

this debt and the steps that can be taken to address the issue. The letter is time stamped when mailed and, if what VA is asking for is not received within a specific timeline, the veteran loses the ability to take certain actions toward addressing or disputing the debt.

Many veterans come to every one of our offices reporting never receiving these letters. I know all of us have heard that story. These are people who I know and trust. It got sent to the wrong address, something happened, and they never got it.

Further, the letter VA is sending is full of complicated legal terms and citations of public laws. We know these letters alarm and confuse veterans unnecessarily. I have personally had them come in, show them to me, and as the ranking member of the Veterans' Affairs Committee—and it is a VA letter—I don't understand what they are asking for in this from a veteran who receives it out of nowhere.

The bill before us today represents a real bipartisan effort to ensure that veterans get timely notices of overpayments or debt, and that these notices are respectful, informative, helpful, and collaborative.

It does it in three ways. First, H.R. 3705, as amended, directs the Secretary to develop a way veterans may elect to receive debt notification letters by email in addition to receiving standard mail notices. Imagine that in 2017.

Second, it directs VA to conduct a study of the problem of veterans not receiving debt letters and to provide a description of the nonlegislative actions the Secretary could take to reduce the number of incorrect addresses, particularly by using the other VHA databases.

At this point in time, I would also note we are taking steps in our committee to make sure now, when you leave the service, that we are able to capture emails, we are able to capture alternate addresses to make sure because a lot of times veterans are in transition, they are moving, those types of things are happening.

Third and most importantly, the bill requires that, in the future, debt notices provide a clear explanation in understandable language for why the debt is owed and what due process options a veteran has available to her or him.

The CBO has estimated the cost of this measure to be insignificant.

The approaches in the bill are the first steps to remedying a longstanding problem and will make a positive change for the thousands of veterans who receive overpayment notices.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs Subcommittee Chairman MIKE BOST and Ranking Member ELIZABETH ESTY for working together on this legislation, in addition to Dr. ROE. We are also going to hear from the author of this piece of legislation. Certainly I encourage support of H.R. 3705.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 4 minutes to the gentlewoman from Maine (Ms. PIN-

GREE), who is the author of this good, smart, overdue piece of legislation.

Ms. PINGREE. Mr. Speaker, I thank the ranking member for yielding me the time and for all those wonderful compliments. I don't know that I have ever had that said about a bill that I have submitted, so I am very happy to be here today and to be able to support the Veterans Fair Debt Notice Act.

Mr. Speaker, as you heard, this bill offers a commonsense fix to frustrations that veterans in my district and across the country have experienced with VA's debt management system.

Veterans in Maine have called my office shocked to find out that they owe VA money. Some are confused by the letters they receive. Others are told by VA that they have missed important deadlines to dispute, to seek forgiveness, or to create a payment plan for the alleged debt.

Regardless of whether the debt is real or a mistake by VA, we shouldn't make it so hard for veterans to know their rights and obligations.

We have seen single mom veterans who can't get a home loan and newly transitioned servicemembers who struggle to reintegrate with garnished pay, recouped tax returns, and reduced disability payments, all because of assigned debts they knew nothing about after notifications got sent to the wrong place or "lost in the mail."

In response, H.R. 3705 directs VA to work with veterans service organizations to develop standard notification letters that are written in plain language. It also directs VA to explore how to inform veterans of debts more quickly by sending notifications electronically, like an email, in addition to standard mail.

It requires VA to study why so many veterans have not received notifications in the mail, as well as steps VA can take to improve its address database and the costs using certified mail.

I thank Chairmen ROE and BOST and Ranking Members WALZ and ESTY for bringing this legislation to the House floor, and I urge its passage.

Mr. WALZ. In closing, Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman from Maine for her remarks. This is a good piece of legislation. As I have said, everybody who serves in this House has received veterans in their office either carrying this letter or talking about a letter they never received. This makes it much better. It gives the benefit of the doubt back to the veteran and makes it easier for them to get this solved in the right manner.

Mr. Speaker, please join me in support of H.R. 3705, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, let's pass this good bill, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Florida (Mr. BILIRAKIS) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 3705, 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. BILIRAKIS. Mr. 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 APPRENTICESHIP AND LABOR OPPORTUNITY REFORM ACT

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 3949) to amend title 38, United States Code, to provide for the designation of State approving agencies for multi-State apprenticeship programs for purposes of the educational assistance programs of the Department of Veterans Affairs, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 3949

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 Apprenticeship and Labor Opportunity Reform Act" or the "VALOR Act".

SEC. 2. DESIGNATION OF STATE APPROVING AGENCIES FOR MULTI-STATE APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMS.

Paragraph (1) of subsection (c) of section 3672 of title 38, United States Code, is amended to read as follows:

"(1)(A) The State approving agency for a multi-State apprenticeship program is—

"(i) for purposes of approval of the program, the State approving agency for the State in which the headquarters of the apprenticeship program is located; and

"(ii) for all other purposes, the State approving agency for the State in which the apprenticeship program takes place.

"(B) In this paragraph, the term 'multi-State apprenticeship program' means a non-Federal apprenticeship program operating in more than one State that meets the minimum national program standards, as developed by the Department of Labor."

SEC. 3. ELIMINATION OF CERTAIN CERTIFICATION REQUIREMENT FOR ASSISTANCE FOR APPRENTICESHIP AND OTHER ON-JOB TRAINING.

Section 3680(c) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by striking "shall have received—" and all that follows through "person's certificate," and inserting "receives from the training establishment a certification".

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. BILIRAKIS) and the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. WALZ) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Florida.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and to include extraneous material on H.R. 3949, as amended.

