

on Ranking Member LEVIN's comprehensive bill, the Isakson-Roe Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020.

My hometown and district in Louisville, Kentucky, is home to nearly 50,000 veterans. Veterans in Louisville and across our country deserve as much support from the government when they come out of Active Duty as when they go in. Today, we have an opportunity to show our vets that we are listening to their concerns and that we are going to do something about it.

H.R. 3981 will help the VA deliver on the promises it makes to servicemembers when they join the military. It improves oversight of and fosters accountability at institutions that receive GI Bill funding, ensuring that the men and women who put on the uniform of our country aren't defrauded by dishonest institutions that fail to set our veterans up for success.

H.R. 3981 is a commonsense, bipartisan bill which came out of our committee on a bipartisan basis. It will ensure our veterans and their benefits are supported and protected. We have a sacred responsibility to look after all Americans, especially those who have sacrificed for our country. Any veteran who wants to get an education, an education they have earned, should be able to do so without fear of being defrauded, losing their benefits, or being left behind.

Every man and woman who puts on a uniform is willing to risk everything to keep us safe. The least we can do is protect them when they get home. Veterans earn their GI Bill education benefits, and no veteran should lose that benefit to bad actors or fraudulent institutions. Not a single one.

I thank Chairman BOST, Chairman VAN ORDEN, Ranking Members TAKANO and LEVIN, and all of those involved, for their support of this bill. I ask my colleagues to support H.R. 3981.

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I ask all my colleagues to join me in passing H.R. 3981, as amended, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. BOST. Madam Speaker, I encourage the Members on our side the aisle and all of our colleagues to support this good piece of legislation, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 3981, the Isakson-Roe Education Oversight Expansion Act of 2023.

Members of the armed forces are important to our nation, and we show them our appreciation by taking care of them after they have completed their service by legislation such as H.R. 3981.

Many of our nation's veterans have earned federal support to help pay for college, graduate school, and training programs through their GI Bill education benefits.

They can even transfer unused benefits to family members and do so in many cases.

Unfortunately, some predatory programs have exploited veterans by aggressively attracting them and their GI benefits to fraudulent, falsified, or substandard programs.

The comprehensive Isakson-Roe Education Oversight Expansion Act would seek to rein in these abuses by increasing the Department of Veterans Affairs oversight capacity.

Additionally, it would look to restore benefits to defrauded veterans, and improve oversight, faster accountability, and most of all, help our veterans access the quality education they have earned.

Similarly, H.R. 3981 would require educational institutions that offer certain courses to people who are eligible for educational benefits administered by the VA.

Reportable events would include punitive actions by state or federal agencies, heightened monitoring of federal student aid, and the potential loss of accreditation.

Institutions that fail to report those events would become ineligible to receive benefit payments from the VA.

Unfortunately, our nation's recognition of those who served in subsequent conflicts has been less than adequate.

We have, in recent decades, too often failed to overcome our political differences to recognize the truly remarkable achievements of our courageous veterans.

We must be united in seeing that every soldier, sailor, airman, and marine in welcoming them back with all the care and compassion this grateful nation can bestow.

Our nation has a proud legacy of appreciation and commitment to the men and women who have worn the uniform in defense of this country.

Veterans continue to have many unanswered needs, and I will continue to fight for the rights of our most patriotic Americans.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. BOST) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 3981, 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. 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.

VETERANS BENEFITS IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 2023

Mr. BOST. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 1530) to amend title 38, United States Code, to improve the requirement to publish disability benefit questionnaire forms of 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. 1530

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

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE; TABLE OF CONTENTS.

This Act may be cited as the "Veterans Benefits Improvement Act of 2023".

SEC. 2. IMPROVEMENT OF PUBLICATION OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS DISABILITY BENEFIT QUESTIONNAIRE FORMS.

Section 5101 of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) in subsection (d)—

(A) in paragraph (1)(A), by inserting “, including (except as provided in paragraph (4)(A)) all disability benefit questionnaire forms available to personnel of the Veterans Health Administration and covered non-Department providers for the completion of examinations with respect to medical disability of applicants for benefits under laws administered by the Secretary” before the semicolon; and

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

“(4)(A) The Secretary may exclude from publication under clauses (i) and (ii) of paragraph (1)(A) any form described in subparagraph (B) of this paragraph that the Secretary determines could not reasonably be completed to a clinically acceptable standard by someone not an employee or a contractor of the Department.

