

This bill would require VA to publish disability compensation exam questionnaires on VA's website so that healthcare professionals can properly complete exams for veterans seeking disability benefits.

It would also ensure that contracted examiners communicate with veterans' representatives when scheduling disability compensation exams.

S. 2513 also includes Representative CISCOMANI's companion proposal to create a new internship program at the VA Board of Veterans' Appeals. This program would encourage law school graduates to join the fight for veterans and improve hiring at VA.

Finally, this bill includes Representative SELF's companion proposal to ensure that the U.S. Court of Appeals for veterans claims has enough judges to provide veterans and survivors with timely decisions on their claims.

These commonsense solutions would help veterans and their families receive faster decisions on their claims for VA benefits.

Mr. Speaker, I thank Mr. LUTTRELL, Mr. CISCOMANI, and Mr. SELF for their important work on this bill. I urge my colleagues to support S. 2513, 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 S. 2513, the Veterans Benefits Improvement Act.

I thank Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs Subcommittee Chairman LUTTRELL and Ranking Member PAPPAS for working in a bipartisan manner on the House companion to this package, which passed this body in September of last year. I also commend Representative CISCOMANI and Representative MCGARVEY for their contributions to this bill.

Mr. Speaker, this bill makes several important changes that will help to streamline the medical disability exam process for veterans. It will also help to 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, bar exam fees, and dues.

Mr. Speaker, this bill also increases by one the number of temporary 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.

Unfortunately, this is a much-paraded provision from the version originally considered by the House last year. This bill languished because Senate Republicans refused to expand the court, albeit on a temporary basis, until this moment. How curious.

Nevertheless, I do support this expansion, and I hope that we can do more in the future. I support S. 2513, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. BOST. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. LUTTRELL), the sponsor of the bill.

Mr. LUTTRELL. Mr. Speaker, I thank Chairman BOST for yielding me time.

Mr. Speaker, I am honored to be here today to speak on S. 2513, the Veterans Benefits Improvement Act of 2024. I am proud to lead the House companion to this bill, H.R. 1530.

Right now, the VA disability compensation claims process has too many barriers that prevent veterans from quickly receiving accurate decisions on their claims for VA benefits.

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This bill would cut down on all the red tape. The bill would improve the quality of disability compensation exams by requiring VA to publish those exam forms online and ensure that veterans' representatives are notified of scheduled contracted disability compensation exams so that the veterans do not miss their appointments.

These are commonsense solutions to make the process for applying for disability benefits easier on veterans and their families.

As a veteran myself and chairman of the Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs, I know the difference these changes will make.

I also thank Representative CISCOMANI and Representative SELF for working with me on including their legislative proposals in my bill. Their provisions would help ensure that VA and the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims can hire and retain personnel required to process disability compensation claims and provide veterans with timely decisions on their claims.

These provisions are vitally important in light of the growing inventory of disability compensation claims after the implementation of the PACT Act. I am proud of this bill because it addresses many problems that the Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs have tried to fix during this Congress.

Mr. Speaker, I thank Ranking Member PAPPAS, Ranking Member TAKANO, and Chairman BOST for their leadership, and I urge my colleagues to support S. 2513.

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

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I ask all my colleagues to join me in passing S. 2513, the Veterans Benefits Improvement Act, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. BOST. Mr. Speaker, I encourage all of my colleagues 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, S. 2513.

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.

REDUCING EXCESSIVE VETTING AUTHORITIES TO MAINTAIN OUR PORTS ACT

Mr. TONY GONZALES of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 8150) to require the Commissioner of U.S. Customs and Border Protection to establish procedures for conducting maintenance projects at ports of entry at which the Office of Field Operations conducts certain enforcement and facilitation activities, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 8150

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 "Reducing Excessive Vetting Authorities to Maintain our Ports Act" or the "REVAMP Act".

SEC. 2. PORT MAINTENANCE.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Section 411(o) of the Homeland Security Act of 2002 (6 U.S.C. 211(o)) is amended—

(1) by redesignating paragraph (3) as paragraph (4); and

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

“(3) PORT MAINTENANCE.—

“(A) PROCEDURES.—

“(i) IN GENERAL.—Notwithstanding section 3305 of title 40, United States Code, subject to subparagraph (B), the Commissioner, in consultation with the Administrator of General Services—

“(I) shall establish guidance and procedures by which U.S. Customs and Border Protection may conduct maintenance and repair projects costing not more than \$300,000 in the physical space at any Federal Government-owned port of entry at which the Office of Field Operations performs any of the activities described in subparagraphs (A) through (G) of subsection (g)(3); and

“(II) is authorized to perform such maintenance and repair projects, subject to the procedures described in clause (ii).

“(ii) GUIDANCE AND PROCEDURES DESCRIBED.—The guidance and procedures established pursuant to clause (i) shall include—

“(I) a description of the types of projects that may be carried out pursuant to clause (i); and

“(II) the procedures for identifying and addressing any impacts on other tenants of facilities where such projects will be carried out.

“(iii) PUBLICATION OF GUIDANCE AND PROCEDURES.—The guidance and procedures established pursuant to clause (i) shall be published in the Federal Register.

“(iv) RULE OF CONSTRUCTION.—The publication of guidance and procedures under clause (iii) shall not impact the authority of the Commissioner to update such procedures, in consultation with the Administrator, as appropriate.

“(B) LIMITATION.—The authority under subparagraph (A) shall only be available for maintenance and repair projects involving existing infrastructure, property, and capital at any port of entry described in such subparagraph.