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

There was no objection.

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 3949, as amended, the Veterans Apprenticeship and Labor Opportunity Reform Act, or the VALOR Act.

This bill, introduced by Mr. KHANNA, Mr. ARRINGTON, and Mr. O'ROURKE, would help streamline the approval of national apprenticeship programs for the use of GI Bill funds, which is very important.

Once a national apprenticeship is GI Bill approved, veterans are eligible for tiered payments that help them complete the program that leads to a successful career.

This bill also helps eliminate an out-of-date requirement that created unnecessary paperwork for a veteran to complete before they could get paid for work completed during the apprenticeship.

Mr. Speaker, this is another commonsense, bipartisan bill that will help employers become approved under the GI Bill and ensure the student veterans secure placement in apprenticeship programs that lead to employment.

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

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

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 3949 allows multi-State apprenticeship programs to go through GI Bill approval in just the State that they are headquartered in, streamlining the approval process so that programs have a lower administrative hurdle to jump over before being able to provide training to veterans.

Currently, non-Federal apprenticeship programs that have locations in multiple States must go through the approval process with the State approving agency in each of the States where it operates before it can be approved for GI Bill benefits in that State.

In order to encourage more high-quality apprenticeship programs to obtain approval for GI Bill benefits so that they can serve more veterans, this bill would allow multi-State programs to simply seek approval from the State approving agency in the State where they are headquartered.

Once they have obtained the State's approval, the program will automatically be approved in all of the other States in which it operates.

We are encouraging apprenticeships. They are a great way for our veterans to use their earned benefits to get into well-paying, long-term careers. We should encourage more companies and industries to do that. This piece of legislation is smart and does that. In just a moment we will hear from one of the authors of it explaining how it will do that.

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

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. ARRINGTON.)

Mr. ARRINGTON. Mr. Speaker, today I rise in strong support of H.R. 3949, yet another piece of bipartisan, commonsense legislation that will serve our veterans.

In the transition from deployment to employment, apprenticeship programs have proven to be extremely successful. Roughly 20,000 veterans are actively training or participating in these programs, and their employment outcomes are nothing short of impressive. According to VA's data, over 90 percent of veteran apprentices are employed after completing their programs with an average starting wage of over \$60,000. Over their lifetime, apprentices see an increase in compensation of over \$300,000 as compared to their peers.

These programs aren't just a win for our veterans, they are a win for taxpayers. Every dollar invested in apprenticeship programs sees a return in benefits of \$35.

While it is clear to see the advantages of apprenticeship programs, like in many parts of VA, this program is hampered by needless burden and bureaucracy. Currently, private employers who offer these programs in more than one State have to register with each State individually. Burdened by the difficulty and trail of paperwork that this creates, many employers only choose to participate in a limited way or they just don't offer them altogether.

H.R. 3949, the Veterans Apprenticeship and Labor Opportunity Reform Act, or the VALOR Act, authored by my good friend and colleague, Congressman RO KHANNA, streamlines the registration process for employers, which, in turn, encourages them to participate and leads to more opportunities for our veterans.

Given the tremendous sacrifice our veterans have made for our country, we should do everything we can to ensure that they have access to good jobs, and the VALOR Act does just that.

I would like to thank Mr. KHANNA again for his hard work and his leadership on this legislation.

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

Mr. WALZ. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from California (Mr. KHANNA), who is not just a national voice, but a global voice on manufacturing entrepreneurship, and apprenticeships; and who is one of the authors of this piece of legislation.

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Mr. KHANNA. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of the bipartisan bill, H.R. 3949.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the ranking member. I was in his office early on, and he really gave a freshman Member of Congress the guidance on how to get this through. I want to thank Chairman ARRINGTON for co-authoring this legislation and for his leadership. I also thank Congressman BILIRAKIS for his kind words about the legislation.

The legislation is very, very simple. Right now, if you want to offer a vet-

eran an apprenticeship, you have to register in 50 different States. As a result, small businesses or medium-sized businesses say, "Well, we can't do that; we can't fill out paperwork in 50 different States," so they don't offer these apprenticeships. Our bill says, very simply, the only place that you should have to register in is the State that you are headquartered.

This is the type of commonsense legislation that isn't partisan. It is going to give more opportunities to the people who have earned them by serving our country: veterans.

I wish to recognize a few other people who have made this possible. Of course, Chairman ROE, whose leadership was critical, in addition to Chairman ARRINGTON; Ranking Member O'ROURKE; and the staff: Cathy Yu, Kelsey Baron, and Jon Clark.

I also want to particularly recognize, on the Senate side, Aaron Murphy and Tony McClain in Senator TESTER's office, and a companion Senate bill with Senator TOM COTTON and Senator THOM TILLIS, as well as their staff, Jake Bailey and Bill Bode.

Finally, I realize that there is only one person more than Members of Congress or staff who often gets things to move in this committee, and that is Dr. Joe Westcott, the legislative director of the National Association of State Approving Agencies. Joe and I have become friends. He has been such a voice for innovation and for this bill. He really is the reason that this bill has moved in the House and, I hope, in the Senate.

Mr. WALZ. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from California and his co-authors.

Again, this is smart. He is leaning into this, bringing innovation. He came to the Veterans' Affairs Committee and looked at ways that we can streamline this process. It is a good piece of legislation.

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

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I thank Representative KHANNA and all the sponsors, including Chairman ARRINGTON, as well, for recognizing the problem and solving it. This is the way Congress should work.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage support for this particular bill, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Florida (Mr. BILIRAKIS) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 3949, 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 CRISIS LINE STUDY
ACT OF 2017

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill