

mental health groups. If we can enact this into law, VA will be the first of hopefully all Federal healthcare programs to eliminate copays for mental health care every year in this way and get people the help they need.

Madam Speaker, I urge all of my colleagues to vote “yes” on this vital piece of legislation, H.R. 7589, as amended, the REMOVE Copays Act, and I reserve the balance of my time.

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

Madam Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 7589, the REMOVE Copays Act. As its name suggests, this bill would remove copayments from every veteran's first three mental health outpatient visits for each calendar year.

I am pleased to support the REMOVE Copays Act today, and I hope it will encourage veterans to take better care of their mental health. September is Suicide Prevention Awareness Month, and according to the most recent data from the VA, the amount of veterans who died by suicide decreased from 2019 to 2020.

That is encouraging news. However, at least one non-VA study suggests that VA is undercounting the number of veterans who die by suicide by as much as 2.4 times. I fear that VA's data still has not accounted for the negative effects of COVID lockdowns, isolation, and illness.

Regardless, as long as veterans continue to take their own lives, we have important work to do. Suicide is not just a mental health issue. Improving mental health has a critical role to play in stopping suicide once and for all.

I am grateful to Chairman TAKANO for his introduction of this bill, and I hope all of my colleagues will join me in supporting it today.

Madam Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I am prepared to close, and I reserve the balance of my time.

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

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, again, I ask all my colleagues to join me in passing H.R. 7589, as amended. I do thank my colleague, the ranking member. It is an example of standing our ground where we must and finding common ground where we can.

Lastly, I close by saying, please dial 988 and press 1 to reach trained responders at the Veterans Crisis Line.

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. 7589, as amended.

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

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

#### SOLID START ACT OF 2022

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (S. 1198) to amend title 38, United States Code, to improve and expand the Solid Start program 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:

S. 1198

*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 “Solid Start Act of 2022”.

#### SEC. 2. SOLID START PROGRAM OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Chapter 63 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new subchapter:

##### “SUBCHAPTER II—OTHER OUTREACH PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES

##### “§ 6320. Solid Start program

“(a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall carry out a program, to be known as the ‘Solid Start program’, under which the Secretary shall—

“(1) build the capacity of the Department to efficiently and effectively respond to the queries and needs of veterans who have recently separated from the Armed Forces; and

“(2) systemically integrate and coordinate efforts to assist veterans, including efforts—

“(A) to proactively reach out to newly separated veterans to inform them of their eligibility for programs and benefits provided by the Department; and

“(B) to connect veterans in crisis to resources that address their immediate needs.

“(b) ACTIVITIES OF THE SOLID START PROGRAM.—(1) The Secretary, in coordination with the Secretary of Defense, shall carry out the Solid Start program of the Department by—

“(A) collecting up-to-date contact information during transition classes or separation counseling for all members of the Armed Forces who are separating from the Armed Forces, while explaining the existence and purpose of the Solid Start program;

“(B) calling each veteran, regardless of separation type or characterization of service, three times within the first year after separation of the veteran from the Armed Forces;

“(C) providing information about the Solid Start program on the website of the Department and in materials of the Department, especially transition booklets and other resources;

“(D) ensuring calls are truly tailored to the needs of each veteran's unique situation by conducting quality assurance tests;

“(E) prioritizing outreach to veterans who have accessed mental health resources prior to separation from the Armed Forces;

“(F) providing women veterans with information that is tailored to their specific health care and benefit needs;

“(G) as feasible, providing information on access to State and local resources, including Vet Centers and veterans service organizations; and

“(H) gathering and analyzing data assessing the effectiveness of the Solid Start program.

“(2) The Secretary, in coordination with the Secretary of Defense, may carry out the Solid Start program by—

“(A) encouraging members of the Armed Forces who are transitioning to civilian life to authorize alternate points of contact who can be reached should the member be unavailable during the first year following the separation of the member from the Armed Forces; and

“(B) following up missed phone calls with tailored mailings to ensure the veteran still receives similar information.

“(3) In this subsection:

“(A) The term ‘Vet Center’ has the meaning given that term in section 1712A(h) of this title.

“(B) The term ‘veterans service organization’ means an organization recognized by the Secretary for the representation of veterans under section 5902 of this title.”.

(b) CONFORMING AMENDMENTS.—Chapter 63 of such title, as amended by subsection (a), is further amended—

(1) by inserting before section 6301 the following:

“Subchapter I—Outreach Services Program”;

and

(2) in sections 6301, 6303, 6304, 6305, 6306, and 6307, by striking “this chapter” each place it appears and inserting “this subchapter”.

