

our Nation's history and help us not to repeat the mistakes of our past. Sites like Amache help to remind us of the challenges our Nation has faced and the mistakes we have made as we have endeavored to form a more perfect Union.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this bill so that in Mr. Fuchigami's own words we can "help shine a light on this forgotten history."

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

Mrs. DINGELL. Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues 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 gentlewoman from Michigan (Mrs. DINGELL) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 2497, 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. BIGGS. 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.

#### ALEXANDER LOFGREN VETERANS IN PARKS (VIP) ACT

Mrs. DINGELL. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 4300) to direct the Secretary of the Interior to make free National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands Passes available to members of the Armed Forces, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 4300

*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 "Alexander Lofgren Veterans in Parks (VIP) Act".

#### SEC. 2. RECREATION PASSES.

Section 805 of the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (Public Law 108-447; 118 Stat. 3385; 16 U.S.C. 6804) is amended—

(1) in subsection (a)(4), by striking "age and disability discounted" and inserting "age discount and lifetime"; and

(2) in subsection (b)—

(A) in the heading, by striking "DISCOUNTED" and inserting "FREE AND DISCOUNTED";

(B) in paragraph (2)—

(i) in the heading, by striking "DISABILITY DISCOUNT" and inserting "LIFETIME PASSES"; and

(ii) by striking subparagraph (B) and inserting the following:

"(B) Any veteran who provides adequate proof of military service as determined by the Secretary.

"(C) Any member of a Gold Star Family who meets the eligibility requirements of section 3.2 of Department of Defense Instruc-

tion 1348.36 (or a successor instruction)."; and

(C) in paragraph (3)—

(i) in the heading, by striking "GOLD STAR FAMILIES PARKS PASS" and inserting "ANNUAL PASSES"; and

(ii) by striking "members of" and all that follows through the end of the sentence and inserting "members of the Armed Forces and their dependents who provide adequate proof of eligibility for such pass as determined by the Secretary.".

#### SEC. 3. 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 gentlewoman from Michigan (Mrs. DINGELL) and the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. WESTERMAN) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Michigan.

#### GENERAL LEAVE

Mrs. DINGELL. Mr. 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 the measure under consideration.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from Michigan?

There was no objection.

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 4300, the Alexander Lofgren Veterans in Parks (VIP) Act introduced by my colleague Representative MILLER-MEEKS from Iowa.

This bill would provide free annual America the Beautiful Passes to current military servicemembers and free lifetime America the Beautiful Passes to veterans and members of Gold Star families, ensuring that those who have sacrificed so much in the service of our Nation are able to access our national parks and public lands at no cost.

Anyone who has visited America's public lands understands the significant mental and physical health benefits of getting outside and connecting with nature. It is time that we ensure our military servicemembers, veterans, and Gold Star families are able to access these beloved places at no cost.

Although the annual America the Beautiful Pass became free for veterans and Gold Star families in 2020, the change for veterans has never been codified in law.

While we will never be able to repay the debt owed to them for their service and their sacrifice, H.R. 4300 will ensure that this benefit is protected in perpetuity and that all of our American heroes are able to recreate and find comfort and solace on the lands that they fought so hard to protect.

I would like to thank Representative MILLER-MEEKS for her service and for her work on this important legislation, including working with Committee on Natural Resources chair, Mr. GRIJALVA, to rename the bill in honor of Alexander Lofgren.

Alexander Lofgren served for 4 years in the U.S. Army as a combat engineer, including a deployment to Afghanistan. Afterwards, he served in Chair GRIJALVA's office as part of the Wounded Warrior Fellowship Program, handling issues and constituent casework concerning veterans' health and benefits.

As a congressional staffer and veteran, Mr. Lofgren was a great proponent for his community, veterans, and our Nation's public lands, often encouraging returning veterans to reconnect with nature to heal.

Tragically, his life was lost during a recent outing in Death Valley National Park. Our hearts go out to his family. Renaming this legislation after Mr. Lofgren is a fitting tribute to his legacy and service to our Nation. I urge my colleagues to support this bill, and I reserve the balance of my time.

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

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to speak today in support of H.R. 4300, the Alexander Lofgren Veterans in Parks Act, also known as the VIP Act, which is sponsored by Congresswoman MARIANNETTE MILLER-MEEKS from Iowa.

