

Mr. Speaker, 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. 4424, the Vietnam Veterans Liver Fluke Cancer Study Act, as amended.

Liver fluke is a serious parasitic infection that is a well-recognized risk factor for the development of bile duct cancer.

H.R. 4424, as amended, would require VA, in consultation with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, to commence an epidemiological study on the prevalence of bile duct cancer in veterans who served in the Vietnam war versus their nonveteran U.S. resident counterparts. This legislation requires VA to submit a regular report with the results of the study broken out by age, gender, race, ethnicity, and geographic location.

I certainly understand why Vietnam war veterans would be concerned about their exposure to this disease and believe we should do everything possible to ensure veterans have access to care and treatment for diseases they may have been exposed to as a part of their service.

Mr. Speaker, while I have concerns that this effort is duplicative given VA's previous and ongoing research on this disorder, I welcome additional research and will support the bill today, and I urge my colleagues to do the same.

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 New York (Mr. LALOTA), the sponsor of the bill.

Mr. LALOTA. Mr. Speaker, I thank the chairman, a Marine Corps veteran, for yielding.

Mr. Speaker, there is an obvious link between liver fluke disease and our Vietnam veterans' service in that war, but the VA won't cover their care. My bill would help fix that and do right by our Vietnam veterans.

Data from multiple studies clearly demonstrate Vietnam veterans have a much greater chance of contracting, suffering from, and dying from the liver fluke parasite, yet the VA does not help veterans who are fighting liver fluke disease. That is wrong, Mr. Speaker.

The correlation between the liver fluke parasite and service in Vietnam is obvious. In 2018, the Northport VA Medical Center conducted a first-of-its-kind study using a 50-veteran sample size. The initial results of that study highlighted three things: a substantial need for greater study of this issue; two, the development of standardized treatment options; and three, broader accessibility of care for veterans at VA facilities across the country.

That study was 6 years ago and could have been justification enough for the VA to start covering affected Vietnam veterans, but the VA insisted on an-

other study. A second study was ordered. After years of delays, supposedly due to the pandemic, a more recent study finally concluded in 2024. The 2024 study affirmed what so many Vietnam veterans have been saying for years, that there is indeed a link between the liver fluke disease and service in Vietnam.

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Specifically, the study in which Marine Corps veterans participated demonstrate that there is a 30 percent greater risk of mortality from this liver fluke disease for marines who served in the Vietnam war theater as compared to marines who served elsewhere.

Mr. Speaker, you would think these findings, coupled with the 2018 findings, would be justification enough for the VA to start covering affected Vietnam veterans. Yet, after multiple in-depth studies which corroborate the link between our veterans' service in Vietnam and the rare liver fluke disease, the VA still says these studies still are not enough.

To fight the VA's ambivalence towards these Vietnam veterans, I am urging all of my colleagues to support my bipartisan legislation, H.R. 4424, the Vietnam Veterans Liver Fluke Cancer Study Act.

This act would require the VA, in conjunction with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, to conduct a third study to determine the prevalence of liver fluke amongst the Vietnam veteran population.

If the VA won't take action, then we will continue to force them to confront the facts until they come to the same conclusion as the rest of us.

Our Vietnam veterans are dying every day, and we do not have the luxury of time. Too much time has passed already. We went through a similar and terrible situation with our blue water Navy veterans and Agent Orange. Let us not make the same mistake with liver fluke.

I thank Chairman BOST and Ranking Member TAKANO for their leadership and support of this critical legislation. Together, we can make sure that our Vietnam veterans get the care, recognition, and support they so rightfully deserve.

Mr. BOST. Mr. Speaker, I have no further speakers on this particular legislation, I am ready to close, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I have no further speakers, and I yield myself the balance of my time to close.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all of my colleagues to join me in passing H.R. 4424, the Vietnam Veterans Liver Fluke Cancer Study Act, as amended, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. BOST. Mr. Speaker, once again, I also encourage 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. 4424, 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 ACCESSIBILITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE ACT OF 2024

Mr. BOST. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 7342) to establish the Veterans Advisory Committee on Equal Access, and for other purposes as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 7342

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 Accessibility Advisory Committee Act of 2024".

SEC. 2. VETERANS ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON EQUAL ACCESS.

(a) ESTABLISHMENT.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall establish within the Department of Veterans Affairs an advisory committee on matters relating to accessibility of the Department for individuals with disabilities.

(2) DESIGNATION.—The advisory committee established by paragraph (1) shall be known as the "Veterans Advisory Committee on Equal Access" (in this section the "Advisory Committee").