(c) CLERICAL AMENDMENTS.—The table of sections at the beginning of chapter 63 of such title is amended—

(1) by inserting before the item relating to section 6301 the following new item:

“SUBCHAPTER I—OUTREACH SERVICES PROGRAM”;

and

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

“SUBCHAPTER II—OTHER OUTREACH PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES

“6320. Solid Start program.”.

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 S. 1198.

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 to support S. 1198, the bipartisan, bicameral, Solid Start Act.

This bill is led by Senator HASSAN, and in the House, this legislative effort is led by my Veterans Affairs' Committee colleague, Representative SLOTKIN.

Now, we know that the transition from Active-Duty service to veteran status can bring not only new opportunities, but also substantial adjustment and stress. For some veterans, it can pose serious mental health challenges. In fact, the first year of transitioning out of military service is a very high-risk period for veteran suicide.

VA initiated its Solid Start program to address the challenges new veterans may face during this period. VA now

contacts veterans at three different periods in that first year to check in, remind veterans of benefits and services for which they are eligible, and connect them to resources.

Women veterans, like all veterans, deserve to know about all of the benefits and services they have earned with no exceptions. I have heard today that some Republican Members of this House are suddenly looking to oppose this veteran suicide prevention bill, and all because it has 16 words that simply ensure women veterans are told about the range of benefits and services for which they are eligible; 16 words, when we are talking about 16 veteran suicide deaths a day.

We are talking about benefits like the GI bill, and compensation for toxic exposure presumptions, breast cancer screening, treatment for military sexual trauma, and, yes, the freedom to discuss their options around pregnancy.

All benefits they have earned through their service because they chose to serve our Nation. Well, I would say to my colleagues on the other side of the aisle to take your fight against women veterans elsewhere.

Criminalizing, infantilizing, and denying women veterans—take your fight elsewhere.

There is no bar that prevents VA providers from discussing a single benefit with male veterans, but my colleagues want a double standard for women veterans. This is about two lines in an entire bill meant to help veterans who have recently left Active Duty. All veterans.

Republicans won't pass this bill unless we delete women from it. I refuse to do that. Women veterans are veterans.

A conversation with a woman veteran about coming to the VA could prevent her death from suicide. It could also prevent needless suffering and possible death from health conditions, including pregnancy.

Republicans have gotten so extreme with their fear of women having autonomy over their own bodies and lives that they are willing to play political games with veterans' lives and tank a veteran suicide prevention bill.

I would also remind those considering blocking this bill that this very same language has already passed in the House. Back on June 23 of this year, this Chamber passed the STRONG Veterans Act of 2022. It passed under a simple voice vote.

The Senate unanimously passed the Solid Start Act after VA's new rule on abortion counseling and services had been announced.

September is National Suicide Prevention Awareness Month, and this legislation would help us better connect veterans with the resources needed to save lives. Sadly, each day, we are losing roughly 16 veterans to suicide.

I am not willing to let 16 words about women's freedom to discuss their own

benefits contained in this legislation prevent us from saving the lives of 16 veterans who die by suicide each day. I thank Senator HASSAN and Representative SLOTKIN for their work on this important issue, and I am pleased we could take up this bill during Suicide Prevention Month.

Madam Speaker, I strongly urge my colleagues to vote "yes" on S. 1198, and 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 reluctant opposition to S. 1198, the Solid Start Act of 2021. The Solid Start program was created by President Trump in 2019 to better support veterans as they transition out of the military.

I know firsthand that leaving the military can be tough. When I left the military as a young marine, the only TAP program that I got was a tap on the back and a "see ya later."

I am glad that things have improved a lot since then. The Solid Start program has helped improve servicemembers' transitions even more.

I am a real big fan of the Solid Start program. The STRONG Act, my bill with Chairman TAKANO, includes identical language to this bill and would permanently authorize the Solid Start Program. The STRONG Act passed the House in June with my full support.

However, earlier this month, Secretary McDonough announced that VA would begin providing abortions. I believe it is not only immoral, but it is also illegal. Congress prohibited VA providing abortions in 1992. Congress has never repealed that prohibition. Just so you know, it has never been superseded.

Secretary McDonough has claimed that he is taking this action in defense of women's health, setting aside the fact that abortion is not healthcare. By making that claim, the Secretary has made it clear that he views women's health as one and the same with abortion.