“(C) RULE OF CONSTRUCTION.—Nothing in this paragraph may be construed to affect the availability of funding from—

“(i) the Federal Buildings Fund established under section 592 of title 40, United States Code;

“(ii) the Donation Acceptance Program established under section 482; or

“(iii) any other statutory authority or appropriation for projects described in subparagraph (A).”.

(b) REPORTING.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one year after the date of the enactment of this Act and annually thereafter, the Commissioner of U.S. Customs and Border Protection shall submit to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs of the Senate, the Committee on Appropriations of the Senate, the Committee on Homeland Security of the House of Representatives, and the Committee on Appropriations of the House of Representatives a report that includes the elements described in paragraph (2).

(2) ELEMENTS.—The elements described in this paragraph are the following:

(A) A summary of all maintenance projects conducted pursuant to section 411(o)(3) of the Homeland Security Act of 2002, as added by subsection (a) during the prior fiscal year.

(B) Information relating to the cost of each project referred to in subparagraph (A) of such section.

(C) An identification of the account that funded each such project, if applicable.

(D) any budgetary transfers, if applicable, that funded each such project.

(c) TECHNICAL AMENDMENT.—Section 422(a) of the Homeland Security Act of 2002 (6 U.S.C. 232(a)) is amended by inserting “section 411(o)(3) of this Act and” after “Administrator under”.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. TONY GONZALES) and the gentleman from California (Mr. CORREA) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. TONY GONZALES of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and to include extraneous material on H.R. 8150.

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

There was no objection.

Mr. TONY GONZALES of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of my bipartisan bill, H.R. 8150, the Reducing Excessive Vetting Authorities to Maintain our Ports Act.

Land ports of entry are a critical line of defense against fentanyl, drugs, and other illicit contraband that have plagued our communities.

Our ports of entry also bring in billions of dollars' worth of trade into our economy and serve as a lifeline for many cities along the border.

To help Customs officers carry out their mission, our international bridges must be kept in the best shape possible. My bill does just that by reducing the bureaucracy that is required to repair and maintain our ports of entry.

While the GSA has the primary authority to maintain our Federal facilities, there is a significant backlog for these projects and our ports of entry are no exception.

Currently, the GSA grants CBP the ability to perform limited repair

projects if the cost is less than \$100,000. Delegating this authority saves every-one time, and we all know that time is money.

My commonsense legislation would simply increase that number from \$100,000 to a \$300,000 threshold so that more of these minor projects at our ports of entry can be done quickly and efficiently.

This helps trade, this helps our taxpayers, and this helps our Customs personnel that work so hard to secure our borders.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to vote “yes” on H.R. 8150, the REVAMP Act, and I reserve the balance of my time.

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 8150, which allows Customs and Border Protection to make low-cost maintenance repairs at our ports of entry without involving the General Service Administration.

It makes sense to allow CBP to carry out expedited low-cost repairs needed to facilitate their operations at our ports of entry. We should not let minor maintenance issues slow down or disrupt legal trade and travel through our ports of entry. I am proud to be an original cosponsor of this legislation, which eliminates red tape.

I thank Representative GONZALES for leading this important initiative. This is a commonsense bill, Mr. Speaker. It allows CBP to carry out low-cost repairs needed to facilitate the operations at our ports of entry.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all my colleagues to support this measure, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. TONY GONZALES of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 8150, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Texas (Mr. TONY GONZALES) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 8150, 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.

WORKING DOG HEALTH AND WELFARE ACT OF 2023

Mr. BURLISON. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (S. 2414) to require agencies with working dog programs to implement the recommendations of the Government Accountability Office relating to the health and welfare of working dogs, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

S. 2414

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 “Working Dog Health and Welfare Act of 2023”.

SEC. 2. IMPLEMENTATION OF WORKING DOG RECOMMENDATIONS.

(a) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

(1) AGENCY.—The term “agency” has the meaning given the term in section 551 of title 5, United States Code.

(2) WORKING DOG.—The term “working dog” means a dog that has received specialized training in order to perform a particular productive function.

(3) WORKING DOG PROGRAM.—The term “working dog program” means a program, the operations of which include the employment of working dogs.

(4) WORKING DOG RECOMMENDATIONS.—The term “working dog recommendations” means the recommendations included in the report of the Government Accountability Office entitled “Working Dogs: Federal Agencies Need to Better Address Health and Welfare”, as published in October 2022.

(b) IMPLEMENTATION.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 180 days after the date of enactment of this Act, the head of each agency that manages a working dog program shall implement the working dog recommendations.

(2) CONTRACTORS.—Not later than 180 days after the date of enactment of this Act, a contractor that manages a working dog program on behalf of an agency shall implement the working dog recommendations.

(3) REPORT.—Not later than 60 days after the date on which the head of an agency or a contractor that manages a working dog program on behalf of an agency implements the working dog recommendations under this subsection, the head of the agency shall submit to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs of the Senate and the Committee on Oversight and Accountability of the House of Representatives a report on the explicit steps the agency or contractor has taken to complete the implementation.

(c) FOREIGN PARTNERS.—Not later than 180 days after the date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary of State shall take appropriate steps to ensure that donations of working dogs provided to foreign partners by the Department of State are executed and monitored according to the working dog recommendations.

(d) NEW WORKING DOG PROGRAMS.—With respect to an agency that establishes a working dog program, or enters into a contract for the establishment of a working dog program, after the date of enactment of this Act, the head of the agency shall ensure that the working dog program implements the working dog recommendations.

(e) NO ADDITIONAL FUNDS.—No additional funds are authorized to be appropriated for the purpose of carrying out this Act.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. BURLISON) and the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. RASKIN) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Missouri.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. BURLISON. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on this measure.

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

There was no objection.