(b) MEMBERSHIP.—

(1) VOTING MEMBERS.—The Advisory Committee shall be composed of 15 voting members, appointed by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs. In appointing such members, the Secretary shall ensure the following:

(A) Four are veterans with disabilities, including mobility impairment, hearing, visual, and mental or cognitive disabilities.

(B) Four are experts on issues described in subsection (f)(1)(A) or the provisions of law set forth under subsection (f)(1)(B).

(C) Two are employees of the Department, one from the Section 508 Office and one from the Architectural Accessibility Program, who oversee the compliance of the Department with Federal accessibility laws.

(D) Five are representatives nominated by national veterans service organizations that advocate for veterans with physical, sensory, mental, or cognitive disabilities.

(2) EX OFFICIO MEMBERS.—The Advisory Committee shall also include four ex officio members (or their designees):

(A) The Under Secretary for Health.

(B) The Under Secretary for Benefits.

(C) The Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs.

(D) The chairperson of the Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board (known as the "Access Board").

(c) TERMS; VACANCIES.—

(1) TERMS.—A member of the Advisory Committee shall be appointed for a term of two years. The Secretary may reappoint members to the Advisory Committee for such additional two-year terms as the Secretary determines appropriate.

(2) VACANCIES.—The Secretary shall fill a vacancy in the Advisory Committee in the same manner as the original appointment

not later than 180 days after such vacancy occurs.

(d) MEETINGS.—

(1) FREQUENCY.—The Advisory Committee shall meet not less frequently than twice each year.

(2) SUBCOMMITTEES.—The Advisory Committee may form subcommittees, which shall meet as often as required.

(3) QUORUM.—A majority of the members of the Advisory Committee shall constitute a quorum.

(e) CHAIRPERSON.—Members of the Advisory Committee shall select a Chairperson from among the members of the Advisory Committee. If the position of Chairperson becomes vacant, the members of the Advisory Committee shall select a new Chairperson not later than 30 days after the date on which the position became vacant.

(f) DUTIES.—

(1) REQUIREMENT TO CONSULT AND SEEK ADVICE.—On a regular basis, the Secretary shall consult with and seek the advice of the Advisory Committee—

(A) on improving the accessibility of the Department for individuals with disabilities, including improving—

(i) the accessibility of information of the Department, including electronic information;

(ii) the accessibility of the services and benefits furnished by the Department;

(iii) the accessibility of the facilities of the Department;

(iv) the accessibility of facilities of health care providers furnishing care or services under the Veterans Community Care Program under section 1703 of title 38, United States Code; and

(v) the acquisition process of the Department to ensure that products and services, including information technology and information and communication technology (as defined in the standards issued by the Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board pursuant to section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. 794d)), are accessible when purchased; and

(B) for ensuring the compliance of the Department with provisions of law relating to disability and accessibility, including—

(i) the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. 12184 et seq.);

(ii) sections 504 and 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. 791, 794, and 794d);

(iii) the Plain Writing Act of 2010 (5 U.S.C. 301 note);

(iv) the 21st Century Integrated Digital Experience Act (44 U.S.C. 3501 note);

(v) the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968 (Public Law 90-480); and

(vi) such other provisions of Federal law as may be that ensure equal access to Federal facilities, benefits, or services for individuals with disabilities.

(2) PROVISION OF ADVICE.—In providing advice to the Secretary, the Advisory Committee shall, focusing on the areas of greatest need for the Department—

(A) assess the disability access needs of veterans, the public, and Department employees for full access to the Department's information, services, and benefits by reviewing relevant information, such as filed complaints by people with disabilities or physical assessments of the Department's facilities;

(B) provide assessments of accessibility at the Department and the compliance of the Department with applicable provisions of law relating to disability and accessibility; and

(C) provide advice on improving accessibility at the Department, including the accessibility of all—

(i) communications, including internal and public facing;

(ii) services and benefits; and

(iii) facilities.

(3) REPORTS.—

(A) REPORTS TO THE SECRETARY.—Not later than two years after the date of the first meeting of the Advisory Committee, and not less frequently than once every two years thereafter, the Advisory Committee shall submit to the Secretary a report that, focusing on areas of greatest need for the Department—

(i) identifies and assesses access barriers affecting veterans, the public, and employees of the Department;

(ii) determines the extent to which the programs and activities of the Department address the barriers identified in clause (i), including compliance of the Department with provisions of law relating to accessibility law and reporting;

(iii) provides recommendations and access priorities to improve the accessibility of the Department's services, benefits, information, technology, and facilities;

(iv) provides a description of access improvements and assesses the Department's implementation of recommendations from previous reports of the Advisory Committee, including any unmet recommendations that remain necessary for improving accessibility for the Department; and

(v) provides any recommendations for legislation, administrative action, or other actions that the Advisory Committee determines appropriate.