Madam Speaker, this bill would require VA to provide women veterans with, "information that is tailored to their specific healthcare and benefit needs."

We have offered if they would remove that language to just say "veterans," that would not include information about abortion, given the Secretary's views, that is unacceptable to me and to many others.

Our democracy is based on the rule of law, and I wish the Secretary would follow the law, especially when it is a matter of life and death. If he did, I would fully support this bill just like I did in June, before the VA's new illegal rule.

Instead, I regret that I must oppose it today, and I urge my colleagues to oppose the bill.

Madam Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

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

Let me just respond, that every day my colleagues are making threats to file a lawsuit to stop the interim final rule. Like the ranking member believes, as do many on his side of the aisle, that the interim final rule is illegal based on the 1992 law. I will remind him that in 1996, Congress authorized the VA Secretary to define the medical benefits package. So I disagree with his interpretation of this interim final rule as being illegal.

Let me mention one thing further, that I have not seen any lawsuit yet filed, even though he asserted that he would seek to have this rule stayed. I am assuming that the delay in filing, since the hearing that we had, is because he is still looking for a perfect judge to hear it.

In the meantime, they are highjacking this opportunity to once again blind and gag women veterans under the premise that veterans should not be allowed to know the healthcare options and benefits that are available to them.

This is not only an insult to veterans but to the veterans service organizations that have endorsed and supported this bill.

Madam Speaker, I yield 5 minutes to the gentlewoman from Michigan (Ms. SLOTKIN), my good friend who serves on the Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs Subcommittee.

Ms. SLOTKIN. Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of the Solid Start Act, a truly bipartisan bill that I originally introduced on Veterans Day in 2020.

This bill requires the VA to connect with veterans during their first year when they transition out of service to ensure they are aware of the benefits and resources that they have earned.

I was thrilled to see this bipartisan legislation pass the Senate twice, both times by unanimous consent. It passed the House as part of the STRONG Veterans Act with overwhelming support by voice vote.

□ 2030

First, I would like to thank my Veterans Advisory Board back in Michigan and the other stakeholders in my district who have helped to craft this bill. I would like to thank The American Legion, Disabled American Veterans, and the VFW for their support, and the countless veterans and veteran families in the district who gave me their feedback to help us craft this bill.

It comes directly from their experience where, overwhelmingly, the sentiment was in that first year of separation, veterans do not understand all of the resources from education to healthcare that they are eligible for.

Madam Speaker, 40 percent of the veterans in Michigan are unconnected totally from the VA and the resources they are entitled to. This statistic, coupled with the experience of navigating those challenges in the VA, are unacceptable. Every veteran I know has their own story as they transition out of the military, whether it has been 3 years or three decades.

I watched this up close with my husband after 30 years of Active Duty in the Army. Newly separated veterans encounter changes in job status, lifestyle, housing, healthcare, and education. It is a period of enormous change, and also a period of vulnerability. Tragically, rates of veteran suicide are higher in those tumultuous first years than later after separation.

Veterans are entitled to a variety of resources, but they only can access them if they know about them. That is why I introduced the Solid Start Act with my Republican friend, Congressman JOYCE.

This bipartisan bill codifies a pilot program, as Mr. BOST said, that was initiated under President Trump, and it shows great promise. But as we stand here tonight, this bill has now been unexpectedly thrown into jeopardy, and it is entirely because of political gamesmanship. Right now, at the last minute, before we vote on this bill, the Pro-Life Caucus from the other side of the aisle has acted to stop the bill from moving to prevent the 16 words that are on this page. This language has been in the bill since its inception when we created this: "Providing women veterans with information that is tailored to their specific healthcare and benefit needs."

To be clear, if we pass this bill, then it goes to the President's desk to be signed into law.

But just so we understand what was meant with the idea of providing women and veterans with information tailored to them, it is pregnancy and mental health care, maternity care, mammogram, breast health, breastfeeding and lactation, menopause, gynecological cancer, pre-pregnancy health, chronic pelvic pain, birth control, osteoporosis, prosthetics for women, intimate partner violence, disordered eating, and sexual assault. I can go on. There is a very long list of specific health issues that are specific to women.

Instead, my colleagues on the other side of the aisle are holding this bill hostage. The 16 words that they apparently now object to are essential for women's healthcare and are already covered by the VA. None of this is controversial. None of this is objectionable. It doesn't change one thing about veterans' benefits or services. It makes no changes to what they are entitled to. All it does is require the VA to reach out to servicemembers three times in their first year from separation. It increases outreach to veterans.

So let's talk about what this is really about.

Earlier today, a letter went out from Ranking Member BOST and the Pro-Life Caucus saying that Members, while they supported it previously, should now turn against it. After publicly supporting this, they are now leaving it.

And why?

Because they are concerned about VA policy. They are concerned about the

VA's decision to provide veteran women with access to abortion when they have been raped, when they are the victims of family incest, or when a doctor confirms that the pregnancy is a risk to the health or the life of the mother.

It is not abortion on demand and not extreme policies. These are very basic, commonly accepted instances when a woman veteran has gone through hell and has no other option.

The other side of the aisle, to be clear, is objecting to this bill because they object to any exceptions whatsoever on abortion. It is a political game. It is literally putting politics ahead of the 18 million veterans and 200,000 each year who separate.

It is our responsibility to honor the veterans, male and female. I find it disturbing that you would play politics in this way. I ask the other side of the aisle to reconsider and support this bill.

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

Mr. BOST. Madam Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume because I would like to take this time to respond to a few things that were not said correctly.

One, no one has said anything about a lawsuit, especially from the ranking member.

Two, the Hyde amendment says: rape, incest, life of the mother. When you put life and health of the mother, then it expands what can be distorted and where we are at, and it opens to the point of long-term abortion, and that has actually been verified by the VA.

There is not a whole list there that we want to remove. We want it to say: If we believe that men and women are all veterans and should be considered, then they should be advised as veterans.

But by putting that particular language in at this time after the administration has violated the law of 1962—now the chairman said there is another law, but if you look at that law, that law never goes directly to abortion. And if it was directed towards abortion, then they would have put it in the law. They would have put it in the law. They wouldn't have made that broad statement. That is why it is a misinterpretation of the VA.

Madam Speaker, I yield 4 minutes to the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH).

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Madam Speaker, I thank my good friend for yielding.

Madam Speaker, as the former chairman of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs and the prime author of 14 major laws to assist veterans, including the Homeless Veterans Comprehensive Assistance Act and several healthcare laws as well, I have always deeply respected and strongly supported the unique mission of VA healthcare.

Comprised of 172 medical centers and over 1,100 outpatient clinics, the VA

operates the largest integrated healthcare network in the entire world. VA medical personnel—371,000 professionals and support staff—are absolutely committed to healing, nurturing, and rehabilitating.

So it is beyond disappointing that President Biden issued an illegal rule—I was here when section 106 of the Veterans Healthcare Act of 1992 was enacted, and it couldn't have been clearer—to turn the lifesaving, life-enhancing mission of the VA into new venues for abortion on demand.

And the word health—Roe v. Wade and Doe v. Bolton couldn't have made it more clear, and Doe v. Bolton with the companion opinion issued by the Supreme Court, they defined health. They used the World Health Organization's definition, and it is everything including any kind of mental stress. So it is completely wide-open, abortion-on-demand language. It is not rape, incest, and life of the mother. Health is included in Biden's rule.

The new Biden VA abortion rule authorizes and forces taxpayers to fund the violent death of unborn baby girls and baby boys by what?

By beheading, dismemberment, forced expulsion from the womb, deadly poisons, and other methods at any time until birth.

Abortion, Madam Speaker, is not healthcare unless one construes the precious life of an unborn child to be analogous to a tumor to be excised or a disease to be vanquished.

For decades, Madam Speaker, abortion advocates have gone to extraordinary lengths to ignore, trivialize, and cover up the battered baby victim. But today, thanks to ultrasound, unborn babies are more visible than ever before. Today, science informs us that birth is an event—albeit an important one—but it is not the beginning of life. Modern science and medicine today treats unborn children with disability or disease as a patient in need of diagnosis and treatment, not death by abortion.

Unborn babies are society's youngest patients and deserve benign, life-affirming medical interventions and not medicines that kill. The weakest and most vulnerable unborn babies deserve our respect, empathy, protection, and love.

The legislation before us today will be used to promote the VA's new abortion-on-demand mission.

Madam Speaker, I urge my colleagues to oppose it, and, hopefully, we will see a change in the policy sometime in the near future that President Biden has issued.

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

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, may I inquire as to how much time remains.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman from California has 9½ minutes remaining.

