

These investments come at a critical time, when VA employees are being asked to do more with less and provide world-class care in aging and outdated buildings.

The average age of VA-owned buildings is approaching 60 years old, with 1,800 buildings still in active use that are designated as historic or eligible for historic status. Meanwhile, private-sector hospitals are less than 15 years old on average.

Despite its aging infrastructure and these challenges, the Department of Veterans Affairs continues to deliver high-quality healthcare, with VA hospitals once again this year outperforming private hospitals on the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services' annual hospital quality star ratings.

To ensure VA can continue providing exceptional care for years to come, we must invest appropriately in its infrastructure.

H.R. 6324, as amended, authorizes more than \$3.35 billion for major medical facility construction projects in 11 locations, including: \$759.2 million for construction of a new healthcare center and utility plant in El Paso, Texas; \$274.3 million for replacement of a community living center and expansion of parking facilities in Perry Point, Maryland; \$613 million for seismic retrofitting and renovation of buildings, construction of a new specialty care facility, and parking upgrades in Portland, Oregon; and \$311.7 million for construction of a new spinal cord injury building, utility plant upgrades, seismic retrofitting, and other projects in San Diego, California.

These projects will ensure the veterans in these communities have access to the highest level of care VA can provide. This legislation is a crucial step to continue our goal of making critical investments in the modernization of VA medical facilities.

Mr. Speaker, I wholeheartedly support H.R. 6324, as amended, I urge my colleagues to do the same, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. BOST. Mr. Speaker, I am ready to close, and I reserve the balance of my time.

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

I ask all of my colleagues to join me in passing H.R. 6324, the Fiscal Year 2024 Veterans Affairs Major Medical Facility Authorization Act, as amended, and I yield back the balance of my time.

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

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. 6324, 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.

VETERANS' COMPENSATION COST-OF-LIVING ADJUSTMENT ACT OF 2024

Mr. BOST. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 7777) to increase, effective as of December 1, 2024, the rates of compensation for veterans with service-connected disabilities and the rates of dependency and indemnity compensation for the survivors of certain disabled veterans, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 7777

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 "Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2024".

SEC. 2. INCREASE IN RATES OF DISABILITY COMPENSATION AND DEPENDENCY AND INDEMNITY COMPENSATION.

(a) RATE ADJUSTMENT.—Effective on December 1, 2024, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall increase, in accordance with subsection (c), the dollar amounts in effect on November 30, 2024, for the payment of disability compensation and dependency and indemnity compensation under the provisions specified in subsection (b).

(b) AMOUNTS TO BE INCREASED.—The dollar amounts to be increased pursuant to subsection (a) are the following:

(1) WARTIME DISABILITY COMPENSATION.—Each of the dollar amounts under section 1114 of title 38, United States Code.

(2) ADDITIONAL COMPENSATION FOR DEPENDENTS.—Each of the dollar amounts under section 1115(d) of such title.

(3) CLOTHING ALLOWANCE.—The dollar amount under section 1162 of such title.

(4) DEPENDENCY AND INDEMNITY COMPENSATION TO SURVIVING SPOUSE.—Each of the dollar amounts under subsections (a) through (d) of section 1311 of such title.

(5) DEPENDENCY AND INDEMNITY COMPENSATION TO CHILDREN.—Each of the dollar amounts under sections 1313(a) and 1314 of such title.

(c) DETERMINATION OF INCREASE.—Each dollar amount described in subsection (b) shall be increased by the same percentage as the percentage by which benefit amounts payable under title II of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 401 et seq.) are increased effective December 1, 2024, as a result of a determination under section 215(i) of such Act (42 U.S.C. 415(i)).

(d) SPECIAL RULE.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs may adjust administratively, consistent with the increases made under subsection (a), the rates of disability compensation payable to persons under section 10 of Public Law 85-857 (72 Stat. 1263) who have not received compensation under chapter 11 of title 38, United States Code.

SEC. 3. PUBLICATION OF ADJUSTED RATES.

The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall publish in the Federal Register the amounts specified in section 2(b), as increased under that section, not later than the date on which the matters specified in section 215(i)(2)(D) of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 415(i)(2)(D)) are required to be published by reason of a determination made under section 215(i) of such Act during fiscal year 2025.

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. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks on H.R. 7777.

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

There was no objection.

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 7777, offered by my friend and fellow veteran, Representative LUTTRELL.

This bill will ensure that VA compensation benefits for veterans and their surviving loved ones keep pace with inflation and the increased cost of living.

Veterans and their families often depend on VA compensation benefits to pay for daily living expenses and to support their families. This bill would help them meet their financial needs by increasing the amount of certain disability compensation benefits by the same percentage as the cost-of-living increase for Social Security benefits recipients.

Congress must pass the cost-of-living adjustment every year to ensure that our veterans and their loved ones cover their expenses and keep food on the table for their families.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 7777, and I reserve the balance of my time.

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise to express my support for H.R. 7777, the Veterans Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2024.

As we do every year, today, we are considering legislation to increase payments for wartime disability compensation, compensation for dependents, the clothing allowance for certain disabled veterans, and dependency and indemnity compensation for surviving spouses and children. Specifically, this bill mandates that the VA raise these benefit amounts by the same percentage as the cost-of-living adjustment, or COLA, provided to Social Security recipients.

This ensures that veterans and their families maintain their quality of life and are protected from reductions in their earned benefits as economic conditions shift.