(B) REPORTS TO CONGRESS AND FEDERAL AGENCIES.—

(i) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 90 days after the receipt of a report required under subparagraph (A), the Secretary shall submit to the appropriate congressional committees a copy of such report and any comments and recommendations of the Secretary concerning such report that the Secretary determines appropriate.

(ii) AVAILABILITY TO THE PUBLIC.—The Secretary shall publish on a publicly accessible website of the Department such report and such comments and recommendations as may have been submitted along with such report.

(iii) APPROPRIATE CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEES.—In this subparagraph, the term “appropriate congressional committees” means—

(I) the Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and House of Representatives;

(II) the Special Committee on Aging of the Senate; and

(III) the Committee on Education and the Workforce of the House of Representatives.

(g) ADVISORY COMMITTEE PERSONNEL AND RESOURCE MATTERS.—

(1) COMPENSATION OF MEMBERS.—A member of the Commission who is not an officer or employee of the Federal Government shall not be compensated for the performance of the duties of the Advisory Committee.

(2) TRAVEL EXPENSES.—A member of the Advisory Committee shall be allowed travel expenses, including per diem in lieu of subsistence, at rates authorized for employees of agencies under subchapter I of chapter 57 of title 5, United States Code, while away from their homes or regular places of business in the performance of services for the Advisory Committee.

(3) RESOURCES.—The Secretary shall ensure that such personnel, funding, and other resources are made available to the Advisory Committee as the Secretary determines appropriate to carry out the duties of the Advisory Committee.

(4) INFORMATION.—The Secretary shall furnish to the Advisory Committee such information as the Advisory Committee may request from the Secretary, subject to applicable provisions of law.

(h) TERMINATION OF ADVISORY COMMITTEE.—The Advisory Committee shall terminate on the date that is 10 years after the date of the enactment of this Act.

SEC. 3. ABOLITION OF INACTIVE ADVISORY COMMITTEE.

Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act and before establishing the Veterans Advisory Committee on Equal Access under section 2, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall—

(1) abolish an advisory committee of the Department of Veterans Affairs that—

(A) was not established by an Act of Congress; and

(B) is inactive;

(2) consolidate two advisory committees described in paragraph (1); or

(3) submit to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and House of Representatives a recommendation to abolish an advisory committee of the Department that—

(A) was established by an Act of Congress; and

(B) is inactive.

SEC. 4. 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 (Mr. LOPEZ). 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. 7342, as amended.

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. 7342, offered by my friend and colleague, Congressman DAVID VALADAO of California.

This bill would direct the Department of Veterans Affairs to establish the Veterans Advisory Committee on Equal Access. The committee would advise the VA Secretary on how to improve access to VA services, programs, and facilities for veterans living with disabilities to enhance their experience at VA.

The committee would rightfully bring together veterans with disabilities, subject matter experts, VA employees, and representatives of veterans service organizations to get to the heart of the matter.

Mr. Speaker, it goes without saying that this is long overdue.

Americans with disabilities are entitled to equal access to healthcare and benefits nationwide, and that includes at VA. Congress made that very clear through the Americans with Disabilities Act and other laws, but veterans with disabilities are still being shortchanged far too often.

We know these accessible gaps still exist because of the work of the Paralyzed Veterans of America, the Blinded

Veterans Association, other VSOs and advocacy groups, and the work of this committee.

I thank them for their collaboration with Congress on this legislation. Their only focus is to eliminate barriers and achieve universal access and equality for veterans living with disabilities. This is an important goal, and I believe the advisory committee is well justified.

I also share many of my colleagues' concerns about the growth of advisory committees in the Federal Government. There are simply too many. That is why this legislation would direct VA to eliminate or consolidate an inactive advisory committee.

This bill is a reasonable step forward to use VA resources wisely and ultimately improve access for veterans living with disabilities.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all of my colleagues to support H.R. 7342, as amended, 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 today in support of H.R. 7342, as amended, the Veterans Accessibility Advisory Committee Act of 2024. This bill establishes an advisory committee that brings disabled veterans' voices into the fold and provides a seat at the table with top decisionmakers at VA.