“(B) A form described in this subparagraph is a form that—

“(i) was available or in use at any time after the date of the enactment of the Veterans Benefits Act of 2023; and

“(ii) has not been published under paragraph (1).

“(C) The Secretary shall include on the same internet website as the website on which forms are published under paragraph (1)(A) a list of forms that have been excluded from publication pursuant to subparagraph (A), and for each such form, a justification for the exclusion of the form from publication.”; and

(2) in subsection (e), by adding at the end the following new paragraph:

“(3) The term ‘covered non-Department provider’ means a medical provider who is not an employee of the Department and who provides examinations with respect to medical disability of applicants for benefits under laws administered by the Secretary pursuant to a contract with the Department.”.

SEC. 3. IMPROVEMENT OF PROVISION OF MEDICAL DISABILITY EXAMINATIONS BY CONTRACTORS.

(a) REPORT ON IMPROVING REIMBURSEMENT FOR TRAVEL RELATING TO MEDICAL DISABILITY EXAMINATIONS.—Not later than one year after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, after consulting with the Secretary of State and the Commissioner of the Social Security Administration, shall submit to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and the House of Representatives a report on the efforts of the Secretary to reimburse veterans for expenses incurred traveling to a facility of the Department or of a covered non-Department provider incident to an examination with respect to the medical disability of the veteran for purposes of benefits under the laws administered by the Secretary, regardless of whether the facility is located inside or outside the United States.

(b) COMMUNICATION BY NON-DEPARTMENT PROVIDERS PROVIDING MEDICAL DISABILITY EXAMINATIONS WITH INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANIZATIONS DESIGNATED FOR PREPARATION, PRESENTATION, AND PROSECUTION OF CLAIMS.—Any contract entered into by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs after the date of the enactment of this Act under which a covered non-Department provider agrees to provide examinations with respect to medical disability for applicants for benefits under the laws administered by the Secretary, shall include a requirement that every communication from the covered non-Department provider to such an applicant regarding the scheduling of a covered medical disability examination be contemporaneously transmitted to any person or organization—

(1) designated by the applicant by a power of attorney filed with the Secretary; and

(2) recognized under sections 5902, 5903, and 5904 of title 38, United States Code, for the preparation, presentation, and prosecution of claims.

(c) DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS OUTREACH REGARDING CONTACT INFORMATION FOR

CONTRACTORS PROVIDING COVERED MEDICAL DISABILITY EXAMINATIONS.—Not later than 120 days after the date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, in partnership with veterans service organizations and such other stakeholders as the Secretary considers relevant and appropriate, shall implement an outreach program to provide veterans with the following information:

(1) Contact information for covered non-Department providers that provide examinations with respect to medical disability of applicants for benefits under laws administered by the Secretary, including the telephone numbers such providers may use to contact veterans.

(2) Notice of the requirement for a veteran to provide personally identifiable information to such a provider when contacted in order to verify the identity of the veteran.

(d) COVERED NON-DEPARTMENT PROVIDER.—In this section, the term “covered non-Department provider” means a medical provider who is not an employee of the Department of Veterans Affairs and who provides examinations with respect to medical disability of applicants for benefits under laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs pursuant to a contract with the Department.

SEC. 4. REPORT ON SUPPORTING GOVERNMENTAL VETERANS SERVICE OFFICERS WHO PREPARE, PRESENT, AND PROSECUTE BENEFITS CLAIMS BEFORE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

(a) REPORT.—Not later than one year after the date of the enactment of this Act and after consulting veterans service organizations and such other stakeholders as the Secretary of Veterans Affairs considers relevant and appropriate, the Secretary shall submit to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and the House of Representatives a report on improving the support by the Department of Veterans Affairs of covered governmental veterans service officers.

(b) ELEMENTS.—The report submitted under subsection (a) shall include the following:

(1) An assessment of the feasibility, advisability, and current technical limitations of providing covered governmental veterans service officers enhanced access to certain Department systems to better serve veterans those governmental service officers may not have authorization to represent.

(2) An assessment as to whether the Department would benefit from the establishment or designation of an office or working group within the Department to serve as an intergovernmental liaison between the Department and governmental veterans service officers.

(3) Any other recommendations to improve how the Department monitors, coordinates with, or provides support to covered governmental veterans service officers.