The cost-of-living adjustment reflects our Nation's ongoing gratitude for the service and sacrifice of not only those who have bravely worn our Nation's uniform but also to their families, who bear significant burdens as well. As the ranking member of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, I am honored to support this effort.

I also commend the Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs and extend my thanks to Ranking Member PAPPAS and Chairman LUTTRELL for sponsoring this year's House bill and for their steadfast commitment to supporting our veterans.

I fully support H.R. 7777 and urge my colleagues to do the same. I also call on the Senate to swiftly pass this measure.

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

Mr. BOST. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. LUTTRELL), the sponsor of the bill.

Mr. LUTTRELL. Mr. Speaker, I am honored to be here today to speak on my bill, H.R. 7777, the Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2024.

The bill would increase certain amounts of compensation that veterans and their families receive as well as the clothing allowance benefits for certain veterans.

Specifically, the bill would ensure that the VA benefits are adjusted by the same percentage as the cost-of-living adjustment for Social Security benefits recipients.

Veterans and their families often depend on VA compensation benefits to meet their financial needs. This bill is critical to ensure that their VA benefits keep up with inflation and today's increased cost of living.

I appreciate Ranking Member PAPPAS and Mr. BOST for their support of this bill. I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 7777, and I yield back the balance of my time.

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

I ask all my colleagues to join me in passing H.R. 7777, the Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2024, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. BOST. Mr. Speaker, once again, I encourage Members to support the legislation, and I yield back the balance of my time.

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. 7777.

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

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

PRIORITIZING VETERANS' SURVIVORS ACT

Mr. BOST. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 7100) to amend title 38, United States Code, to clarify the organization of the Office of Survivors Assistance of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 7100

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 "Prioritizing Veterans' Survivors Act".

SEC. 2. CLARIFICATION OF ORGANIZATION OF THE OFFICE OF SURVIVORS ASSISTANCE OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

Section 321(a) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by striking "in the Department" and inserting "in the Office of the Secretary".

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. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks on H.R. 7100.

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

There was no objection.

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 7100, as offered by Representative CISCOMANI.

This bill would ensure that VA prioritizes care, services, and benefits for the surviving family members of veterans as much as VA does for the veterans.

The bill would do so by ensuring the VA Office of Survivors Assistance conducts its mission with the Office of the VA Secretary.

In 2008, Congress created an Office of Survivors Assistance to serve as the Secretary's principal adviser and to serve as a resource on all benefits and services for veterans' surviving loved ones.

The Biden-Harris administration did veterans' survivors a disservice by moving this office from the Secretary's office to the Veterans Benefits Administration's Pension and Fiduciary Service. This office is nowhere near the top of the organization chart, and the office no longer advises the Secretary on all benefits and services for those survivors.

The Office of Survivors Assistance is understaffed and no longer has resources for survivors on all care, services, and benefits offered by all VA offices.

Mr. CISCOMANI's bill would correct the Biden-Harris administration's misguided changes and ensure survivors have a seat at the table again.

We must ensure the voices of veterans' surviving families are heard and that they are prioritized by the VA. This bill will ensure that.

I am proud to be co-lead of this bill with Representative CISCOMANI, and I urge all my colleagues to support H.R. 7100.

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

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise to express my support for H.R. 7100, the Prioritizing Veterans' Survivors Act. This bill would require VA to move the Office of Survivors Assistance, or OSA, to a position directly reporting to the Office of the VA Secretary.

The Office of Survivors Assistance was established by statute in 2008 to serve as a resource regarding all benefits and services furnished by the Department to survivors and dependents of deceased veterans and members of the armed services. OSA also serves as a principal adviser to the Secretary and promotes the use of VA benefits, programs, and services to survivors.

Recently, VA moved supervision of OSA from the Office of Outreach, Transition, and Economic Development to VBA's Pension and Fiduciary Service. VA made this move with the idea that it would increase emphasis on the office and oversight of OSA, as VBA has more capacity to properly oversee the function. However, the survivor community has been critical of this move, characterizing it as a downgrade of the function and a diminishing of the importance of survivors in VA's mission. H.R. 7100 is responsive to those concerns.

Historically, there has been a lack of resources dedicated to the mission of serving survivors. For example, there are only three employees in the Office of Survivors Assistance to serve over 450,000 employees—I repeat, three employees in the Office of Survivors Assistance to serve over 450,000.

We also see a lack of awareness of whom is part of the survivor community, where the community is, and a lack of direct and targeted outreach. As such, we have seen an underutilization of survivor benefits, so we must do whatever we can to remedy that situation.

This bill is a small but important step in that process. I would be remiss, however, if I didn't also point to other legislation that we can and should be taking up to improve benefits for survivors.

I have introduced H.R. 7150, the Survivor Benefits Delivery Improvement Act, a bill that puts new tools in VA's hands to aid in reaching survivors where they are and better inform them of the benefits they have earned.

We have Members like JULIA BROWNLEY, who has introduced legislation to extend CHAMP-VA eligibility.

Representative JAHANA HAYES has also introduced legislation to raise the levels of dependency and indemnity compensation benefits on par with other Federal survivor programs.

We have Members like Representative DEAN PHILLIPS who has introduced Love Lives On Act that would repeal the ridiculous penalties survivors face when they choose to remarry.

We have legislation introduced by Representative FRANK MRVAN to increase benefits for those using chapter