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, before I yield an additional 3 minutes to the gentlewoman from Michigan, let

me just say that if the minority is so insistent and is fervent in their belief that this interim final rule is illegal, I do not understand why there has been no lawsuit filed to enjoin the rule.

This is very peculiar that with such passion and with such fervor they argue that this rule is illegal.

Madam Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentlewoman from Michigan (Ms. SLOTKIN).

Ms. SLOTKIN. Madam Speaker, there has been a lot of talk on the other side of the aisle, and I just want to be clear. No one in this room is in the judicial branch, and no one in this room that I am aware of is a medical doctor.

If you believe that the provisions that the VA has put forward have a legal problem, then you have the right to take up that case and put it through the courts. We are the legislative branch. We make laws, and we pass laws. We are not judge and jury. Take it to a court if you are concerned. That is your right.

In terms of making decisions on behalf of women, if you want to take a veterans' bill and make it about abortion, then let's do it. What you are saying, and you are saying it in front of the American people, is that you believe a veteran who has been raped, who is the victim of incest, or who is having a dangerous miscarriage does not deserve access to abortion.

You are saying—unless you correct me and tell me what you believe a woman deserves to have when she has been raped, the victim of incest, or is in the middle of a dangerous miscarriage, if you can't state it then be clear you believe in no exceptions for women—a cold, heartless, and violent approach to women's health.

You want to ban all abortions. That is your goal. Many of you have been open about that, and if you flip the House, we know that you will put forward a full ban on all abortions for all States. You have been clear about it.

If you want to turn a veterans' bill into an abortion bill, then let's do it. Not one of you are a medical doctor. Not one of you.

What the VA guidelines say is that if you have been raped or are the victim of incest or a medical professional deems that your pregnancy is a risk to your health. The one in four women in this country who has had a miscarriage, probably many women in this room, that you are a better judge of who gets to decide the future of their life and not a medical doctor? Who do you think you are?

You are politicians. We are all on this floor elected officials and not medical professionals. If it were your wife or your daughter who is suffering through a miscarriage, are you going to tell her she can't until her fever gets high enough or until she is bleeding harder?

That is what is happening in the State of Texas right now. If that is what you want for veterans, shame on you. Shame on you.

I am sorry we built this bill to be bipartisan. I sought your support par-

ticularly, sir, and you are making it a political issue.

Shame on you. You all have pictures of veterans in your office. You are proud to show your pride in our veterans. It should be the most bipartisan issue in the world, and you are making it political. Shame on you.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Members are reminded to direct their remarks to the Chair.

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

Let me tell you, Madam Speaker, if I may, the question is not on rape, incest, or life of the mother. It is on health, which could then go to mental health which could spin off to late-term abortions.

This is a very personal issue to a lot of people, and I am sure it is to everyone on both sides of the aisle. But I have to question who in this room has ever held a child who has been born after 25 weeks in the womb? I have. I held one granddaughter who died in the womb and one who died in my arms after she was out of the womb.

What the VA has done with this rule by tweaking it, they think it is for the right reasons—right or wrong—which you consider, rape, incest, life of the mother, it is not. It is rape, incest, life and health of the mother, which will allow for those late-term abortions.

Madam Speaker, that is life. Our Constitution is very clear. It is very clear: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, the first being life.

□ 2045

You can't, if you have ever held a child like that when they died in your arms, say that is not life.

Unfortunately, it is not us that is making the decision. It is political. It is the Biden administration, Madam Speaker, and they have done it through taking the VA.

Anybody that can question me on my support of veterans is out of their mind. I have served. My father served. My grandfather served. My son served. My grandson served. And guess what? As of last week, my granddaughter is now in Navy boot camp.

I will stand for the veterans, but I will not stand for the death of children regardless of who this administration is or what they believe is a good political move.

Madam Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. ROY), my good friend.

Mr. ROY. Madam Speaker, I appreciate his friend's service, and I appreciate his passion on this issue.

I listened here as my colleagues want to lecture us about making decisions about life. Who are my colleagues to decide when life begins? Talking about where the doctors are in the room, who are my colleagues, where is God in the room about determining when life begins?

It is my colleagues on the other side of the aisle who have out-of-step views about the extent of abortion in this country to terminate life right up to the point of birth. It is out of step with

the entirety of the world. It is a radical position, and the entirety of this country knows it.