This bipartisan bill, which currently has 150 cosponsors, would provide free annual passes to our national parks and public lands for current military servicemembers and free lifetime passes for veterans and members of Gold Star families.

We can never fully repay the debt owed to our military servicemembers, veterans, and Gold Star families. However, as a small acknowledgment of their sacrifice, this bill will ensure that they can always access over 2,000 Federal recreation areas across the country that they fought so hard to defend free of charge.

□ 1530

By codifying these passes under the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act, it guarantees this benefit can never be taken away from these brave men and women.

This bill is important not only because it honors the sacrifice of the men and women of our military and Gold Star families but because our public lands hold a special value for veterans, particularly those wounded in combat.

Captain John Paluska, a constituent of Representative MILLER-MEEKS and a Purple Heart recipient, summed up the purpose and meaning of this bill perfectly when he testified before our committee earlier this month: "I mentioned the word 'freedom' earlier. Is it a concept? Is it a place? Is it the result of an action? What does it mean for

each of you on this committee? For me, it is all of those, and I find this each and every time I am so very fortunate to visit the outdoors and our national parks.”

This bill would not only allow our veterans and Gold Star family members to always enjoy the freedom of our national parks, but it will remove any financial barriers they may face to accessing places they use to heal the emotional and physical burdens they carry with them.

In addition to the 150 bipartisan cosponsors of this bill, there are also 60 organizations currently endorsing the measure. These organizations represent a diverse variety of interests, from the outdoor recreation industry to veterans groups, and include The American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Paralyzed Veterans of America, Outdoor Recreation Roundtable, REI, Vista Outdoor, Audubon Society, and The Nature Conservancy.

Mr. Speaker, I include in the RECORD five letters in support of the bill from the Outdoor Industry Association, Sierra Club, Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, American Cultural Resources Association, and Evangelical Environmental Network.

OUTDOOR INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION,  
July 9, 2021.

Hon. JOE NEGUSE,  
*Chairman, Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands, Washington, DC.*

Hon. RUSS FULCHER,  
*Ranking Member, Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands, Washington, DC.*

DEAR CHAIRMAN NEGUSE AND RANKING MEMBER FULCHER, On behalf of our 1,200 manufacturer, supplier, sales representative and retailer members, Outdoor Industry Association (OIA) is proud to support the “Veterans in Parks (VIP) Act” to give veterans and members of the Armed Forces free access to national parks and public lands.

Spending time in nature can provide countless mental and physical health benefits for everyone, including our nation’s servicemembers. Through studies and anecdotes, we know outdoor activities are linked to improved mental health and long-term psychological well-being. Additionally, increasing access and opportunity to outdoor spaces is an important way to honor those who have risked their lives to protect us and this country.

The outdoors can be a restorative force for all, helping individuals and communities thrive. We are pleased to see the commitment to ensuring those who served our country have the resources they need to participate in outdoor activities and experience everything our beautiful national parks and public lands have to offer. OIA is committed to honoring and respecting servicemembers through access to the outdoors and outdoor recreation, and we look forward to seeing this bill become law.

Sincerely,

LISE AANGENBRUG,  
*Executive Director, Outdoor Industry Association.*

JULY 13, 2021.

Hon. JOE NEGUSE,  
*Chairman, House Committee on Natural Resources, Subcommittee on Federal Lands, Washington, DC.*

Hon. RUSS FULCHER,  
*Chairman, House Committee on Natural Resources, Subcommittee on Federal Lands, Washington, DC.*

DEAR CHAIRMAN NEGUSE, RANKING MEMBER FULCHER, AND MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS, AND PUBLIC LANDS: On behalf of 3.8 million members and supporters, the Sierra Club urges you to support the Veterans in Parks (VIP) Act, H.R. 4300. This bipartisan legislation would help military service members, veterans, and Gold Star Families explore, enjoy, and heal on America’s public lands and waters by removing a financial barrier to access over 2,000 federal recreation areas.

America’s public lands and waters provide unique opportunities for healing and respite for veterans upon returning home from service. Unfortunately, these opportunities are not equally available to all. No one, especially veterans, active duty service members, and Gold Star Families, should be denied access to the benefits of nature because of a lack of funds. The Veterans in Parks Act will ensure that those who have served and sacrificed for our nation can enjoy a direct connection to the land they defend.

