

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

35 education benefits, but making those individuals eligible for more robust, comprehensive benefits equal to the Forever GI Bill.

My hope is that in the waning days of this Congress, we see fit to consider these other pieces of legislation, as well. In the meantime, however, I do support this bill, and I encourage my colleagues to support it, as well.

I extend a special thank-you to the survivors who may be listening today and those who are with us only in spirit. Their stories demonstrate bravery and courage, and they deserve every ounce of our effort in creating a VA that is welcoming and accessible, and every dollar of benefits we can muster on their behalf.

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 Arizona (Mr. CISCOMANI), the sponsor of this bill.

Mr. CISCOMANI. Mr. Speaker, I thank Chairman BOST for yielding me time to speak today in support of my bill, H.R. 7100, the Prioritizing Veterans' Survivors Act.

Mr. Speaker, since I was elected, I have heard from military servicemembers and veterans' surviving family members about their struggle accessing VA benefits. In my district, I organized a Veterans Advisory Council, ensuring that surviving spouses and children accessing VA benefits and services is a top priority that we have discussed time and time again. I am always looking for ways to ensure that top VA leaders hear the concerns of veterans' loved ones.

From its creation, the Office of Survivors Assistance, or OSA, was meant to serve as the principal adviser to the VA Secretary on all survivors' benefits and services, including medical care and burial benefits.

When VA began operating the OSA within the Veterans Benefits Administration, the VA deprioritized survivors policy and skirted Congress' intent when they created this office. My bill would fix this, requiring OSA to operate within the Secretary's office, thereby prioritizing advocacy and services for servicemembers' and veterans' surviving spouses and families.

I would like to highlight the comment of a member of my Veterans Advisory Council, Ms. Jane Strain, a surviving spouse and an Army veteran herself. She said: "Surviving spouses and families are family members who cared for children, moved many times during a military career, compromised their careers, and maintained home life while the servicemember deployed. They have earned and deserve attention when the spouse has passed. Placing the OSA directly under the Secretary will help to recognize the importance of this population."

I was proud to work alongside Chairman BOST to ensure survivors have a seat at the table.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to vote in favor of this commonsense legislation.

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I urge all of my colleagues to join me in passing H.R. 7100, the Prioritizing Veterans' Survivors Act, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. BOST. Mr. Speaker, once again, I encourage all Members to support this 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. 7100.

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.

VIETNAM VETERANS LIVER FLUKE CANCER STUDY ACT

Mr. BOST. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 4424) to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to study and report on the prevalence of cholangiocarcinoma in veterans who served in the Vietnam theater of operations during the Vietnam era, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 4424

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 "Vietnam Veterans Liver Fluke Cancer Study Act".

SEC. 2. STUDY ON THE PREVALENCE OF CHOLANGIOCARCINOMA IN VETERANS WHO SERVED IN THE VIETNAM THEATER OF OPERATIONS DURING THE VIETNAM ERA.

(a) *EPIDEMIOLOGICAL STUDY.*—Not later than 120 days after the date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, in consultation with the Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention of the Department of Health and Human Services, shall commence an epidemiological study on the prevalence of cholangiocarcinoma in covered veterans of the Vietnam era, using data from the Veterans Affairs Central Cancer Registry and the National Program of Cancer Registries. The study shall—

(1) identify the rate of incidence of cholangiocarcinoma in covered veterans of the Vietnam era and in residents of the United States, from the beginning of the Vietnam era to the date of enactment of this Act; and

(2) for each of the groups specified in paragraph (1), identify the percentage of individuals with cholangiocarcinoma by various demographic characteristics, including by age, gender, race, ethnicity, and the geographic location of the patient at the time of diagnosis.

(b) *REPORT TO CONGRESS.*—Not later than one year after the completion of the study under subsection (a), the Secretary shall submit to Congress a report containing—

(1) the results of the study under subsection (a); and

(2) recommendations for administrative or legislative actions required to address issues identified in the study under subsection (a).

(c) *CONTINUED TRACKING OF CHOLANGIOCARCINOMA IN COVERED VETERANS OF THE VIETNAM ERA.*—The Secretary shall track the prevalence of cholangiocarcinoma in covered veterans of the Vietnam era using the Veterans

Affairs Central Cancer Registry, and provide such information to Congress as required under subsection (d).

(d) *FOLLOW-UP REPORTS.*—The Secretary shall periodically submit to the Congress an updated report under subsection (b), as determined by the Secretary.

(e) *DEFINITIONS.*—In this section:

(1) The term "Secretary" means the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

(2) The term "Vietnam era" has the meaning given such term in section 101 of title 38, United States Code.

(3) The term "covered veterans of the Vietnam era" means veterans who served in the Vietnam theater of operations during the Vietnam era.

SEC. 3. MODIFICATION OF CERTAIN HOUSING LOAN FEES.

The loan fee table in section 3729(b)(2) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by striking "November 15, 2031" each place it appears and inserting "November 29, 2031".

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.

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. 4424, as amended, introduced by my friend and fellow veteran, Mr. LALOTA from New York. Representative LALOTA's bill would require VA to conduct a study and produce a report on the frequency of bile duct cancer for veterans who served in and around the Vietnam war.

Mr. Speaker, it goes without saying that many veterans and Vietnam veterans suffered greatly in their service to their country. Thousands of Vietnam veterans still live with the invisible and visible wounds of war today.

Eating uncooked fish while deployed over 60 years ago may have added to that harm. Certain undercooked fish contain a parasite known as a liver fluke, which can cause infection and scarring that could lead to bile duct cancer.

This type of cancer is a rare form of cancer and is in the U.S. but is more common in Southeast Asia. The study in this bill would rightly require VA to determine if the bile duct cancer is a result of the Vietnam-era veterans' deployment in that region.

One of the VA's most important missions is to take care of veterans' service-connected injuries. This study would help uphold that sacred mission. This bill is also an important step in continuing to ensure our Vietnam veterans receive the respect and care they have earned.

Mr. Speaker, I thank Mr. LALOTA for his vitally important work on this bill, and I urge all of my colleagues to support H.R. 4424, as amended.