(c) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

(1) The term “covered governmental veterans service officer” means an employee of a State, county, municipal, or Tribal government—

(A) who is recognized by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs as a representative of a veterans service organization to serve as a veterans service officer; and

(B) whose primary responsibilities include preparing, presenting, and prosecuting before the Department of Veterans Affairs claims for benefits under laws administered by the Secretary.

(2) The term “veterans service organization” means an organization recognized by the Secretary for the representation of veterans under section 5902 of title 38, United States Code.

SEC. 5. BOARD OF VETERANS' APPEALS INTERNSHIP PROGRAM.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Chapter 71 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new section:

“§ 7114. Internship program

“The Secretary shall establish a competitive internship program of the Board for individuals

enrolled in the first or second year of law schools accredited by the American Bar Association.”

(b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections at the beginning of chapter 71 of such title is amended by adding at the end the following new item:

“7114. Internship program.”

(c) DEADLINE.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall establish the internship program required by section 7114 of such title, as added by subsection (a), not later than one year after the date of the enactment of this Act.

SEC. 6. BENEFITS FOR PARTICIPANTS IN CERTAIN PROGRAMS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

(a) ESTABLISHMENT.—Not later than one year after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall carry out a program to furnish certain benefits to covered participants.

(b) BENEFITS: STUDENT LOAN REPAYMENT; REIMBURSEMENTS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Subject to an agreement under paragraph (2), the Secretary shall provide to each covered attorney—

(A) student loan repayment benefits under section 5379 of title 5, United States Code, in the case of a covered attorney who is eligible for such benefits; and

(B) reimbursement for the cost of—

(i) enrollment in a course designed to prepare an individual for licensure to practice law in a State;

(ii) sitting for a bar examination in a State; and

(iii) annual dues required to maintain membership in the bar of any State.

(2) AGREEMENT.—The Secretary shall enter into an agreement with a covered attorney who will receive benefits under paragraph (1). Each such agreement shall specify that—

(A) the covered attorney agrees to remain in the service of the Department for a period of not less than three years, unless involuntarily separated; and

(B) if separated involuntarily on account of misconduct, or voluntarily, before the end of the period specified in the agreement, the covered attorney shall repay to the United States the amount of any benefits received by the covered participant under paragraph (1).

(c) PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES.—

(1) MENTORSHIP.—Not later than 90 days after the date on which an individual becomes a covered participant, the Secretary shall assign the covered participant a mentor who is an employee of the Department who is—

(A) to the extent practicable, a managerial employee; and

(B) outside the participant's chain of command.

(2) ASSIGNMENTS.—At the election of a covered participant who has completed at least two years of service to the Department, the Secretary shall assign such covered participant to:

(A) The Office of General Counsel, in a position—

(i) that includes full-time legal responsibilities in order to further the professional development of the covered participant; and

(ii) for a period of not less than 120 days and not more than 180 days, or longer at the discretion of the Secretary.

(B) In the case of a covered participant who has already held a position described in subparagraph (A), an assignment described in clauses (i) and (ii) of such subparagraph with the Board of Veterans' Appeals.

(3) OTHER ROTATIONAL ASSIGNMENTS.—The Secretary may provide a covered participant one or more other short-term rotational assignments. Such an assignment shall be for a period of not less than 30 days and not more than 180 days, at the discretion of the Secretary.

(d) PERIODIC REPORTS.—

(1) REPORTS REQUIRED.—Not later than three years after the date on which the Secretary be-

gins to carry out the program under this section, and not less frequently than once every three years thereafter, the Secretary shall submit to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Representatives regarding such program.

(2) ELEMENTS.—Each report submitted under paragraph (1) shall include the following elements:

(A) Costs to the United States to provide benefits under subsection (b).

(B) The rates of retention of covered participants compared to other employees of the Department.

(C) Recommendations of the Secretary regarding legislative or administrative action to improve such program.

(e) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

(1) The term “covered attorney” means an individual who—

(A) is a covered participant;

(B) has graduated from a law school accredited by the American Bar Association; and

(C) is a member in good standing of the bar of a State.

(2) The term “covered participant” means an individual who participates in—

(A) the Honors Attorney Program (or successor program) of the Office of General Counsel of the Department of Veterans Affairs; or

(B) the Law Clerk Program (or successor program) of the Board of Veterans' Appeals.

