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ADVANCING UNIFORM TRANSPORTATION OPPORTUNITIES FOR VETERANS ACT

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 3304) to amend title 38, United States Code, to authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide or assist in providing an additional vehicle adapted for operation by disabled individuals to certain eligible persons, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 3304

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 "Advancing Uniform Transportation Opportunities for Veterans Act" or the "AUTO for Veterans Act".

SEC. 2. ELIGIBILITY FOR DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS PROVISION OF ADDITIONAL AUTOMOBILE OR OTHER ADAPTED EQUIPMENT.

Section 3903(a) of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) in paragraph (1), by striking "paragraph (2)" and inserting "paragraphs (2) and (3)"; and

(2) by adding at the end the following new paragraph:

"(3) The Secretary may provide or assist in providing an eligible person with an additional automobile or other conveyance under this chapter—

"(A) if more than 25 years have elapsed since the eligible person most recently received an automobile or other conveyance under this chapter; or

"(B) beginning on the day that is 10 years after date of the enactment of the AUTO for Veterans Act, if more than 10 years have elapsed since the eligible person most recently received an automobile or other conveyance under this chapter."

SEC. 3. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS TREATMENT OF CERTAIN VEHICLE MODIFICATIONS AS MEDICAL SERVICES.

Section 1701(6) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new subparagraph:

"(I) The provision of medically necessary van lifts, raised doors, raised roofs, air-conditioning, and wheelchair tie-downs for passenger use."

SEC. 4. MODIFICATION OF CERTAIN HOUSING LOAN FEE.

(a) EXTENSION.—The loan fee table in section 3729(b)(2) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by striking "January 14, 2031" each place it appears and inserting "May 16, 2031".

SEC. 5. 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 California (Mr. TAKANO) and the gen-

tleman 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 include extraneous material on H.R. 3304, as amended.

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 rise in support of H.R. 3304, as amended, the AUTO for Veterans Act.

I was proud to join Representative LIZZIE FLETCHER in introducing H.R. 3304, and I thank her for her tireless work with the veteran community, which has led to this bill being considered on the floor today.

Currently, disabled veterans are only allowed a single grant to modify a vehicle to provide them mobility. This means there are cars that are 25, 30, or even 40 years old on the road because the veteran has no other option.

When you consider that the average life of an automobile is less than 12 years, we are asking veterans to incur additional costs and risks by driving excessively old cars for decades.

The AUTO for Veterans Act finally expands eligibility for disabled veterans to obtain vehicles modified for their disabilities more than once in their lifetime.

Upon passage into law, H.R. 3304 would immediately allow veterans who have waited decades to acquire a new vehicle and, after giving those veterans priority, would eventually expand the benefit to cover those veterans who updated their vehicle 10 years ago.

This legislation also expands the definition of "medical services" to include certain vehicle modifications so that veterans can attend medical appointments.

This legislation has long been a priority for veterans and is supported by DAV, VFW, PVA, and countless other veterans organizations.

This legislation is fully paid for and delivers for disabled veterans who gave us so much.

I thank the ranking member for his support of this legislation. I know we have both wanted to fix this longstanding problem.

Madam Speaker, I wholeheartedly support this bill, and I urge my colleagues to do the same. 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 the AUTO for Veterans Act, as amended.

This bill would help severely disabled service-connected veterans purchase and adapt a vehicle 10 years after they

purchased their first one. Current law only provides veterans with the funds for one vehicle during their lifetime. We all know that the life of a car is not infinite. Maybe my father didn't, but most people do.

For too long, disabled veterans have had to drive vehicles that have logged hundreds of thousands of miles. This bill would help a deserving population with the safe and reliable transportation they need. I am also pleased that this bill is fully offset.

The underlying bill is very similar to H.R. 1361, the AUTO for Veterans Act, which was introduced this Congress and last by our colleague, Congressman MEUSER. While I would have preferred that we consider his version today, this bill will help many disabled veterans, and it has my full support.

I thank the PVA and the DAV for their continued advocacy for this proposal.

Madam Speaker, I encourage all Members to support this bill, and I reserve the balance of my time.

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

Mr. BOST. Madam Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. MEUSER).

Mr. MEUSER. Madam Speaker, I thank Ranking Member BOST for his leadership on this important bill.

I rise in support of the AUTO for Veterans Act. This legislation would expand, as stated, access to the Department of Veterans Affairs' automobile grant, which assists severely disabled veterans.

Veterans, especially those in rural communities, Madam Speaker, face transportation challenges, as we all know, that affect their quality of life and independence. Expanding the VA auto grant program is a commonsense step toward improving this program for men and women who made tremendous sacrifices serving our country.

Improving access to safe and reliable transportation for disabled veterans will ensure they can maintain their independence and lead fulfilling, healthy lives.

I introduced the AUTO for Veterans Act, a bill nearly identical to this legislation, in the last Congress, and it did receive support from numerous veterans service organizations and garnered over 70 cosponsors, including Democrats and Republicans. I am glad that my Democrat colleagues were able to see the merit of this legislation, and I do look forward to the Senate taking action on this legislation and providing much-needed support and independence for our wounded veterans.

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

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I ask all of my colleagues to join me in passing H.R. 3304, 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 California (Mr.

TAKANO) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 3304, as amended.

