

Mr. BOST. Madam Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Kansas (Mr. MANN), my good friend, who has worked so hard on this issue.

Mr. MANN. Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of legislation that I co-introduced with Congressman PAPPAS, H.R. 8510, the Strengthening Whistleblower Protections at the Department of Veterans Affairs Act.

Holding government accountable requires reasonable whistleblower protection. VA employees take a risk when exposing fraud, corruption, or any wrongdoing of any kind, and they deserve to have their claims investigated, and to have protection from retaliation.

The VA's Office of Accountability and Whistleblower Protection was created with good intentions but has never lived up to the expectations of whistleblowers or of this Congress. In 2021, 80 percent of all the disciplinary recommendations that OAWP made were either changed or simply ignored. Here are just two examples of the many troubling stories that my colleagues and I have heard during our hearings.

At one facility, OAWP recommended a range of discipline from 12-day suspension to removal for three supervisors who engaged in whistleblower retaliation. VA officials disagreed, however, and the individuals received no disciplinary action.

At another facility, OAWP recommended a range of discipline from demotion to removal for an individual who retaliated against and harassed an employee. VA officials believed the file lacked certain testimony and evidence and the individual received no disciplinary action.

Despite the efforts of many dedicated VA staff, these cases, and others like them, highlight the need for a change in OAWP's roles and responsibilities. Veterans, whistleblowers, and taxpayers deserve better. H.R. 8510 would remove OAWP's investigative authority, and instead, direct OAWP to refer whistleblowers to the Office of Special Counsel, an independent agency, which has a much better track record for whistleblower investigations. This bill would also require OAWP to track settlement negotiations and agreements between VA employees and the Department and refocus the office on providing training to employees on whistleblower rights.

This legislation is an example of the good that Congress can do when we work together. I look forward to its swift passage through the House, and I urge my colleagues to support this important bill.

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I have no further speakers, I am prepared to close, and I reserve the balance of my time.

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

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I ask all my colleagues to join me in passing

H.R. 8510, as amended, the Strengthening Whistleblower Protections at the Department of Veterans Affairs Act, 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. 8510, 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. 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.

SUPPORTING FAMILIES OF THE FALLEN ACT

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (S. 2794) to amend title 38, United States Code, to increase automatic maximum coverage under the Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance program and the Veterans' Group Life Insurance program, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

S. 2794

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 "Supporting Families of the Fallen Act".

SEC. 2. INCREASE IN AUTOMATIC MAXIMUM COVERAGE UNDER SERVICEMEMBERS' GROUP LIFE INSURANCE AND VETERANS' GROUP LIFE INSURANCE.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Section 1967(a)(3)(A)(i) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by striking "\$400,000" and inserting "\$500,000".

(b) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendment made by subsection (a) shall take effect on the later of—

(1) the date that is 60 days after the date of the enactment of this Act; or

(2) the date on which the Secretary of Veterans Affairs determines that—

(A) the amount for which a member will be insured pursuant to the amendment made by subsection (a) and the premiums for such amount are administratively and actuarially sound for the Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance program under subchapter III of chapter 19 of title 38, United States Code, and the Veterans' Group Life Insurance program under section 1977 of such title; and

(B) the increase in such amount carried out pursuant to the amendment will not result in such programs operating at a loss.

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 include extraneous material on S. 2794.

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, life insurance is designed to offer protection from loss and serves as a death benefit. For a veteran or servicemember, VA's Veterans' Group Life Insurance offers security and confidence that loved ones will be covered and made financially whole in the event a source of income is lost.

While no amount of money can replace the life of a beloved family member, VA's Servicemembers' and Veterans' Group Life Insurance exists to provide an affordable option to provide a fiscal shield for survivors.

Neither insurance program has experienced a coverage limit increase since 2005. This bill increases the maximum amount of coverage for Servicemembers' and Veterans' Group Life Insurance by \$100,000, which means expanded coverage of up to \$500,000 for each option.

Madam Speaker, I support this bill, I urge all of my colleagues to do the same, 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 support of S. 2794, the Supporting Families of the Fallen Act.

I thank Senator TUBERVILLE and Congressman ROY for leading this effort in the Senate and the House, respectively.

This bill makes much-needed updates to the coverage amounts for the Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance and the Veterans' Group Life Insurance program.

Specifically, this bill would allow VA to raise the max payment for both programs from \$400,000 to \$500,000. An additional \$100,000 would make it easier for surviving spouses to keep a roof over their family's head and food on the table following the loss of their loved one.

As many of you know, VA's life insurance programs may be the only affordable option available to servicemembers and veterans. This is because some veterans may not be eligible for private life insurance due to the added risk of military service or because they have a service-connected disability, like PTSD or cancer.

When we send our military into harm's way, VA insurance programs provide them and their families with financial security. However, the max rate of \$400,000, which was established in 2005, does not meet the needs of today's survivors.

Since 2005, American families have seen the cost of living continuously rise. This is especially true right now due to historic inflation under the Biden administration.

This bill would provide families with insurance coverage that will better meet their needs. S. 2794 builds on our Nation's promises to care for the families of those lost in service to our country.

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

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I have no further speakers, I am prepared to close, and I reserve the balance of my time.

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

Mr. ROY. Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise in support of my bill, which in this case is the S version—the Senate version—that was introduced by Senator TUBERVILLE from Alabama, S. 2794, the Supporting Families of the Fallen Act.

The ranking member just articulated why this legislation is important. I think one of the things that we have to remember is the extent to which our men and women in uniform have to keep up and keep pace with inflation, and we thought this was important.

I had a constituent in my district who raised this issue. I sat down with that constituent and then met with a bunch of other constituents who were running into the same problem. I talked to a number of my veteran colleagues, and we believed that this was an important solution.

As many know, I am not one to want to put forward legislation that isn't paid for. This bill, for the most part, pays for itself with the slight exception of Active Duty combat individuals. I believe that is an exception worth making when we talk about things that are not paid for.

It is straightforward. It simply increases the SGLI and VGLI maximum coverage from \$400,000 to \$500,000 so that servicemembers and veterans can customize the coverage amount that they need. I think it is a commonsense solution. It is bipartisan and it is bicameral.

Madam Speaker, I appreciate the chairman and the ranking member for their support.

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

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

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I thank all the folks that came together for this bill, and I ask all my colleagues to join me in passing S. 2794, which upon passage today will be sent on to the President's desk for signature.

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. 2794.

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. 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.

□ 2110

JOHN LEWIS CIVIL RIGHTS FELLOWSHIP ACT OF 2022

Mr. CASTRO of Texas. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 8681) to establish the John Lewis Civil Rights Fellowship to fund international internships and research placements for early- to mid-career professionals to study non-violent movements to establish and protect civil rights around the world, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 8681

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 “John Lewis Civil Rights Fellowship Act of 2022”.

SEC. 2. JOHN LEWIS CIVIL RIGHTS FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM.

The Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961 (22 U.S.C. 2451 et seq.) is amended by adding at the end the following:

“SEC. 115. JOHN LEWIS CIVIL RIGHTS FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM.

“(a) ESTABLISHMENT.—There is established the John Lewis Civil Rights Fellowship Program (referred to in this section as the ‘Fellowship Program’) within the J. William Fulbright Educational Exchange Program.

“(b) PURPOSES.—The purposes of the Fellowship Program are—

“(1) to honor the legacy of Representative John Lewis by promoting a greater understanding of the history and tenets of non-violent civil rights movements; and

“(2) to advance foreign policy priorities of the United States by promoting studies, research, and international exchange in the subject of nonviolent movements that established and protected civil rights around the world.

“(c) ADMINISTRATION.—The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (referred to in this section as the ‘Bureau’) shall administer the Fellowship Program in accordance with policy guidelines established by the Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board, in consultation with the binational Fulbright Commissions and United States Embassies.

“(d) SELECTION OF FELLOWS.—

“(1) IN GENERAL.—The Board shall annually select qualified individuals to participate in the Fellowship Program. The Bureau may determine the number of fellows selected each year, which, whenever feasible, shall be not fewer than 25.

“(2) OUTREACH.—To the extent practicable, the Bureau shall conduct outreach at institutions the Bureau determines are likely to produce a range of qualified applicants.

“(e) FELLOWSHIP ORIENTATION.—The Bureau shall organize and administer a fellowship orientation that shall—

“(1) be held in Washington, DC, or at another location selected by the Bureau;

“(2) include programming to honor the legacy of Representative John Lewis; and

“(3) be held on an annual basis.

“(f) STRUCTURE.—

“(1) WORK PLAN.—To carry out the purposes described in subsection (b)(2)—

“(A) each fellow selected pursuant to subsection (d) shall arrange an internship or research placement—

“(i) with a nongovernmental organization, academic institution, or other organization approved by the Bureau; and

“(ii) in a country with an operational Fulbright U.S. Student Program; and

“(B) the Bureau shall, for each fellow, approve a work plan that identifies the target objectives for the fellow, including specific duties and responsibilities relating to those objectives.

“(2) CONFERENCES; PRESENTATIONS.—Each fellow shall—

“(A) attend the fellowship orientation described in subsection (e);

“(B) not later than the date that is 1 year after the end of the fellowship period, attend a fellowship summit organized and administered by the Bureau, which, whenever feasible, shall be held in a location of importance to the civil rights movement in the United States and may coincide with other events facilitated by the Bureau; and

“(C) at such summit, give a presentation on lessons learned during the period of fellowship.

“(3) FELLOWSHIP PERIOD.—Each fellowship under this section shall continue for a period determined by the Bureau, which, whenever feasible, shall be not shorter than 10 months.

“(g) FELLOWSHIP AWARD.—The Bureau shall provide each fellow under this section with an allowance that is equal to the amount needed for—

“(1) the fellow's reasonable costs during the fellowship period; and

“(2) travel and lodging expenses related to attending the orientation and summit required under subsection (e)(2).

“(h) REPORTS.—Not later than 1 year after the date of completion of the Fellowship Program by the initial cohort of fellows selected under subsection (d), and on an annual basis thereafter, the Secretary of State shall submit to the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Foreign Relations of the Senate a report providing information on the implementation of the Fellowship Program, including on—

“(1) the demographics of the cohort of fellows who completed a fellowship during the preceding 1-year period;

“(2) a description of internship and research placements, and research projects selected, under the Fellowship Program, including participant feedback on program implementation and feedback of the Department on lessons learned;

“(3) a plan for factoring such lessons learned into future programming; and

“(4) an analysis of trends relating to the diversity of the cohorts of fellows and the topics of projects completed over the course of the Fellowship Program.”.

SEC. 3. TECHNICAL AND CONFORMING AMENDMENTS TO THE MUTUAL EDUCATIONAL AND CULTURAL EXCHANGE ACT OF 1961A.

Section 112(a) of the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961 (22 U.S.C. 2460(a)) is amended—

(1) in paragraph (8), by striking “; and” and inserting a semicolon;

(2) in paragraph (9), by striking the period and inserting “; and”; and

(3) by adding at the end the following:

“(10) the John Lewis Civil Rights Fellowship Program established under section 115, which provides funding for international internships and research placements for early-