(3) The term “State” has the meaning given such term in section 101 of title 38, United States Code.

SEC. 7. INCREASE IN MAXIMUM NUMBER OF JUDGES APPOINTED TO UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS FOR VETERANS CLAIMS.

Section 7253(a) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by striking “seven” and inserting “nine”.

SEC. 8. REPORT ON IMPROVING ACCESS TO BOARD OF VETERANS' APPEALS TELEHEARINGS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Representatives a report on improving access to hearings before the Board of Veterans' Appeals held by picture and voice transmission.

(b) CONTENTS.—The report required by subsection (a) shall include the following:

(1) Recommendations on the feasibility and advisability of reimbursing veterans for expenses incurred for travel from the home of a veteran to the location at which a hearing before the Board of Veterans' Appeals is held by picture and voice transmission, if the Secretary determines that travel to such location is reasonably necessary for such a hearing.

(2) Recommendations on establishment of pilot programs to assess the feasibility and advisability of using other methods that could improve veteran access to hearings before the Board of Veterans' Appeals held by picture and voice transmission from a veteran's home.

(3) Such other recommendations to improve access to hearings before the Board of Veterans' Appeals held by picture and voice transmission as the Secretary may receive from stakeholders.

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

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Illinois.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. BOST. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks on H.R. 1530, as amended.

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

There was no objection.

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

Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 1530, as amended, offered by my friend from Texas and our Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs chairman, Representative LUTTRELL.

I also congratulate Representative LUTTRELL on this bill as it is his first one to come before the floor since coming to Congress.

Now, this bill would make vitally important improvements to the VA's disability claims process for veterans applying for benefits, and I am grateful to my fellow veteran for his work on it.

It is no secret that the VA disability claims process is lengthy and difficult, but Mr. LUTTRELL's bill is the right solution to modernize the process, an example of which would be the requirement for VA to publish disability benefits questionnaire forms on the VA's website to ease access between veterans and providers completing disability claims.

This is a commonsense change that honestly we should have done a long time ago. This bill also includes Representative CISCOMANI's legislation to create a new internship program at the Board of Veterans' Appeals. This program would offer certain incentives to legal interns to get them into VA and fighting for veterans while also addressing hiring and retention challenges at the board head on.

Lastly, this bill includes Representative SELF's proposal to make sure that the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims has enough judges to process the backlog of appeals and expected growth since the passage of the PACT Act last year.

These commonsense solutions should help us make the claims process a little easier to navigate for veterans and their families. It would also provide the courts with the additional resources we know they need to manage the workload coming in from the board.

Once again, I thank Representative LUTTRELL, Mr. SELF, and Mr. CISCOMANI for their work on this legislation.

Madam Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 1530, as amended, and I reserve the balance of my time.

□ 1630

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

Madam Speaker, I rise to express my support for H.R. 1530, as amended, the Veterans Benefits Improvement Act.

I thank the Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs Subcommittee Chairman LUTTRELL and Ranking Member PAPPAS for working in a bipartisan manner on the issues in this package. I

commend Representatives CISCOMANI and MCGARVEY for their contributions, as well.

Madam Speaker, this bill makes several important changes that will serve to help streamline the medical disability exam process for veterans.

It will also help strengthen recruitment, hiring, and retention at the Board of Veterans' Appeals by creating a new internship program for law students and will expand the reimbursement programs for current employees to include student loans, professional development activities, and bar dues.

This bill will also permanently expand the number of judges appointed to the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims, allowing the court to process cases faster and grant veterans and survivors the relief they deserve.

Madam Speaker, I support H.R. 1530, as amended, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. BOST. Madam Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. LUTTRELL), the chairman of the DAMA Subcommittee.

Mr. LUTTRELL. Madam Speaker, I am honored to be here today to talk about H.R. 1530, as amended, the Veterans Benefits Improvement Act of 2023.

We have an obligation to support our veterans who served and sacrificed for our country. However, there is currently a lot of red tape that prevents veterans from easily accessing the disability benefits they have earned from the VA.

This bill takes important steps to identify and break down these barriers in the disability exam process, ensuring our veterans receive the highest quality care and support.

This bill would make several improvements, including clarifying publishing requirements for disability benefits questionnaire forms on VA's website and easing communication about the scheduling of disability exams between contract examiners, veterans, and veterans' representatives so that the veterans do not miss their appointments.