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. ROY. Madam Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

FOOD SECURITY FOR ALL VETERANS ACT

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 8888) to amend title 38, United States Code, to establish in the Department of Veterans Affairs an Office of Food Security, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

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 “Food Security for All Veterans Act”.

SEC. 2. ESTABLISHMENT OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS OFFICE OF FOOD SECURITY.

Chapter 3 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new section (and conforming the table of sections at the beginning of such chapter accordingly):

“§ 325. Office of Food Security

“(a) ESTABLISHMENT.—There is in the Department an office to be known as the ‘Office of Food Security’. There is at the head of the Office a Director, which shall be a career position.

“(b) RESPONSIBILITIES.—(1) The Director of the Office of Food Security shall carry out the following responsibilities:

“(A) To provide information to veterans concerning the availability of, and eligibility requirements for Federal nutrition assistance programs.

“(B) To collaborate with other program offices of the Department, including the Homeless Programs Office and the Office of Tribal Government Relations, to develop and implement policies and procedures to identify and treat veterans at-risk or experiencing food insecurity.

“(C) To collaborate with the Secretary of Agriculture and the Secretary of Defense on food insecurity among veterans, including by collaborating with the Secretaries to develop materials related to food insecurity for the Transition Assistance Program curriculum and other transition-related resources.

“(D) To develop and provide training, including training that may count towards continuing education or licensure requirements, for social workers, dietitians, chaplains, and other clinicians on how to assist veterans with enrollment in Federal nutrition assistance programs, including the supplemental nutrition assistance program and the special supplemental nutrition program for women, infants, and children established by section 17 of the Child Nutrition Act of 1966 (42 U.S.C. 1786).

“(E) To issue guidance to Department medical centers on how to collaborate with their State and local offices administering the supplemental nutrition assistance program.

“(2) In carrying out the responsibilities under paragraph (1), the Director shall consult with and provide technical assistance to the heads of other Federal departments and agencies, including the Department of Agriculture, Department of Defense, Department of Interior, and Department of Labor.

“(c) ANNUAL REPORT ON FOOD INSECURITY.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs, in consultation with the Secretary of Agriculture, shall submit to the Committees on Veterans Affairs of the Senate and House of Representatives an annual report on veteran food insecurity. Each such report shall include data on the following:

“(1) The socioeconomic, ethnic, and racial characteristics of veterans experiencing food insecurity, disaggregated by State in which the veteran is located.

“(2) Native American veterans experiencing food insecurity.

“(3) Specific interventions for veterans who screen positive for food insecurity.

“(4) Eligibility screenings for participation in the supplemental nutrition assistance program completed by personnel of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

“(5) The number of applications for participation in the supplemental nutrition assistance program completed with assistance from personnel of the Department.

“(6) Changes, as a result of participation in the supplemental nutrition assistance program, in the number of food insecure veteran households.

“(7) Coordination efforts between State agencies and Department facilities located in that State regarding outreach to veterans to participate in the supplemental nutrition assistance program.

“(d) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

“(1) The terms ‘Native American’ and ‘Native American veteran’ have the meanings given those terms in section 3765 of this title.

“(2) The terms ‘State agency’ and ‘supplemental nutrition assistance program’ have the meanings given those terms in section 3 of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C. 2012).”.

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 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 insert extraneous material on H.R. 8888, as amended.

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 rise today in support of H.R. 8888, as amended, the Food Security for All Veterans Act.

This bill establishes an office dedicated to ending veteran hunger at the VA that will collaborate with internal and external groups to develop and implement policies and procedures to identify and treat veterans at risk of or experiencing hunger.

Food insecurity can create or exacerbate other health maladies and is one of many contributing factors that has led to increased suicide rates, diabetes, heart disease, and depression. Addressing veteran hunger is critical to this committee’s suicide prevention efforts.

Madam Speaker, I thank our newest Member from Alaska, Congresswoman PELTOLA, for taking up this important issue and prioritizing veterans.

The VA has made tremendous strides in its work to end veteran hunger. The VA leads an interagency working group and regularly collaborates with its Federal counterparts on this issue. The VA also instituted a clinical reminder that screens every veteran who receives their care at VA for food insecurity and connects those in need with resources.

However, until recently, these tasks were carried out by VA employees as ancillary duties. There was no staff dedicated solely to addressing veteran hunger. The VA has started the process of building a team that works exclusively on this issue, and Congresswoman PELTOLA’s bill gives the VA the infrastructure and resources to ensure those efforts continue for years to come.

Before the pandemic and still now, Black, Latino, Native American, and Alaska Native veteran families experienced disproportionately high rates of hunger. This bill requires the VA to coordinate with the VA Office of Tribal Government Relations and the Department of the Interior to focus on these communities.

A critical issue this bill intends to affect is the disparity between the VA and USDA data on veteran hunger. The USDA reports about an 11 percent rate of food insecurity among veterans versus the VA, which reports a roughly 2 percent rate among veterans using VA healthcare.

The bill requires VA, in consultation with the USDA, to issue an annual report to Congress on the prevalence of veteran hunger. It also requires the VA to track its progress and success in connecting more veterans with resources like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP.

Importantly, the Food Security for All Veterans Act mandates the VA collaborates with the Departments of Agriculture and Defense to develop materials for the Transition Assistance Program to help increase access to food resources for families in need as they navigate the military-to-civilian transition.

September is Hunger Action Month, and today, the White House hosted the Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health that will catalyze the public and private sectors around a coordinated strategy to accelerate progress