What we are talking about right now, when we used to be able to have some peaceful debates in this body, we had the Hyde amendment recognizing our differences on the issue and trying to pull it out of the debate of funding, but my colleagues on the other side of the aisle refuse to respect the Hyde amendment.

Now, you have an administration making up law. My colleague on the other side of the aisle wants to lecture about where you go to have a dispute about law. Oh, run to the courts, they say. Run to Article III.

Well, we are Article I, dadgummit, and we make decisions about the law every single day. As a Member of this body, I introduced the ARTICLE ONE Act under President Trump, questioning executive authority.

I subpoenaed records from the White House, questioning unaccompanied alien children data because I believe in the primacy of Article I.

But we should, dadgummit, on a bipartisan basis believe that we need to make these decisions, and you don't have the VA arbitrarily making law and stepping over the 1992 law, which has never been repealed. It has never been set aside, and to suggest that it has makes a mockery of the laws that we pass. We should agree on that on a bipartisan basis.

The ranking member is speaking for all of us when he says we are trying to stand up in support of the Solid Start program, but it has now been turned on its head by a radical decision by the executive branch, so now we are no longer going to support this program as it exists.

As the chairman said, 16 words are the hang-up. Then change the 16 words, and let's fix what needs to be fixed to honor what we know is the law from the 1992 law.

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, what the gentleman from Texas is suggesting that we do is delete women from S. 1198. That, I will not do.

Yes, I strongly believe in Article I. The accusation that Secretary McDonough issued a radical rule, well, what is this so-called radical rule he is mentioning that he has issued? The rule that Secretary McDonough issued, the interim final rule, says that abortion is available based on the 1996 law, which gave him the authority to define medical benefits available at the VA. That is very clear what Congress did.

It is under that authority that this Secretary has made not a radical rule but simply a rule which allows veteran women to enjoy the same rights that they had when they were serving in the military as Active-Duty servicemembers. Women serving in the military have access to abortions when they have been raped, when they are victims of incest, and, yes, when their pregnancies pose a danger to their life.

Who is trying to play God here are the Members on the other side of the aisle who wish to deny women who have worn the cloth of this country, who have served our country, who fought for all of our freedoms, to deny them the freedom to be able to consider the full range of medical procedures that they need in order to preserve their own life.

What is extreme here is that they want to deny women to even be able to access abortion counseling, counseling which may save their lives.

Madam Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. BOST. Madam Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time.

Madam Speaker, I think it is important to realize that DOD actually follows the Hyde amendment, which is rape, incest, and the life of the mother, which is exactly what the chairman just quoted.

What the VA does is rape, incest, and life and health, including mental health, of the mother, which can be a claim that maybe I am under stress, all of these things. That is why we need clarification. Not only do we need clarification, but we need to follow the law.

The argument that the other law allows the VA Secretary to make these decisions, it never mentioned abortion in there. I think that would have done that.

Madam Speaker, I am encouraging my Members to vote “no” on this bill. I would love to be able to vote on this bill when we get this problem straightened out. I believe our veterans deserve to have the other benefits that are here and available in the bill.

As everybody knows, I did vote for it in the other form before the VA stepped down this path.

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

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, again, I ask for my colleagues to join me in passing S. 1198.

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, S. 1198.

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. BOST. 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.

# STRENGTHENING WHISTLEBLOWER PROTECTIONS AT THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS ACT

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the

bill (H.R. 8510) to amend title 38, United States Code, to make certain improvements to the Office of Accountability and Whistleblower Protection of the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 8510

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

## SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Strengthening Whistleblower Protections at the Department of Veterans Affairs Act”.

## SEC. 2. COUNSEL OF OFFICE OF ACCOUNTABILITY AND WHISTLEBLOWER PROTECTION.

Subsection (e) of section 323 of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) by inserting “(1)” before “The Office”; and

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

“(2) The Assistant Secretary shall appoint a Counsel of the Office, who shall be a career appointee in the Senior Executive Service and shall report to the Assistant Secretary. The Counsel shall provide the Assistant Secretary with legal advice on all matters relating to the Office. In accordance with subsection (e), the Assistant Secretary may hire the appropriate staff for the Counsel to provide such legal advice.”.