Madam Speaker, I thank Ranking Member PAPPAS and my colleagues, Representatives CISCOMANI and SELF, for working with me to include their respective legislation in this amendment. All of their provisions will take steps to provide VA with the resources they need to address the backlog of appeals, especially since the passage of the PACT Act last year, as well as mitigate the recruiting and retention problems at the board to get new lawyers in the door for our veterans.

I know firsthand how cumbersome the disability claims process can be, and it is past time to modernize these efforts.

I am proud to have a bill on the floor that will make improvements for my fellow veterans going through the VA claims process.

Madam Speaker, I urge all of my colleagues to support H.R. 1530, as amended.

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from New Hampshire (Mr. PAPPAS), my good friend, the ranking member of the House Veterans Affairs' Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs.

Mr. PAPPAS. Madam Speaker, I thank Ranking Member TAKANO for yielding. I rise today in support of this bipartisan legislation, the Veterans Benefits Improvement Act.

As ranking member of the Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs Subcommittee, I am honored to be able to partner with the subcommittee chair, Mr. LUTTRELL, on this legislation. I thank him for working in a bipartisan fashion to ensure that our veterans can access the benefits and services that they are owed.

We all have a solemn obligation to ensure that the needs of veterans are met. We know that too many of our heroes encounter red tape, delays, and backlogs when trying to access benefits. My office has spoken with countless veterans across New Hampshire who have had trouble completing and filing disability benefits questionnaires due to a lack of clear and timely communication.

Often, our office will step in when things go awry along the way and advocate on their behalf with VA, but veterans shouldn't have to reach out to yet another office just to navigate these processes, which are all too complicated.

By improving transparency and accessibility for those filing a disability claim, as well as communications between veterans, their accredited representatives, and contractors, we can make sure that veterans receive the support that they have earned.

As we see more veterans file claims as a result of the PACT Act, it is so crucial that we have steps in place that are going to improve these processes as soon as possible.

Madam Speaker, I urge all of my colleagues to support this commonsense legislation, which will help reduce the VA claims backlog and minimize delays that too many of our veterans are facing today.

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I ask all of my colleagues to join me in passing H.R. 1530, as amended, the Veterans Benefits Improvement Act, and I yield back the balance of my time.

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

Mr. SELF. Madam Speaker, I rise in support of the Veterans Benefits Improvement Act.

This bill will streamline the veterans claims process through several actions, including adding language from my bill, H.R. 1329, to add two additional judges to the United States Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims.

For decades, the Board of Veterans' Appeals has been maligned because they cannot provide timely decisions to veterans who appeal their cases. To

make matters worse, the court anticipates the caseload in FY 2023 increasing even more due to the amount of cases generated from the PACT Act.

Quite simply, more cases before the board will lead to more denials, and more denials will lead to more appeals. The rapid growth of appeals will create an even larger backlog and leave veterans waiting longer periods of time—potentially years—for their cases to be resolved.

Since the court's expansion from five to seven permanent judges in 2011, appeals that have been filed with the court have more than doubled from just under 4,000 to just under 9,000 in 2020. Increasing the number of judges will provide the court with an opportunity to prevent a backlog and provide veterans with decisions in a timely manner.

The addition of this language to the bill is endorsed by the court itself.

Madam Speaker, I urge my colleagues to vote “yes” on H.R. 1530.

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

Mr. CISCOMANI. Madam Speaker, I thank Chairman BOST for yielding me this time to speak in support of Representative LUTTRELL's bill, the Veterans Benefits Improvement Act of 2023.

I am grateful that my bill, the Veterans' Appeals Backlog Improvement Act, is included in this package. My bipartisan bill, which I introduced with Congressman MCGARVEY, is aimed at reducing wait times for our veterans with claims in front of the Board of Veterans' Appeals.

For too many of our veterans, they are waiting weeks, months, and sometimes even years to hear back. These delays create an incredible hurdle for our veterans who are trying to get a potentially life-changing decision.

While progress has been made in this area to older legacy VA appeals from veterans, the backlog is only increasing with newer claims stemming from the PACT Act.

Simply put, the Board of Veterans' Appeals, like all employers, is having issues recruiting employees and does not have enough staff to process the volume of cases. To address this shortage, my bill would create an internship program for law students at the Board of Veterans' Appeals. Additionally, it would create a 9-year pilot honors program at the VA for recruiting entry-level attorneys to work at the Board of Veterans' Appeals.