Access is an issue I have sought to champion during my time in Congress, and particularly during my time with the Veterans' Affairs Committee.

Disabled veterans still face many barriers in accessing the care and services they have rightfully earned. Those barriers deserve the time and attention of a VA advisory committee so that experts can come together to improve how veterans with disabilities access their care and benefits.

Advocates like the Blinded Veterans Association, Paralyzed Veterans of America, and Disabled American Veterans, have been tireless voices in our communities, raising awareness of these issues.

Establishing a Veterans Accessibility Advisory Committee will provide a direct line for these voices to be heard and for change to be made at VA so that all veterans can access their care and benefits with ease.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to vote "yes" on this bill, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. BOST. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from California (Mr. VALADAO), who has sponsored the bill.

Mr. VALADAO. Mr. Speaker, I thank the chairman for yielding, and I thank him and his committee for all their help on getting this bill here.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to urge my colleagues to support my bill, the Veterans Accessibility Advisory Committee Act. Sadly, many disabled veterans in the Central Valley and across the country are facing barriers in accessing the critical services they need.

From struggling with physical infrastructure at VA facilities to navigating the red tape in the benefits process, disabled veterans are too often getting left behind.

Doorways that are too narrow, elevators that are constantly out of service, and exam rooms that aren't big enough to accommodate wheelchairs are just a few obstacles veterans face when trying to receive care.

Serving disabled veterans is a critical part of the VA's mission, but they need to do more to ensure the unique needs of disabled veterans are being heard.

By establishing a permanent advisory committee within the VA, my bill ensures disabled veterans have a seat at the table in providing feedback so they can easily access the benefits, services, and facilities they have earned.

We cannot leave our disabled veterans behind. Our veterans have sacrificed so much for our Nation, and they deserve a VA that is responsive to their needs.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all of my colleagues to support this legislation.

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I have no further speakers, and I yield myself the balance of my time to close.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all of my colleagues to join me in passing H.R. 7342, the Veterans Accessibility Advisory Committee Act of 2024, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. BOST. Mr. Speaker, once again, I encourage all Members to support this legislation to improve access to VA services for veterans with disabilities, 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. 7342, 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.

CLEAR COMMUNICATION FOR VETERANS CLAIMS ACT

Mr. BOST. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 7816) to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to seek to enter into an agreement with a federally funded research and development center for an assessment of notice letters that the Secretary sends to claimants for benefits under laws administered by the Secretary, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 7816

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 "Clear Communication for Veterans Claims Act".

SEC. 2. INDEPENDENT ASSESSMENT OF NOTICES THAT THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS SENDS TO CLAIMANTS.

(a) AGREEMENT.—Not later than 30 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall seek to enter into an agreement with an FFRDC for an assessment of notices that the Secretary sends to claimants.

(b) ASSESSMENT.—An FFRDC that enters to an agreement under subsection (a) shall submit to the Secretary a written assessment of such notices. The assessment shall include the following:

(1) The determination of the FFRDC, made in consultation with covered entities, whether each such notice may be feasibly altered to reduce paper consumption by, and costs to, the Federal Government.

(2) The recommendations of the FFRDC regarding how the Secretary may make such notices clearer to claimants, better organized, and more concise.

(c) REPORT; IMPLEMENTATION.—Not later than 90 days after the Secretary receives the assessment under subsection (b), the Secretary shall—

(1) submit to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and House of Representatives a copy of such assessment; and

(2) implement the recommendations in the assessment that are in compliance with the laws administered by the Secretary.

(d) DEADLINE FOR IMPLEMENTATION.—The Secretary shall complete the implementation of such recommendations pursuant to subsection (c)(2) by not later than one year after the date on which the Secretary commences such implementation.

(e) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

(1) The term "FFRDC" means a federally funded research and development center.

(2) The term "covered entities" includes—

(A) the Secretary of Veterans Affairs;

(B) an expert in laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs;

(C) a veterans service organization recognized under section 5902 of title 38, United States Code; and

(D) an entity that advocates for veterans.

(3) The terms "claimant" and "notice" have the meanings given such terms in section 5100 of title 38, United States Code.

SEC. 3. EXTENSION OF CERTAIN LIMITS ON PAYMENTS OF PENSION.

Section 5503(d)(7) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by striking "November 30, 2031" and inserting "December 31, 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 have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks on H.R. 7816, as amended.

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. 7816, as amended. This bill was introduced by my colleague, Representative DUARTE, and I am a proud cosponsor.

This bill, H.R. 7816, as amended, would require VA to contract with a