Many veterans face considerable challenges upon returning home. Repeat exposure to trauma and long deployments away from family and friends has resulted in a generation of veterans that have difficulty reintegrating into civilian life. In addition, some of the effects of war, such as traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress, leave no visible scars and can be equally or more disabling than an apparent physical injury, making it even harder to adjust to life at home. As a result, the demand for mental health services for veterans continues to grow. According to the U.S. Government Accountability Office, the number of veterans receiving mental health care from the Department of Veterans Affairs increased 90% from FY 2006–2019—more than three times the rate of increase for all VA health care services. During this time, VA’s mental health budget increased from \$2.4 to \$8.9 billion.

Time spent outdoors is proven to promote mental and physical health and well-being. For veterans, these benefits can be exceptionally profound; research into the efficacy of outdoor recreation as therapy shows significant improvements in mental and physical well-being, social function, and outlook on life with even moderate exposure to nature. Research also indicates that these programs may be especially beneficial to veterans most in need of help, supplemented by fewer stigmas being associated with outdoor recreation compared to clinical treatments. Expanding access to these benefits is a common-sense, cost-effective way to ease veterans’ transition into civilian life and improve the health and wellbeing of service members and Gold Star Families.

Veterans are already relying on the healing power of the outdoors. Structured programs utilizing outdoor recreation on federal lands have become increasingly common within various Veterans Service Organizations.

Last year, Congress passed the Accelerating Veterans Recovery Outdoors Act, which will create an interagency task force to identify veterans’ barriers to access and recommend how the Department of Veterans Affairs can utilize public lands as an adjunct therapy for veterans. This victory was a critical step to ensure veterans have ample op-

portunities to enjoy outdoor recreation on the land they served to protect. Similarly, the Veterans in Parks Act will be an important part of fulfilling that mission and improving the lives of veterans, service members, and Gold Star Families.

Thank you for your support for our nation’s service members, veterans, and Gold Star Families.

Sincerely,

ROB VESSELS,  
*Military Outdoors Campaign Manager, Sierra Club.*

BACKCOUNTRY HUNTERS & ANGLERS,  
July 8, 2021.

Hon. RAÚL GRIJALVA,  
*Chair, House Natural Resources Committee, Washington, DC.*

Hon. BRUCE WESTERMAN,  
*Ranking Member, House Natural Resources Committee, Washington, DC.*

DEAR CHAIR GRIJALVA AND RANKING MEMBER WESTERMAN: On behalf of Backcountry Hunters & Anglers (BHA), the voice for our wild public lands, waters and wildlife, we write in support of the bipartisan Veterans in Parks (VIP) Act (H.R. 4300) led by Representatives Miller-Meeke (R-IA) and Gallego (D-AZ). This important legislation will provide free annual America the Beautiful Passes to current military service members and free lifetime America the Beautiful Passes to veterans and members of Gold Star Families.

We recognize that members of the armed forces are a critical constituency when it comes to the defense of our wild public lands. BHA’s Armed Forces Initiative focuses on connecting veterans to our public lands through lowering the barrier of entry of hunting and fishing for military members, engaging veterans through skill camps and leading restoration projects, and elevating the voices of veterans from town halls to the discussion of legislation at the congressional level. The benefits provided by the VIP Act would fit well within this mission.

The VIP Act is supported by hunters and anglers who want to recognize the sacrifice made by service members, veterans and Gold Star Families. The debt to these individuals can never be repaid, but the VIP Act would give them access, at no cost, to over 2,000 federal recreation areas including national parks, national forests and national wildlife refuges. This will eliminate barriers and increase access to hunt, fish and recreate on our nation’s treasured public lands, an honor they deserve.

Since 2020, the annual America the Beautiful Pass has been free for veterans and Gold Star Families, however the VIP Act would change these to lifetime passes and codify this program to ensure it continues in the years to come. Passing this legislation would not only ensure this program continues for veterans and Gold Star Families, but it would also provide the much-needed inclusion for current service members.

We urge the Natural Resources Committee to pass the VIP Act and honor the service of our nation’s active-duty military, veterans and Gold Star Families by increasing their access to our public lands and waters. As the bill continues through the legislative process, we look forward to working with you and your colleagues to see it across the finish line.

Sincerely,

MORGAN MASON,  
*Armed Forces Initiative Coordinator, Backcountry Hunters & Anglers.*

AMERICAN CULTURAL  
RESOURCES ASSOCIATION,  
July 12, 2021.

Hon. MARIANNETTE MILLER-MEEKS,  
Washington, DC.

Hon. RUBEN GALLEGO,  
Washington, DC.

DEAR REPRESENTATIVES MILLER-MEEKS AND GALLEGO: The American Cultural Resources Association (ACRA) strongly supports H.R. 4300, the Veterans in Parks (VIP) Act, and commends you for introducing this worthy legislation.

ACRA is the national trade association supporting the common interests of cultural resource management (CRM) firms of all sizes, types, and specialties. ACRA member firms undertake much of the legally mandated cultural resource studies and investigations in the United States. They employ thousands of professionals, including archaeologists, architectural historians, historians, ethnographers, and an increasingly diverse group of other specialists who work with communities in every state to help protect and record our nation's historic and cultural heritage.

Our nation's public lands, monuments and parks help tell the story of America, from the battlefields of Yorktown to the Pacific coast and everything in between. These public lands educate, entertain and inspire millions of Americans and visitors from around the world. They are integral to understanding America's history and culture, while providing enormous ecological benefits to our nation's ecosystem.

As veterans, you both understand firsthand the enormous sacrifices that servicemembers and their families have made to protect our nation. Their contributions to our nation's story are incalculable; they certainly should not have to pay to access to our most treasured and beautiful public lands.

By giving active-duty servicemembers free annual passes, and veterans and Gold Star Families free lifetime passes, to our national parks and lands, the VIP Act honors both our nation's historic and scenic heritage and the people who have sacrificed so much to protect it.

We commend you for your leadership in introducing this bipartisan bill, and we urge Congress to pass it as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

NATHAN BOYLESS,  
President,  
American Cultural Resources Association.

EVANGELICAL ENVIRONMENTAL  
NETWORK,  
July 12, 2021.

Ref: H.R. 4300—117th Congress (2021–2022)

Hon. JOE NEGUSE, *Chair*,

Hon. RUSS FULCHER, *Ranking Member*,  
*Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and  
Public Lands, Committee on Natural Re-  
sources, Washington, DC.*

DEAR CHAIR NEGUSE AND RANKING MEMBER FULCHER, Our National Parks and other public lands are essential to our quality of life. They make God's creation available to everyone. They reflect our ideals as a nation: that everyone is welcome because all individuals are created equal and endowed with the inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. To step into a National Park and enjoy the beauty of God's creation is to experience freedom and the richness of life as persons made in the image of God. That's why over 400,000 pro-life Christians have joined with us to defend and protect these God-given National Treasures.

Most Christians have experienced God in our natural parks and public lands, but we also have the responsibility to care for them.

We are commanded to tend the earth and steward all aspects of this wonderful creation given to us to sustain abundant physical life, enjoy, and even play in. Creation doesn't belong to any one person or group to exploit, plunder, or be used selfishly. It's a trust, given by God, for the benefit of humanity and the glory of God.

That is why The Evangelical Environmental Network supports the efforts of Representative Mariannette Miller-Meeks (R-IA), Representative Ruben Gallego (D-AZ), and the over 140 other cosponsors for introducing the Veterans in Park (VIP) Act! The VIP Act offers a small thank you to our military service members, veterans, and Gold Star Families for their patriotism and service to our nation, but it goes beyond saying thanks, it offers an opportunity for healing. Medical research clearly proves the ability to find healing in our greatest outdoor treasures, America's National Parks. God's marvelous creation provides perhaps the greatest healing place for many of our heroes and their families who suffer deep internal wounds. The VIP Act offers our heroes hope for healing, wholeness, restoration, and simply great fun!

Our prayer is that the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands will quickly move this to the full committee and then onward to the House floor in quick order.

Thank you for your service to our nation and know you are in our prayers.

Sincerely,

THE REV. MITCHELL C. HESCOX,  
President/C.E.O.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I also include in the RECORD several news articles that speak to the importance of this bill that have appeared in papers all across the country.

#### HONORING AMERICA'S REAL VIPs

(By Reps. Bruce Westerman (R-ARK.) and Mariannette Miller-Meeks (R-IOWA), Opinion Contributors)

[From The Hill, July 4, 2021]

This year, we celebrate the 245th birthday of the United States. Independence Day is a great day to picnic with friends, spend time outside, and enjoy a fireworks show, but it is also much more than that. It is our duty to honor the men and women who, for the past two and a half centuries, have kept our country free.

