

heroes to provide them the best possible care, regardless of where they live.

Mr. Speaker, I support the legislation offered by my friend and colleague from Florida, Dr. DUNN, to solve this problem. I am just amazed that we have waited this long to realize we had one.

The VICTOR Act allows veterans who live more than 100 miles from one of the VA's 13 transplant centers to seek care at a federally certified, non-VA facility. I am proud to cosponsor the VICTOR Act because our veterans shouldn't be punished just because of where they live.

Mr. WALZ. Mr. Speaker, again, it makes great sense. We are in full support of the bill. I urge my colleagues to join me in support of H.R. 2601.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I encourage all the Members to support this great piece of legislation.

Mr. Speaker, 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. 2601, 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.

REPORT ON RESOLUTION PROVIDING FOR CONSIDERATION OF H.R. 2201, MICRO OFFERING SAFE HARBOR ACT

Mr. SESSIONS, from the Committee on Rules, submitted a privileged report (Rept. No. 115-401) on the resolution (H. Res. 609) providing for consideration of the bill (H.R. 2201) to amend the Securities Act of 1933 to exempt certain micro-offerings from the registration requirements of such Act, and for other purposes, which was referred to the House Calendar and ordered to be printed.

SECURING ELECTRONIC RECORDS FOR VETERANS' EASE ACT OF 2017

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 3634) to amend title 38, United States Code, to ensure that individuals may access documentation verifying the monthly housing stipend paid to the individual under the Post-9/11 Educational Assistance Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 3634

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 "Securing Electronic Records for Veterans' Ease Act of 2017" or the "SERVE Act of 2017".

SEC. 2. PROVISION OF MONTHLY HOUSING STIPEND INFORMATION UNDER POST-9/11 EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

Section 3313 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new subsection:

"(j) PROVISION OF HOUSING STIPEND PAYMENT INFORMATION.—The Secretary shall furnish to individuals receiving educational assistance under this chapter documentation that verifies the amount of the monthly housing stipend the individual receives under this section. The Secretary shall make such documentation available to the individual using an internet website in the same manner the Secretary provides documentation verifying compensation and other benefits furnished by the Secretary to individuals."

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 to revise and extend their remarks, and include extraneous material on H.R. 3634.

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. 3634, the Securing Electronic Records for Veterans' Ease Act of 2017, or SERVE Act.

Under the post-9/11 GI Bill, eligible servicemembers, veterans, and their dependents are provided a monthly allowance that is based on the cost of living where they are taking the majority of their classes at the E-5 with dependents rate.

For many students, this living stipend payment can be their only source of income, and proving that they will receive this payment while in school is important for them to show income for the purposes of renting an apartment or home while they are in school. It makes sense.

The SERVE Act would help address this problem and would require the Secretary to electronically provide documentation that verifies the amount of the monthly housing stipend an individual receives under the GI Bill. This would allow beneficiaries to use this documentation as proof of income when applying for housing.

Mr. Speaker, this is a commonsense, bipartisan bill that will help student veterans secure housing and would eliminate roadblocks to a student veteran's academic success. I thank Mr. JIM HIMES of Connecticut for introducing this particular bill. It has my support.

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

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 3634, requiring the VA to provide electronic documentation of the GI Bill beneficiary housing stipend. Once again, I want to thank Mr. HIMES, whom we are going to hear from in just a moment, for responding to constituents, responding to a need, and crafting a piece of legislation that makes sure—as currently the VA does not provide sufficient information about the exact amount of housing stipend that a beneficiary receives under GI Bill benefits.

Many veterans rely on their housing stipend to pay for their housing while they are attending school; and, therefore, it can be necessary for them to show proof of their housing allowance as proof of income. Without this proof of income, veterans are often finding themselves unable to secure housing before the start of a school term.

This is—once again, it is being used a lot today, but this is a case that I would concur—a commonsense piece of legislation that asks for documentation that the VA can electronically provide to allow all of our veterans to more easily use their earned benefits.

Mr. Speaker, I urge support, and I reserve the balance of my time.

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

Mr. WALZ. Mr. Speaker, I yield 4 minutes to the gentleman from Connecticut (Mr. HIMES), the author of this piece of legislation and a staunch supporter of our Nation's veterans.

Mr. HIMES. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Minnesota for yielding.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of the Securing Electronic Records for Veterans' Ease Act, the SERVE Act, because we all know and feel that veterans and their families face very real challenges when they transition to civilian life. We all know that we have an important responsibility to do what we can to help. Finding housing or a roof over their heads should not be an ordeal, especially if it is caused by difficulties in showing the stipend that student veterans get from Uncle Sam.

In conversations with student veterans throughout my district, proof of income for housing kept coming up as a big challenge. In fact, Nick Quinzi, a marine and founder of the Veteran's Student Association at Sacred Heart University in Fairfield, Connecticut, told my office that if he had a wish list of things to make his veteran experience better, the number one item would be fixing the lack of verification for the monthly housing stipend and, therefore, giving him better access to housing.

The fact that Nick and many veterans like him have no proof of income that a property manager or landlord could consider when weighing creditworthiness and income qualifications is the definition of an unnecessary burden.

Mr. Speaker, this bipartisan legislation would help veterans obtain proof of income for the housing allowance

they receive while utilizing the post-9/11 GI Bill. This is, as we have all said, a commonsense fix to this problem. It requires the VA to make documentation for the post-9/11 GI Bill monthly housing stipend accessible and available online. That is it.

