



United States  
of America

# Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE *115<sup>th</sup>* CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

*Vol. 163*

WASHINGTON, WEDNESDAY, MAY 24, 2017

*No. 90*

## *House of Representatives*

### **Helping Ensure That All Veterans Get The Care They Have Earned**

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to express my strong support for the significant package of the veteran's bills that we considered in the House both yesterday and today.

As the former Chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Committee (2001 through 2005), I am acutely aware of the challenges our veterans face, especially as they transition from military to civilian life. As Chairman, I authored more than a dozen laws to expand health, education, job training and homelessness benefits for the men and women who served in uniform. Thankfully these laws continue to help our veterans today.

Still, there are new problems and new issues that urgently need our attention. Massive wait times, forged documents by VA officials, ineptitude, lack of equipment and understaffing at VA medical facilities are just a few of the significant transgressions that have been exposed and are undermining

the quality of service and the treatment our veterans receive.

In 2014 and 2016 Congress passed the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act (P.L. 113–146) and the Faster Care for Veterans Act (P.L. 114–286), respectively, to usher in a complete overhaul of VA systems and to institute new technological services for scheduling and in order to secure more timely appointments.

Some, but not nearly enough, progress has occurred. Much more must be done.

I commend Chairman PHIL ROE, MD and his team at the Veterans Affairs Committee on the package of bills before us this week. All seven will help improve the benefit programs and the delivery of healthcare service for our veterans.

For instance, The Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act of 2017 (H.R. 2288) will empower veterans who have been denied benefits to have more

options as they pursue their appeals. Under the new bill, vets will be able to waive a hearing and submit additional evidence, pursue a hearing and submit additional evidence, or transfer the jurisdiction of their case to the Board of Veterans Appeals. The new options should help cut through some wait time.

The VA Scheduling Accountability Act (H.R. 467) would require an annual certification of compliance with scheduling directives. Additionally the bill blocks awards and bonuses to any leadership personnel at any medical center that fails to comply with the scheduling directives. Another bill before us, H.R. 1005 would allow the federal government to enter into agreements with state veteran's homes to pay for adult day health care for certain eligible veterans.

The No Hero Left Untreated Act (H.R. 1162) will create a one year pilot program at the VA to use innovative therapy to treat veterans who suffer from invisible wounds, which include post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury (TBI), military sexual trauma, chronic pain, or opiate addiction. As the author of the Veterans Health Programs Improvement Act (P.L. 108-422) which authorized regional veteran polytrauma centers for multiple injuries including TBI, I fully support H.R. 1162 as a way to ensure that the VA is able to adapt to the newest and best practices for treating veterans with these unique traumas and conditions.

The Quicker Veterans Benefits Delivery Act

of 2017 (H.R. 1725) will require stronger reporting requirements from the Department of Veterans Affairs regarding the necessity for inperson disability examinations; and the Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2017 (H.R. 1329) will increase the cost-of-living-adjustment for disabled veterans who receive compensation to equal the same rate of increase for citizens who receive Social Security in 2018.

Finally, the VA Prescription Data Accountability Act (H.R. 1545) will help combat drug addiction among our veterans by creating better information and data sharing between the Department of Veterans Affairs and the states' recording programs.

Mr. Speaker, let me remind my colleagues that while this package of veterans bills marks another step forward, we cannot be lulled into thinking that the Department of Veterans Affairs and the delivery of veterans' benefits and healthcare will be forever fixed simply with the enactment of new legislation, no matter how well written.

Good legislation is the necessary, minimum first step. But equally important is the full and consistent implementation of the new laws, along with regular and aggressive oversight by this Congress. We must be vigilant and continue to push to ensure that all veterans get the care they have earned—at the time they need it—not months or years later.