We owe a debt of gratitude to American military members and their families and we want to repay them in a very small way by giving them lifetime access to our national parks.

There are few things that instill American pride quite like watching the sun set over the Grand Canyon, seeing bison roam through Yellowstone, or hiking through the forest in Acadia. From sea to shining sea, we are a nation of incredible beauty and biodiversity. Congress recognizes the mental and physical health benefits of outdoor recreation for current servicemembers and veterans. Last December Congress passed and President Trump signed legislation establishing an interagency task force to identify barriers and make recommendations to increase the use of public lands and other outdoor spaces for veteran medical treatment.

Removing barriers and increasing access to our public lands is exactly why we have introduced the bipartisan Veterans in Parks (VIP) Act: to give servicemembers, veterans, and Gold Star families free passes to all national parks and federal recreational lands for life. It is the least we can do for those who gave so much for our country. Currently, active duty servicemembers and vet-

erans are able to receive a one-year free access pass to all parks with entrance fees. With more than 135 co-sponsors, the VIP Act would codify the active duty and veterans passes, as well as make the pass for veterans a lifetime pass. It would also amend the previously codified Gold Star families annual pass and make it a lifetime pass.

As a veteran of the U.S. Army who served for 24 years, Congresswoman Miller-Meeks is no stranger to the myriad hardships that come from being a member of the military. We both are also privileged to represent a host of servicemembers in Congress and want to make it even easier for them to enjoy time with family and friends in America's most beautiful landscapes.

Our national parks are for all of us. No one is more worthy of experiencing open access to these incredible places than the men and women who fought to keep us free and the families who made the ultimate sacrifice.

Unfortunately, it is often all too easy to pay lip service to the military's sacrifice but then not follow through with action to recognize their service. We aim to change that, one legislative recognition at a time.

If you or a member of your family has been a member of the U.S. Armed Forces, we are grateful for your service, today and every day. We hope to see you in a national park soon.

[From Samoa News]

(Source: Congresswoman Uifa'atali Amata's Office)

WASHINGTON, DC.—Congresswoman Uifa'atali Amata voted Wednesday for the Veterans in Parks (VIP) Act, H.R. 4300, which was passed by the full Committee on Natural Resources with bipartisan support. Amata cosponsored the legislation to honor Veterans with free lifetime access to all U.S. National Parks, and other National Forests and public lands.

The Veterans in Parks (VIP) Act specifically honors the nation's servicemembers, veterans, and Gold Star families as VIPs in over 2,000 federally protected places. Amata supported the bill from the start as an original cosponsor upon introduction by Representatives Mariannette Miller-Meeks (R-IA) and Ruben Gallego (D-AZ).

Currently, the public can purchase annual "America the Beautiful" passes that allow entry to all parks for one year. The VIP Act works by providing these annual America the Beautiful Passes for free to current military service members, and free lifetime America the Beautiful Passes to veterans and members of Gold Star Families.

"This bill is a special statement of support for our Veterans and military families, and another way to say thank you," said Congresswoman Amata. "The VIP Act honors those serving, those who served, and Gold Star families who lost a loved one in service to the United States, by ensuring you are a VIP in the nation's federally protected historic and beautiful places."

The America the Beautiful pass is an access ticket to over 2,000 places spanning National Parks, National Forests and Wildlife Refuges, which fall under different federal agencies and departments. The National Parks system has 423 sites including 63 Parks, along with trails, historical sites, monuments and memorials. These sites are preserved for national value based on scenery, special geographic features, history, or plant and wildlife conservation. Some Parks, such as the National Park of American Samoa, are generally free to access, but many locations have fees, or passes applied per car or for parking. The America the Beautiful pass covers those entry expenses.

In 2020, the administration made America the Beautiful yearly access free for Veterans

and Gold Star families, but the VIP Act takes it a step further in three ways by extending it to lifetime passes, making the change permanent, and codifying it in law.

[JULY 1, 2021]

**BOONE AND CROCKETT JOINS OVER 100 OTHERS ENDORSING VETERANS IN PARKS ACT**

The Boone and Crockett Club endorsed H.R. 4300, the Veterans In Parks Act, which was introduced earlier today (<https://republicans-naturalresources.house.gov/newsroom/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=409869>) by Reps. Miller-Meeks and Gallego with an additional 133 bipartisan original cosponsors.

**BACKGROUND**

The America the Beautiful Pass provides access to more than 2,000 federal recreation areas, including our national parks, national forests, and wildlife refuges. This includes some of the country's most iconic treasures, ranging from the majestic Grand Canyon National Park to the aweinspiring Redwood National Forest. Although we can never fully repay the debt we owe to our servicemembers and veterans, the VIP Act would allow them, along with Gold Star Family members, to visit our national parks and public lands free of charge. In 2020, the America the Beautiful annual pass became free for veterans and Gold Star Families. However, this change for veterans has never been codified and could be undone in future years. The VIP Act protects these passes by codifying them and making them lifetime passes instead of annual passes. The VIP Act also creates annual passes for current service members, which can be converted into lifetime passes once they leave the military.

**SUPPORTING ORGANIZATIONS**

Paralyzed Veterans of America, Vista Outdoor, National Marine Manufacturers Association, National Park Hospitality Association, the National Association of Counties, Outdoor Industry Association, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Evangelical Environmental Network, Wildlife Mississippi, Mississippi River Trust, American Sportfishing Association, American Cultural Resources Association, VoteVets, The Mission Continues, American Battlefield Trust, Camp Chef, Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation, National Association of RV Parks & Campgrounds (ARVC), Delaware North, Trout Unlimited, National RV Dealers Association (RVDA), American Trails, Backcountry Hunters & Anglers, Boone and Crockett Club, Rugged Range, Bell Helmets, Blackburn, Blackhawk, Bushnell, CamelBak, CCI, Eagle Industries, Federal Ammunition, Giro, HEVI-Shot, Primos, Remington, Bipartisan Policy Center Action, American Hiking Society, Archery Trade Association, ConservAmerica, Southeast Tourism Society, The Corps Network, Outdoor Recreation Roundtable, REI Co-op, Audubon, Sierra Club, U.S. Travel Association, National Wildlife Federation, American Conservation Coalition, America Outdoors, Student Conservation Association, Wildlife Management Institute, Association of Marina Industries, International Inbound Travelers Association, American Horse Council.

[JULY 8, 2021]

**HOUSE INTRODUCES BILL TO GIVE MILITARY FAMILIES FREE LIFETIME ACCESS TO NATIONAL PARKS**

(By Zach Hester)

(WHNT).—A new bill introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives could allow veterans and Gold Star families free lifetime access to national parks and public lands—and free annual passes to active-duty members of the military.

The bipartisan bill, brought to the floor by Reps. Mariannette Miller-Meeks (R-Iowa)

and Ruben Gallego (D-Ariz.), creates the “America the Beautiful Pass” providing these services members and their families free access to more than 2,000 federal recreation areas, ranging from Acadia National Park to Redwood National Forest.

“As a 24-year Army veteran, I understand the sacrifices made by our military and their loved ones,” said Miller-Meeks. “We owe so much to our amazing servicemembers, veterans, and their families; my Veterans in Parks Act is the least we can do.”

In addition to creating the passes for services members and their families, it also codifies them and makes them last a lifetime. Last year, a similar measure was passed, but never put into law.

“As a veteran, I know firsthand the importance of national parks as a place of connection and healing when dealing with the visible and invisible wounds of war,” Gallego said. “I am proud to co-lead this bill and I will continue to fight for veteran accessibility and support on our nation's public lands.”

The bill lists over 100 co-sponsors, including Alabama Reps. Mo Brooks, Barry Moore, and Jerry Carl.

[July 14, 2021]

**PROPOSAL MADE TO EXPAND VETERANS' FREE ACCESS TO ALL NATIONAL PARKS**

(By Ariana Figueroa)

WASHINGTON.—U.S. Rep. Mariannette Miller-Meeks of Iowa testified Tuesday before the House Natural Resources Committee hearing in support of bipartisan legislation that would give veterans and Gold Star families free lifetime access to national parks and public federal lands.

“No one is more worthy of experiencing open access to the incredible places that these men and women have fought to keep us free and their families who have also made the ultimate sacrifice along with them,” the Iowa Republican said.

Miller-Meeks is a veteran and worked on the bill, the “Veterans in Parks Act,” with Rep. Ruben Gallego, an Arizona Democrat who is also a veteran.

“As a veteran, I know firsthand the importance of national parks as a place of connection and healing when dealing with the visible and invisible wounds of war,” Gallego said in a statement.

“The VIP Act is an important step in ensuring that veterans, service members, and Gold Star families have access to the public lands they and their loved ones fought to protect.”

Last year, the U.S. National Park Service made annual visits to national parks free for veterans and active duty service members, but the bill, H.R. 4300, would codify that annual pass into law, to be used throughout their lives.

“We can never fully repay our veterans for their service and sacrifice, but we want to show our gratitude by giving them lifetime access to America's beautiful landscapes,” Miller-Meeks said.

The bill would also give active-duty military free annual passes to national parks and public federal lands. Once those members retire, their passes could be converted to lifetime passes. A Gold Star family is an immediate family member of a service member who died in the line of duty.

Capt. John Paluska, from Ottumwa, Iowa, testified before the panel in support of the bill.

He said that in between his deployments, he would often visit Yellowstone National Park “and find my freedom all throughout the park.”

“There's something about connecting to nature at these parks that helps with the

healing,” he said. “I will always carry the wounds of war with me wherever I go, but when I go to these beautiful places, I am able to connect with one of the reasons I decided to serve this incredible, beautiful, country.”

Mr. WESTERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I would note that at our committee markup earlier this month, as the gentlewoman has stated, we added a bipartisan amendment to name this bill after a wounded veteran who, sadly, passed away earlier this year.

Alexander Lofgren was a military and veterans' liaison for Chair GRIJALVA through the Wounded Warrior Fellowship Program and a lover of the outdoors. I was happy to cosponsor Chair GRIJALVA's amendment to name the bill after him and hope that this fitting tribute helps carry on Alex's legacy and provides some level of comfort to his family and friends.

Before I close, I thank Representative MILLER-MEEKS for her leadership on this effort. A veteran herself who served 24 years in the Army as a private, nurse, and doctor, Congresswoman MILLER-MEEKS is the perfect champion of this legislation. I commend her for her commitment to bipartisanship and for her work on behalf of our Nation's veterans and her constituents.

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

Mrs. DINGELL. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentlewoman from New Mexico (Ms. HERRELL).

Ms. HERRELL. Mr. Speaker, I rise as a proud original cosponsor and supporter of H.R. 4300, the VIP Act, offered by my friend from Iowa, Congresswoman MILLER-MEEKS.

This legislation would codify into Federal law an initiative put into place by the Trump administration last year that grants free passes to visit our national parks, national forests, and wildlife refuges to those who deserve them most, our Nation's Active-Duty servicemembers, veterans, and Gold Star families.

Our national parks and public lands are an essential part of our history and provide great recreational opportunities for the American people. Recreating in the most beautiful places our Nation has to offer brings needed healing and relaxation for those who have and still do put it all on the line to protect the freedoms each of us take for granted as Americans.

As a Member of this body from southern New Mexico, I have the privilege of representing two of the most iconic landmarks in the Nation, White Sands National Park and Carlsbad Caverns. These irreplaceable components of the National Park System welcome thousands of visitors every year and provide a strong economic boost to their surrounding communities.

Providing greater access to our public lands, as this bill does, will only enhance economic opportunity for gateway communities that surround our public lands and provide even greater benefits for our Active-Duty servicemen, veterans, and Gold Star families.

This legislation enjoys the support of a wide cross-section of organizations representing all strains of political opinion and areas of interest, such as the National Association of Counties, Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation, and National Wildlife Federation.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to be an original cosponsor of this legislation, and I once again congratulate and thank my colleague, Congresswoman MILLER-MEEKS, for her hard work.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to vote in favor of this bill.

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

Mr. WESTERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentlewoman from Iowa (Mrs. MILLER-MEEKS), the author of the legislation.

Mrs. MILLER-MEEKS. Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleagues on the Natural Resources Committee, and I thank Representative WESTERMAN for yielding me time to speak.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of my bill, H.R. 4300, the Alexander Lofgren Veterans in Parks Act. I was so proud to introduce this overwhelmingly bipartisan legislation with a fellow veteran, Congressman GALLEGOS.

Our commonsense legislation would give our servicemembers, veterans, and Gold Star families free passes to all of our beautiful national parks and Federal lands for life. This is a reasonable piece of legislation that will support those who sacrifice so much for our liberties.

Our Nation is blessed to have some of the most beautiful national parks and public lands. Each year, millions of Americans access the more than 2,000 Federal recreation areas, including national parks, national forests, and wildlife refuges. This includes some of the Nation's most iconic national treasures, from Acadia National Park in Maine and the Dry Tortugas in Florida to the Redwood National and State Parks forest in California and the Gates of the Arctic in Alaska.