Student veterans will use this documentation to provide needed verification to housing agents, apartment managers, and potential landlords. This bill would provide a permanent solution to the inadequacy of the statement of benefits that is currently available—an official form, accessible online, that verifies the housing benefit is necessary and builds upon existing website functionality. The VA's eBenefits site already provides access to certification letters for VA compensation and pension benefits.

Mr. Speaker, this fix could have a big effect. There are close to 1.1 million student veterans using the post-9/11 GI Bill who would be eligible to benefit from this.

Mr. Speaker, our veterans have earned this benefit. We, as elected officials, feel a responsibility to make sure that they do not face bureaucratic hurdles that prevent them from taking advantage of all of the benefits that they have earned.

I would like to close by thanking Dr. ROE and Ranking Member WALZ for their role in bringing this bill to the floor and for their work on behalf of all of our Nation's veterans.

Mr. WALZ. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Connecticut once again. This is a good piece of legislation. It will speed the benefits that were earned by our Nation's veterans.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 3634, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I thank the sponsor of the bill, Mr. HIMES, first of all, for holding the roundtables and the town halls—they mean so much—and identifying the problem. We are solving it here today, so I appreciate all of the support for this bill.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

□ 1600

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. VALADAO). 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. 3634.

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.

VETERANS FAIR DEBT NOTICE ACT OF 2017

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 3705) to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to require the use of

certified mail and plain language in certain debt collection activities, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 3705

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 Fair Debt Notice Act of 2017”.

SEC. 2. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS NOTICE RELATING TO DEBT COLLECTION ACTIVITIES.

(a) *DEBT NOTIFICATION LETTERS.*—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall collaborate with veterans service organizations to write a standard letter to be provided to individuals who the Secretary determines owe debts to the Department of Veterans Affairs. Such letter shall be written in plain language and shall include a notice of the debt and a clear explanation of—

(1) *why the individual owes money to the Department of Veterans Affairs; and*

(2) *the options available to the individual.*

(b) *DELIVERY OF LETTERS.*—The Secretary shall develop a method by which individuals may elect to receive debt notification letters by electronic means and shall ensure, to the extent practicable, that the letter developed under subsection (a) is delivered to intended recipients who have made such an election by both standard mail and by electronic means and to intended recipients who have not made such an election only by standard mail.

(c) *NOTICE TO CONGRESS.*—

(1) *NOTICE OF COMPLETION.*—Upon completion of the letter required under subsection (a), the Secretary shall submit to Congress notice of the completion of the letter.

(2) *PROGRESS REPORTS.*—If the Secretary has not submitted the notice required by paragraph (1) by the date that is 90 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall—

(A) *submit to Congress a report describing the progress of the Secretary toward implementing subsection (a) and an explanation for why the letter has not been completed; and*

(B) *every 30 days thereafter until the submission of the notice required by paragraph (1), submit to Congress an update to the report under subparagraph (A) that includes an additional explanation for the failure to complete the letter.*

(d) *STUDY; REPORT.*—

(1) *STUDY.*—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall conduct a study on the process by which the Department of Veterans Affairs notifies veterans of debt collection efforts. Such study shall include—

(A) *an analysis of the scope of the problem of veterans not receiving debt collection notices;*

(B) *a description of any non-legislative actions the Secretary could take to reduce the number of incorrect or unknown addresses of veterans in the databases of the Department and a timeline for adopting such actions; and*

(C) *an estimate of the costs associated with sending debt collection notices by certified mail.*

(2) *REPORT.*—Not later than 12 months after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall submit to Congress a report on the study conducted under paragraph (1).

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 re-

visé and extend their remarks and to include extraneous material on H.R. 3705, 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. 3705, as amended, the Veterans Fair Debt Notice Act of 2017, introduced by Congresswoman PINGREE from Maine.

This bill would help ensure that beneficiaries who have received an overpayment from VA clearly understand why the Department believes the veteran owes the money.

Under VA's current practice, when the Department determines that a beneficiary may have received an overpayment, it sends a letter to the beneficiary that explains why the debt was created and how the veteran can dispute or mitigate the debt. But if VA doesn't have the veteran's current address, the veteran may miss important deadlines. For example, if the beneficiary intends to request a full waiver of the debt but does not request that waiver within 30 days of the date of the letter, VA may take action to withhold benefits until the waiver request is adjudicated.

Sound confusing?

It certainly is. We can't have that for our veterans.

Another issue is that some veterans find the language used in the letters to be unclear and confusing. I am sure that is true, too. It is only fair that the veteran understands why the Department believes he or she owes the money. It is the least we can do.

H.R. 3705, as amended, would require VA to develop a new notification letter that explains in plain language how the alleged debt was created and what actions the veteran can take to dispute or mitigate the debt.

In addition, the bill would direct VA to study and report to Congress on its current debt collection process, including how many veterans are not receiving debt collection notices because of incorrect addresses. The report would also describe the steps VA will take to reduce the number of incorrect addresses in the Department's databases.

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

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

I feel like we are on a roll, Mr. Speaker. We should stay here all day. Bipartisan, commonsense legislation improving the lives of veterans, it kind of feels like what we came here for.

I rise in strong support of another one of those, H.R. 3705, as amended, the Veterans Fair Debt Notice Act introduced by the gentlewoman from Maine (Ms. PINGREE).

Again, you heard it from the vice chairman, if a veteran incurs an overpayment in benefits, VA sends out a series of letters notifying him or her of