This bill makes major strides in improving and addressing the backlog and delays that our veterans see far too often and will help recruit much-needed staff.

Madam Speaker, I look forward to supporting this legislation and swift passage on the House floor.

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

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Speaker, I rise as a strong supporter of H.R. 1530, the Veterans Benefits Improvement Act of 2023, which, among other things, would amend title 38 of the United States Code to improve the requirement to publish disability benefit questionnaire forms of Department of Veterans Affairs.

Veterans are some of America's most valued members of society.

These are people who served our nation in a time of need, people who risked their lives to protect our country.

Yet, it pains me to say that many of these same veterans who fought so bravely and risked so much in lands abroad have come back to their nation and have limited access to veterans' outreach programs, particularly in areas with large concentration of veterans.

There are approximately 18.5 million veterans in the United States.

Of those veterans, 1.5 million reside in Texas—the largest veteran population of any state.

This legislation is necessary because veterans have special needs that are unique from those faced by the rest of the population.

In 2015, I was proud to introduce the H.E.R.O.E.S. Act, which offers assistance and materials to help veterans transition from the battlefield to the workplace.

The Veterans Benefits Improvement Act of 2023 is a step closer towards building a smooth transition for our nation's heroes.

H.R. 1530 helps to address the shortcomings in veteran assistance by increasing and extending assistance programs as well as scholarships through the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The Veterans Benefits Improvement Act of 2023 holds the Secretary of Veterans Affairs responsible to improve its support of veterans through outreach; reimbursement for medical disability-related travel; professional development activities; and access to Board of Veterans' Appeals telehearings.

This comprehensive program is needed if we are to fight this scourge that is a blight upon our nation.

Our nation's veterans did not risk their lives abroad so that they could come home and not receive the support and benefits they so desperately need.

We must all have outrage that so many of our nation's veterans live without critical support services; we must continue to proactively find ways to correct this injustice.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. BOST) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 1530, 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. BOST. Madam Speaker, I object to the vote on the ground that a quorum is not present and make the point of order that a quorum is not present.

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

The point of no quorum is considered withdrawn.

BENEFITS FOR CERTAIN CHILDREN OF VIETNAM VETERANS AND CERTAIN OTHER VETERANS

Mr. BOST. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (S. 112) to amend title 38, United States Code, to strengthen benefits for children of Vietnam veterans born with spina bifida, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

S. 112

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

SECTION 1. BENEFITS FOR CERTAIN CHILDREN OF VIETNAM VETERANS AND CERTAIN OTHER VETERANS.

(a) DEFINITIONS.—Section 1831 of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) by redesignating paragraphs (2) and (3) as paragraphs (4) and (5), respectively; and

(2) by inserting after paragraph (1) the following new paragraphs:

“(2) The term ‘covered child’ means a child who is eligible for health care and benefits under this chapter.

“(3) The term ‘covered veteran’ means an individual whose children are eligible for health care and benefits under this chapter.”.

(b) IN GENERAL.—Subchapter IV of chapter 18 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new sections:

“§ 1835. Advisory council

“(a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall establish an advisory council on health care and benefits for covered children.

“(b) MEMBERSHIP.—The advisory council established under subsection (a) shall be composed of Federal employees.

“(c) DUTIES.—The advisory council established under subsection (a) shall solicit feedback from covered children and covered veterans on the health care and benefits provided under this chapter and communicate such feedback to the Secretary.

“§ 1836. Care and coordination teams

“(a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall establish care and coordination teams for covered children.

“(b) OUTREACH.—A care and coordination team established under subsection (a) shall attempt to contact each covered child—

“(1) not less frequently than once every 180 days, to ensure the continued care of the child and assist with any changes in care needed due to a changed situation of the child; and

“(2) as soon as practicable after the identification of a condition listed in the report required by subsection (c).

“(c) REPORT.—Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this section, the Secretary shall submit to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Representatives a report setting forth a list of conditions that will trigger outreach to covered children under subsection (b)(2).

“§ 1837. Duration of health care and benefits provided

“The Secretary shall provide a covered child with health care and benefits under this chapter—

“(1) for the duration of the life of the child; and

“(2) notwithstanding any death of a parent of the child that precedes the death of the child.

“§ 1838. Biennial report

“Not less frequently than once every two years, the Secretary shall submit to Congress a report setting forth the following: