce the FOIA backlog and provide additional resources that may be necessary.

Madam Speaker, I appreciate the bipartisan work on this legislation, and I encourage my colleagues to support it. I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. GALLEG0), my good friend, author of H.R. 2726, and a member of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

Mr. GALLEG0. Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of my bill, H.R. 2726, the VA FOIA Reform Act.

Madam Speaker, I thank Chair TAKANO and Ranking Member BOST for bringing this bill to the floor and Representative MURPHY for co-leading this important legislation with me.

The bill is a simple, bipartisan measure to improve efficiency and transparency at the VA.

As we all know, transparency is critical in ensuring that the VA is serving our veterans as effectively as possible. Veterans, their caregivers, VSOs, and the public all deserve easy and timely

access to information about veteran care, VA performance, and other data when requested.

Unfortunately, VA currently has among the worst backlogs of Freedom of Information Act requests across Federal agencies. Among these backlogged requests are inquiries about VA performance and decisions, as well as requests from veterans for their own personal records.

My bill will ensure that the VA takes concrete steps to reduce its FOIA backlogs so that these veterans get answers. It also calls for the National Archives and Records Administration to review VA's FOIA process.

Finally, the bill requires the VA to analyze the root causes of its FOIA backlog and to identify technology needs and procedural improvements that will increase efficiency in responding to requests.

This straightforward bill is a commonsense step toward improving the flow of information from the VA to all the stakeholders it serves.

Madam Speaker, I urge all of my colleagues to support it today, and I look forward to working to get it signed into law.

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

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I would like to close by saying I urge all of my colleagues to support the VA FOIA Reform Act of 2021. We need to make sure that our veterans and their families get information that they have requested from the VA in a timely manner.

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

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. TAKANO) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 2726.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

□ 1445

CLARIFYING ROLE OF DOCTORS OF PODIATRIC MEDICINE IN DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 2545) to amend title 38, United States Code, to clarify the role of doctors of podiatric medicine in the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 2545

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

# SECTION 1. ROLE OF DOCTORS OF PODIATRIC MEDICINE IN DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

(a) CLARIFICATION OF ROLE.—Section 7306 of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) in subsection (a)—  
(A) in paragraph (6), by striking “a Director of Podiatric Service.”;

(B) by redesignating paragraph (10) as paragraph (11); and

(C) by inserting after paragraph (9) the following new paragraph:

“(10) A Podiatric Medical Director, who shall be a qualified doctor of podiatric medicine and who shall be responsible to the Under Secretary for Health for the operation of the Podiatric Service.”;

(2) in subsection (b)(1), by inserting “podiatric medicine,” after “doctors of medicine.”; and

(3) in subsection (c), by striking “and (8)” and inserting “(8), and (10)”.

(b) CLARIFICATION OF PAY GRADE.—Section 7404 of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) in subsection (a)(2), by inserting “, podiatrists,” after “physicians”; and

(2) in subsection (b), in the first heading of the list following the colon, by striking “PODIATRIST” and inserting “PODIATRIST (DPM)”.

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

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California.

## GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 2545.

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

There was no objection.

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

Madam Speaker, I am pleased to support H.R. 2545 to amend title 38, United States Code, to clarify the role of doctors of podiatric medicine in the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes.

H.R. 2545 is offered by former Veterans' Affairs Committee member, Dr. BRAD WENSTRUP. This legislation seeks to clarify a technical error affecting the Director of Podiatric Services which developed following the inclusion of Dr. WENSTRUP's VA Provider Equity Act in the MISSION Act.

The renaming of the position to Podiatric Medical Director will create equity by allowing this position holder to be paid on par with their peers rather than below, which is currently the case.

If VA is to recruit top talent, we must ensure VA is able to offer competitive salaries whenever possible, that is why I support this legislation and I hope my colleagues will too.

Madam Speaker, 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 H.R. 2545, a bill that would clar-

ify the role of podiatrists in the VA health system. Podiatrists are increasingly called upon to care for veterans in the VA medical facilities.

This bill would make a technical correction to current law to ensure that they are properly compensated for their important work.

This bill is sponsored by Dr. WENSTRUP. Dr. WENSTRUP is a veteran, a podiatrist, and a former member of the Veterans' Affairs Committee. I am grateful for his continued commitment to those who he serves.

Madam Speaker, I urge every Member of the Chamber to join me and Dr. WENSTRUP and the chairman in supporting this bill today, and I reserve the balance of my time.

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

Madam Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. BOST. Madam Speaker, I encourage everyone to support this piece of legislation, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I urge all my colleagues to support the legislation and join me in passing H.R. 2545, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. TAKANO) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 2545.

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. TAKANO. Madam 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.

## VA HOSPITALS ESTABLISHING LEADERSHIP PERFORMANCE ACT

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 293) to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish qualifications for the human resources positions within the Veterans Health Administration of the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 293

*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 “VA Hospitals Establishing Leadership Performance Act”.

### SEC. 2. QUALIFICATIONS FOR HUMAN RESOURCES POSITIONS WITHIN THE VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

(a) ESTABLISHMENT OF QUALIFICATIONS.—Not later than 180 days after the date of the

enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall—

(1) establish qualifications for each human resources position within the Veterans Health Administration of the Department of Veterans Affairs;

(2) establish standardized performance metrics for each such position; and

(3) submit to Congress a report containing the qualifications and standardized performance metrics established under paragraphs (1) and (2).

(b) REPORT.—Not later than 180 days after the establishment of the qualifications and performance metrics under subsection (a), the Comptroller General of the United States shall submit to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate a report containing—

(1) a description of the implementation of such qualifications and performance metrics; and

(2) an assessment of the quality of such qualifications and performance metrics.

### SEC. 3. NO ADDITIONAL FUNDS AUTHORIZED.

No additional funds are authorized to be appropriated to carry out the requirements of this Act. Such requirements shall be carried out using amounts otherwise authorized to be appropriated.

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

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California.

## GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 293.

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

There was no objection.

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

Madam Speaker, I am pleased to support H.R. 293, the VA Hospitals Establishing Leadership Performance Act, introduced by our committee's ranking member, Mr. BOST.

This bill would require VA to establish qualifications and performance metrics for human resources positions within the Veterans Health Administration. This legislation follows a 2017 Government Accountability Office report that found human capital process deficiencies, such as a lack of performance metrics for certain positions.

GAO concluded that these deficiencies negatively affected VA's ability to serve veterans. The legislation does not specify what metrics VA must use, but leaves that determination up to VA. Instituting these human resource management improvements at VA is a commonsense, good-government step.

H.R. 293 was favorably reported by the committee, and I ask my colleagues to join me in supporting the VA Hospitals Establishing Leadership Performance Act.

Madam Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.