## SEC. 3. MODIFICATIONS TO FUNCTIONS OF OFFICE OF ACCOUNTABILITY AND WHISTLEBLOWER PROTECTION.

Subsection (c)(1) of such section is amended—

(1) by striking subparagraphs (A) and (B);

(2) by redesignating subparagraphs (C) through (G) as subparagraphs (A) through (E), respectively;

(3) in subparagraph (A), as so redesignated, by inserting “and allegations of whistleblower retaliation” after “disclosures”; and

(4) by striking subparagraph (B), as so redesignated, and inserting the following new subparagraph:

“(B) Referring employees of the Department to the Office of Special Counsel so the Office of Special Counsel may receive whistleblower disclosures and allegations of whistleblower retaliation.”; and

(5) by striking subparagraphs (H) and (I).

## SEC. 4. EXPANSION OF WHISTLEBLOWER PROTECTIONS.

(a) CLARIFICATION OF PROHIBITED PERSONNEL ACTION.—Section 731(c) of such title is amended—

(1) in paragraph (1)—

(A) in the matter preceding subparagraph (A), by inserting “, or threatening to take or fail to take,” after “failing to take”; and

(B) in subparagraph (A), by inserting “, or with respect to an allegation of such a disclosure” before the semicolon;

(2) in paragraph (3), by inserting “, making a referral to boards of licensure,” after “negative peer review”.

(b) FUNCTION OF OFFICE OF ACCOUNTABILITY AND WHISTLEBLOWER PROTECTION.—Section 323(g) of such title is amended by adding at the end the following new paragraph:

“(4) The term ‘prohibited personnel action’ has the meaning given such term in section 731(c) of this title.”.

## SEC. 5. TRACKING AND ENFORCEMENT OF RECOMMENDATIONS AND SETTLEMENT AGREEMENTS REGARDING WHISTLEBLOWERS.

Subsection (c) of section 323 of such title, as amended by section 4, is further amended—

(1) in paragraph (1), by adding at the end the following new subparagraphs:

“(I) Tracking the negotiation, implementation, and enforcement of settlement agreements entered into by the Secretary regarding claims of whistleblower retaliation, including with respect to the work of the General Counsel of the Department regarding such settlements.

“(J) Tracking the determinations made by the Special Counsel regarding claims of whistleblower retaliation, including—

“(i) any disciplinary action for the individual who engaged in whistleblower retaliation; and

“(ii) determinations regarding the need for settlement as identified by the Special Counsel, and any settlement resolving claims of whistleblower retaliation entered into by the Secretary with the whistleblower.”; and

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

“(4)(A) In carrying out subparagraph (I) of paragraph (1), the Assistant Secretary shall, in consultation with the General Counsel, establish metrics and standards regarding—

“(i) the timely implementation of settlement agreements entered into by the Secretary regarding whistleblower retaliation; and

“(ii) reasonable restitution and restoration of employment, and other relief for whistleblowers; and

“(B) The Assistant Secretary shall establish a secure electronic system to carry out subparagraphs (I) and (J) of paragraph (1) in a manner that ensures the confidentiality of the identity of a whistleblower.”.

## SEC. 6. TRAINING AND INFORMATION.

Section 323 of such title is further amended—

(1) in subsection (c)(2), by striking “receive anonymous whistleblower disclosures” and inserting “provide information to employees of the Department regarding the rights of and procedures for whistleblowers”; and

(2) by redesignating subsection (g) as subsection (i); and

(3) by inserting after subsection (f) the following new subsections:

“(g) TRAINING.—The Assistant Secretary shall—

“(1) develop, in consultation with the Special Counsel, annual training on whistleblower protection and related issues;

“(2) provide and make such training available to employees of the Department; and

“(3) disseminate training materials and information to employees on whistleblower rights, whistleblower disclosures, and allegations of whistleblower retaliation, including any materials created pursuant to section 733 of this title.”.

## SEC. 7. IMPROVEMENTS TO ANNUAL REPORTS.

Subsection (f) of section 323 of such title is amended—

(1) in paragraph (1)(B)(ii), by striking “subsection (C)(1)(G)” and inserting “subsection (c)(1)(E)”; and

(2) in paragraph (2)—

(A) by striking “under subsection (c)(1)(I)” and inserting “by the Special Counsel”; and

(B) by inserting “not later than 60 days after such date” before “the Secretary shall”; and

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

“(3) Not later than June 30, 2023, and semi-annually thereafter, the Secretary shall submit to the Committees on Veterans’ Affairs of the House of Representatives and the Senate a report on settlements described in paragraph (1)(I) of subsection (c), including, with respect to the period covered by the report—

“(A) the number of settlements under negotiation or executed, and the number of executed settlements that have not been fully implemented;