In 2020, the America the Beautiful annual pass became free for veterans and Gold Star families. However, this change for veterans has never been put into law and could be undone in future years.

My bill protects these veteran passes by codifying them into law and making them lifetime passes instead of annual passes that would have to be re-sent every year. Making these passes lifetime instead of annual also makes the job of the Park Service easier and ensures our veterans have full access to the benefits they so richly deserve.

Finally, my legislation also creates annual passes for current servicemembers, which can be converted into lifetime passes once they retire.

From sea to shining sea, we are a Nation of incredible beauty and biodiversity. Congress recognizes the mental and physical health benefits of outdoor recreation for current servicemembers and veterans. In fact, I think at our hearing, there was not a dry eye when Captain John Paluska spoke on behalf of this bill.

Mr. Speaker, as a 24-year Army veteran, I understand the sacrifices made by our military and their loved ones and believe that we must do whatever we can to honor these VIPs. My bill provides these Americans with free access to the land they have sacrificed to defend.

Our national parks are there for all of us. Getting outside into nature and enjoying our beautiful country provides an outlet and escape with mental and physical benefits. No one is more worthy of experiencing open access to these incredible places than the men and women who have fought to keep us free and the families who have made the ultimate sacrifice.

Unfortunately, it is all too easy to pay lip service to the military's sacrifice but then not follow through with action to recognize their service. We can never fully repay our veterans for their service and their sacrifice, but we want to show our gratitude by giving them lifetime access to America's most beautiful landscapes.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all Members to join in supporting my commonsense bill, H.R. 4300, the Alexander Lofgren Veterans in Parks Act.

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

Mr. WESTERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. THOMPSON).

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I thank the ranking member for yielding, and I thank the gentlewoman for her sponsorship of this.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 4300, the Veterans in Parks Act.

Across the country, our national parks provide endless opportunities for Americans to learn about our Nation's history and culture. Additionally, national parks generate significant recreational opportunities, which encourage visitors to spend time in the outdoors and enjoy nature.

From Gettysburg to Independence Park, and the Allegheny Portage Railroad to Valley Forge, Pennsylvania is home to 19 national parks and 7 heritage areas providing these benefits to Pennsylvanians throughout the Commonwealth and visitors alike. As the representative of Pennsylvania's 15th Congressional District, it continues to be an honor to serve our veterans, Active-Duty servicemen and -women, and proud military families.

This legislation would simply give veterans and Gold Star families free access for life to public lands and also provide free annual passes to Active-Duty servicemembers. Studies show outdoor recreation is an effective way to decrease symptoms of PTSD and

help veterans reintegrate with civilian life. This legislation is a step in the right direction when it comes to assisting our veterans and Active-Duty servicemembers' health.

H.R. 4300 is one way that we can say thank you to our brave men and women in uniform who have selflessly served and have already given so much to protect our Nation.

Mr. Speaker, as the father of a combat-wounded soldier and as the ranking member of the Committee on Agriculture, which also received referral on this legislation, I support this legislation. I urge my colleagues to vote in its favor.

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

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

Mrs. DINGELL. Mr. Speaker, I commend my colleague from Iowa for her leadership on this bill, and I urge my colleagues to support the legislation.

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

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentlewoman from Michigan (Mrs. DINGELL) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 4300, 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. BIGGS. 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.

#### AMENDING ALYCE SPOTTED BEAR AND WALTER SOBOLEFF COMMISSION ON NATIVE CHILDREN ACT

Mrs. DINGELL. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (S. 325) to amend the Alyce Spotted Bear and Walter Soboleff Commission on Native Children Act to extend the deadline for a report by the Alyce Spotted Bear and Walter Soboleff Commission on Native Children, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

S. 325

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

#### SECTION 1. ALYCE SPOTTED BEAR AND WALTER SOBOLEFF COMMISSION ON NATIVE CHILDREN REPORT.

Section 3(f) of the Alyce Spotted Bear and Walter Soboleff Commission on Native Children Act (Public Law 114-244; 130 Stat. 987) is amended, in the matter preceding paragraph (1), by striking "3 years" and inserting "5 years".

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentlewoman from Michigan (Mrs. DINGELL) and the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr.