

proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

The point of no quorum is considered withdrawn.

UNITED STATES PAROLE COMMISSION EXTENSION ACT OF 2008

Mr. COHEN. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the Senate bill (S. 3294) to provide for the continued performance of the functions of the United States Parole Commission.

The Clerk read the title of the Senate bill.

The text of the Senate bill is as follows:

S. 3294

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 "United States Parole Commission Extension Act of 2008".

SEC. 2. AMENDMENT OF SENTENCING REFORM ACT OF 1984.

For purposes of section 235(b) of the Sentencing Reform Act of 1984 (18 U.S.C. 3551 note; Public Law 98-473; 98 Stat. 2032), as such section relates to chapter 311 of title 18, United States Code, and the United States Parole Commission, each reference in such section to "21 years" or "21-year period" shall be deemed a reference to "24 years" or "24-year period", respectively.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. COHEN) and the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. KING) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Tennessee.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. COHEN. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 days to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on the bill under consideration.

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

There was no objection.

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

Mr. Speaker, S. 3294, the United States Parole Commission Extension Act of 2008, would authorize the United States Parole Commission for another 3 years.

Under the Sentencing Reform Act of 1984, criminal defendants sentenced for Federal offenses committed on or after November 1, 1987 serve determinate terms and are not eligible for patrol.

Since the elimination of Federal parole in 1987, the Parole Commission has been reauthorized on four prior occasions. Current reauthorization is set to expire October 31, 2008.

The Commission has jurisdiction over Federal offenders sentenced before November 1, 1987, as well as DC offenders sentenced before August 4, 2000. The Commission also has jurisdiction over an increasing number of DC offenders on supervised release.

Should the Commission not be reauthorized, the Department of Justice is

concerned that Federal inmates who were sentenced prior to 1987 will begin to file motions for release under the Sentencing Reform Act. This act requires inmates sentenced before 1987 to be given release dates 3 to 6 months prior to the Commission's expiration. This is why it's imperative that Congress act immediately to reauthorize the Parole Commission.

Accordingly, I urge my colleagues to support this bipartisan legislation and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. KING of Iowa. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself so much time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of S. 3294, the United States Parole Commission Extension Act of 2008.

This bipartisan legislation will extend the authorization of the United States Parole Commission for an additional 3 years.

Judiciary Committee Chairman JOHN CONYERS and Ranking Member LAMAR SMITH introduced the House version of this bill earlier this month. Crime Subcommittee Chairman BOBBY SCOTT and Ranking Member LOUIE GOHMERT also joined as cosponsors.

The Parole Commission is an independent agency within the Department of Justice that has the responsibility of supervising Federal offenders that are eligible for parole. The Parole Commission also has jurisdiction over offenders from the District of Columbia who are parole-eligible and those convicted under current DC law, under which they cannot be paroled.

Today, the great majority of the Commission's workload concerns the District of Columbia offenders. That's because the group of offenders that the Commission was originally intended to supervise—Federal offenders that are eligible for parole—are a small category of prisoners getting smaller every day. This decrease in the number of parole-eligible Federal offenders is the result of a decision by Congress to end indeterminate sentencing, and therefore Federal parole, with the passage of the Sentencing Reform Act, or SRA, of 1984.

As a result of the SRA, the arbitrary and disparate sentences imposed by judges under the old system were replaced with determinate sentences mandated by strong guidelines created by the U.S. Sentencing Commission. This new Federal sentencing arrangement has been an unquestioned success. Determinate sentencing makes incarceration terms more meaningful and ensures that offenders actually serve most of their sentences. Determinate sentencing also helped to restore the credibility of courts by making sentencing more uniform.

Over the last 25 years the national crime rate has dropped. This decrease in crime can be attributed to determinate sentencing, which keeps the violent criminals in prison and off the streets, and it also provides a deterrent.

In an effort to lower local crime rates, the District of Columbia fol-

lowed the Federal example and abolished parole. Under the new DC system, the DC Superior Court imposes a term of incarceration and supervised release, and the Parole Commission enforces the conditions of the supervised release.

Like the population of Federal offenders eligible for parole, the parole-eligible DC offender population is declining over time, although at a slower rate than Federal offenders.

□ 1630

However, because all incoming offenders are now sentenced under the new law, the DC supervised release offender population is increasing over time.

The Department of Justice has indicated that it will evaluate the future of the commission during the 3-year reauthorization period. The department will review whether any changes to the commission are necessary to reflect its decreasing Federal parole responsibilities and its evolving supervised release responsibilities for the District of Columbia. These changes may include transferring all or some of the commission's functions to an entity or entities inside or outside the Department of Justice.

We hope the department will share the results of this review with Congress as it will help the legislature make an informed decision about the future status of the U.S. Parole Commission.

I urge my colleagues to support this bill.

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

Mr. COHEN. 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 Tennessee (Mr. COHEN) that the House suspend the rules and pass the Senate bill, S. 3294.

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. KING of Iowa. Mr. Speaker, I object to the vote on the ground that a quorum is not present and make the point of order that a quorum is not present.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX and the Chair's prior announcement, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

The point of no quorum is considered withdrawn.

DRUG TRAFFICKING VESSEL INTERDICTION ACT OF 2008

Mr. COHEN. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 6295) to amend title 18, United States Code, to prohibit operation by any means or embarking in any submersible or semi-submersible vessel that is without nationality and that is navigating or has navigated into, through or from waters beyond the

outer limit of the territorial sea of a single country or a lateral limit of that country's territorial sea with an adjacent country, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 6295

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 "Drug Trafficking Vessel Interdiction Act of 2008".

SEC. 2. FINDINGS AND DECLARATIONS.

Congress finds and declares that operating or embarking in a submersible or semi-submersible vessel without nationality and on an international voyage is a serious international problem, facilitates transnational crime, including drug trafficking, and terrorism, and presents a specific threat to the safety of maritime navigation and the security of the United States.

SEC. 3. OPERATION OF SUBMERSIBLE OR SEMI-SUBMERSIBLE VESSEL WITHOUT NATIONALITY.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Chapter 111 of title 18, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new section:

"SEC. 2285. OPERATION OF SUBMERSIBLE OR SEMI-SUBMERSIBLE VESSEL WITHOUT NATIONALITY.

"(a) OFFENSE.—Whoever knowingly operates, or attempts or conspires to operate, by any means, or embarks in any submersible or semi-submersible vessel that is without nationality and that is navigating or has navigated into, through, or from waters beyond the outer limit of the territorial sea of a single country or a lateral limit of that country's territorial sea with an adjacent country, with the intent to evade detection, shall be fined under this title, imprisoned not more than 15 years, or both.

"(b) DEFINITIONS.—In this section—

"(1) the term 'submersible vessel' means a watercraft that is capable of operating completely below the surface of the water, and includes manned and unmanned watercraft;

"(2) the term 'semi-submersible vessel' means any watercraft constructed or adapted to be capable of operating with most of its hull and bulk under the surface of the water, and includes manned or unmanned watercraft;

"(3) the term 'vessel without nationality' has the same meaning given that term in section 70502(d) of title 46;

"(4) the term 'evade detection' includes the indicia set forth in section 70507(b)(1)(A), (E), (F), (G), (b)(4), (5), and (6) of title 46; and

"(5) the term 'vessel of the United States' has the same meaning given that term in section 70502(b) of title 46.

"(c) EXTRATERRITORIAL JURISDICTION.—There is extraterritorial Federal jurisdiction over an offense under this section, including an attempt or conspiracy to commit such an offense.

"(d) CLAIM OF NATIONALITY OR REGISTRY.—A claim of nationality or registry under this section includes only—

"(1) possession on board the vessel and production of documents evidencing the vessel's nationality as provided in article 5 of the 1958 Convention on the High Seas;

"(2) flying its nation's ensign or flag; or

"(3) a verbal claim of nationality or registry by the master or individual in charge of the vessel.

"(e) AFFIRMATIVE DEFENSES.—

"(1) IN GENERAL.—It is an affirmative defense to a prosecution for a violation of this section, which the defendant has the burden to prove by a preponderance of the evidence,

that any submersible or semi-submersible vessel that the defendant operated by any means or embarked in at the time of the offense—

"(A) was a vessel of the United States or lawfully registered in a foreign nation as claimed by the master or individual in charge of the vessel when requested to make a claim by an officer of the United States authorized to enforce applicable provisions of United States law;

"(B) was classed by and designed in accordance with the rules of a classification society;

"(C) was lawfully operated in government-regulated or licensed activity, including commerce, research, or exploration; or

"(D) was equipped with and using an operable automatic identification system, vessel monitoring system, or a long range identification and tracking system.

"(2) PRODUCTION OF DOCUMENTS.—The affirmative defenses provided by this subsection are proved conclusively by the production of—

"(A) government documents evidencing the vessel's nationality at the time of the offense, as provided in article 5 of the 1958 Convention on the High Seas;

"(B) a certificate of classification issued by the vessel's classification society upon completion of relevant classification surveys and valid at the time of the offense; or

"(C) government documents evidencing licensure, regulation, or registration for research or exploration.

"(f) FEDERAL ACTIVITIES.—Nothing in this section applies to lawfully authorized activities carried out by or at the direction of the United States Government.

"(g) APPLICABILITY OF OTHER PROVISIONS.—Sections 70504 and 70505 of title 46 apply to this section."

(b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections at the beginning of chapter 111 of title 18, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new item:

"2285. Operation of submersible or semi-submersible vessel without nationality."

SEC. 4. SENTENCING GUIDELINES.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Pursuant to its authority under section 994(p) of title 28, United States Code, and in accordance with this section, the United States Sentencing Commission shall promulgate sentencing guidelines (including policy statements) or amend existing sentencing guidelines (including policy statements) to provide adequate penalties for persons convicted of knowingly operating by any means or embarking in any submersible or semi-submersible vessel as defined in section 2285 of title 18, United States Code.

(b) REQUIREMENTS.—In carrying out this section, the United States Sentencing Commission shall—

(1) ensure that the sentencing guidelines and policy statements reflect the serious nature of the offense described in section 2285 of title 18, United States Code, and the need for deterrence to prevent such offenses;

(2) account for any aggravating or mitigating circumstances that might justify exceptions, including—

(A) the use of a submersible or semi-submersible vessels described in section 2285 of title 18, United States Code, to facilitate other felonies;

(B) the repeated use of a submersible or semi-submersible vessel described in section 2285 of title 18, United States Code, to facilitate other felonies, including whether such use is part of an ongoing commercial organization or enterprise;

(C) whether the use of such a vessel involves a pattern of continued and flagrant violations of section 2285 of title 18, United States Code;

(D) whether the persons operating or embarking in a submersible or semi-submersible vessel willfully caused, attempted to cause, or permitted the destruction or damage of such vessel or failed to heave to when directed by law enforcement officers; and

(E) circumstances for which the sentencing guidelines (and policy statements) provide sentencing enhancements;

(3) ensure reasonable consistency with other relevant directives, other sentencing guidelines and policy statements, and statutory provisions;

(4) make any necessary and conforming changes to the sentencing guidelines and policy statements; and

(5) ensure that the sentencing guidelines and policy statements adequately meet the purposes of sentencing set forth in section 3553(a)(2) of title 18, United States Code.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. COHEN) and the gentleman from California (Mr. DANIEL E. LUNGREN) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Tennessee.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. COHEN. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and submit extraneous material on the subject matter of the bill under consideration.

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

There was no objection.

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 6225, as amended, a bill authorized by my colleague Mr. DAN LUNGREN of California to address the growing problem of self-propelled semi-submersible or fully submersible vessels used for criminal purposes. Not the Hunley, in fact.

According to the United States Coast Guard, international drug traffickers are using these vessels to transport illegal drugs to the United States. They are typically large enough to carry 24 metric tons of contraband, can travel up to 3,500 miles, and are designed so that the crew members can readily sink them within scant minutes of being spotted, thereby making it virtually impossible for authorities to intercept illegal shipments and bring the smugglers to justice.

These vessels sail under no country's flag. They are not registered. They are usually camouflaged and constructed to avoid radar detection, with all but a few inches hidden below the water line.

The Coast Guard estimates that these vessels now account for 32 percent of all maritime cocaine flow to the U.S. from pan-American sources. And they could just as easily carry even more dangerous cargo, posing a serious national security threat.

In recognition of this threat, this bill makes it a felony to operate such a vehicle on the high seas or across our border without national registration and with intent to avoid detection, punishable by up to 15 years in prison.

The version of the bill we are considering reflects a number of improvements developed by Congressman DANIEL E. LUNGREN, Senator BIDEN, and Senator LAUTENBERG in consultation with the Coast Guard and the Department of Justice. I would like to commend them all for their leadership on this important legislation.

I urge my colleagues to support it.

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

Mr. DANIEL E. LUNGREN of California. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 6295 is a bill on which Congressman POE of Texas and I have worked to address a serious problem relating to the use of submersible and semi-submersible vessels to transport drugs and potentially other contraband which pose a threat to our communities and our national security. The language in the amendment before us reflects an agreement reached with Chairman CONYERS and the majority on the Judiciary Committee, and we thank him and them for their willingness to work with us to address this very serious challenge.

Submersibles and semi-submersibles are watercraft of unorthodox construction capable of putting much of their bulk underneath the surface of the water. This makes them very difficult to detect. These submersible and semi-submersible vessels are typically less than 100 feet in length and usually carry between 5 and 6 tons of illicit cargo, everything from drugs, guns, people, and potentially weapons of mass destruction. The range of these vessels is sufficient to reach the southeastern United States from the north coast of South America without refueling. According to recent press reports, in order to cover even longer distances, some of these vessels have been caught while being towed by larger ships with the idea that they would be released for the final approach to the shores of California or off the northeast coast of the United States.

Now, we're talking about stateless vessels that are built in the jungles of South America. They have no legitimate use. They are built for stealth and are designed to be rapidly scuttled. Their crews often will abandon and sink the vessels and contraband when detected by U.S. law enforcement in order to avoid prosecution. According to the Coast Guard, when you scuttle a vessel and all of the evidence ends up at the bottom of the ocean, it makes prosecution difficult, if not, in most cases, impossible. As a July 9 article in *Politico* reported:

"On June 16 U.S. forces encountered one of newfangled drug boats northwest of the Colombian-Ecuador border. But before the Americans could get to it, the four Colombians aboard scuttled it, along with the estimated 5 to 10 tons of cocaine they were carrying . . . So what started as a major drug bust ended up as a rescue mission. And with no evidence the government could not prosecute the four drenched sailors."

This adds a new dimension to the notion of "submarine warfare," and it's critical that our prosecutors be equipped with the tools necessary to adapt to this new challenge facing Federal law enforcement authorities.

Although these new vessels are being used to evade detection and prosecution for drug trafficking, my own interest actually in this issue is even broader. The potential that someone might seek to transport a weapon of mass destruction into the United States is further reason for concern and why we need an aggressive response to alter the calculus of deterrence with respect to the use of these vehicles.

In testimony before our Crime Subcommittee of the Judiciary Committee, the U.S. Coast Guard testified that these semi-submersible vessels present "one of the emerging and most significant threats we face in maritime law enforcement today."

In making the case for legislation, the Coast Guard testified that: "If operation and embarkation in an SPSS were illegal, U.S. interdiction forces and U.S. Attorneys would have the necessary legal tools to combat the threat even in the absence of recovered drugs or other contraband. So criminalizing the operation of these vessels on international voyages would improve officer safety, deter the use of these inherently dangerous vessels, and facilitate effective prosecution of criminals involved in this treacherous and emerging trend."

The Coast Guard has asked us for help on what they deem to be one of the most significant emerging threats to their mission. Language similar to that before us passed this body by a vote of 408-1 as an amendment to the Coast Guard authorization offered by Mr. POE and me. The recent seizure of a semi-submersible by the Mexican navy a little over a week ago is additional evidence that this pressing challenge to our drug enforcement authorities is no less compelling than it was when this body overwhelmingly supported this request by the Coast Guard before. So I ask once again for the unanimous support of this House.

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

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

Mr. DANIEL E. LUNGREN of California. Mr. Speaker, I yield 5 minutes to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. POE).

Mr. POE. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the gentleman from California for yielding and for cosponsoring and offering this legislation to capture the individuals who sail these vessels.

Mr. Speaker, here's a photograph that was taken of one of these submersible vessels that we have been talking about this evening. As you can see, it's blue like the water, but it also, as the gentleman from California pointed out, has stealth capability. And these vessels are able to go from the coast of Columbia all the way to

the United States without refueling. They are made by the drug cartels in the jungles of Columbia. They're floated down river, and they set sail for the United States.

The United States Coast Guard has brought this to the attention of Congress. What happens is they come upon one of these vessels that are stateless, they have no flag, and as soon as they come upon one of these vessels carrying 9, 10, 11 tons of cocaine, the crew scuttles the vessel. It sinks to the bottom of the ocean, and then the Coast Guard or the United States Navy has to rescue the crew and take care of them and send them back home even though they're criminals smuggling drugs into the United States.

So to prevent that from happening anymore, these stateless vessels will be a crime to be in possession of one of these on the high seas. Thus when our Navy or the Mexican navy, as Mr. LUNGREN pointed out, last week came across one of these vessels, it would be a crime to be in the possession of one of these vessels, and the crew members can be prosecuted for being on board one of these vessels.

The Coast Guard has reported that at any one time, there are over 100 of these vessels on the high seas all headed to the United States, all bringing cargo, drugs or even people. And, Mr. Speaker, this is a photograph of it. And this other chart shows where the United States Coast Guard came across one of these vessels. The crew tried to scuttle it, but it didn't sink fast enough. So the Coast Guard got on board, recovered some of the drugs, captured the outlaws, and they're being prosecuted in Florida as we speak.

So this bill, which I hope all Members of Congress support, will help us fight the sea trafficking of these drug cartels who are relentless in bringing that cancer into the United States.

And, lastly, as pointed out previously, these things are so shallow, even though they are 100 feet long, they are so shallow they can go up our rivers and tributaries into the innermost parts of the United States, and some of them might not even be discovered, and they could bring in weapons of mass destruction, and all types of weapons into the United States.

So it's time to make it a crime to set sail in one of these vessels, these submarines on the high seas, and prosecute these criminals who bring drugs into our country.

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

Mr. DANIEL E. LUNGREN of California. In closing, Mr. Speaker, let me just say that some people look at this and I have had people say to me, well, my goodness, if you have something like that, why don't we just sink them? Why don't we just shoot them down. If this were wartime, we would do that sort of thing. This is not wartime in the judicial sense of the word. So what we need to do is how we can successfully prosecute them to get around

their evasive tactics of scuttling their ships, sinking their ships, throwing their cargo overboard. That's why we need this legislation, to allow us to have a legal premise for prosecuting them for actually being on the high seas.

Secondly, and I don't think this is an idle threat that we ought to consider, one of the most serious concerns I have being a member of the Homeland Security Committee is the possibility of a nuclear weapon or dirty bomb somehow being discharged somewhere in the United States. We think the possibilities of that are rather low, but the fact of the matter is there are possibilities. And these kinds of delivery systems could be modified for that purpose.

So rather than our waiting until we have an even greater problem than we have now, we think this legislation deserves the support of the Members of this committee. There is companion legislation in the other body. We believe that they are very likely to affirmatively respond to this bill. And so if we could get it over there to the Senate as quickly as possible, it enhances the opportunity for this actually becoming law, helping the Coast Guard, helping this Nation, and preventing further tragedy in the future.

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

□ 1645

Mr. COHEN. I want to thank Mr. LUNGREN for bringing this issue to the surface.

I yield back the balance of my time. The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. COHEN) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 6295, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

The title was amended so as to read: "A bill to enhance drug trafficking interdiction by creating a Federal felony relating to operating or embarking in a submersible or semi-submersible vessel without nationality and on an international voyage."

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

VETERANS' HEALTH CARE POLICY ENHANCEMENT ACT OF 2008

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 6445) to amend title 38, United States Code, to prohibit the Secretary of Veterans Affairs from collecting certain copayments from veterans who are catastrophically disabled, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 6445

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' Health Care Policy Enhancement Act of 2008".

SEC. 2. PROHIBITION ON COLLECTION OF CERTAIN COPAYMENTS FROM VETERANS WHO ARE CATASTROPHICALLY DISABLED.

(a) PROHIBITION ON COLLECTION OF COPAYMENTS AND OTHER FEES FOR HOSPITAL OR NURSING HOME CARE.—Section 1710 of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) by redesignating subsection (h) as subsection (i); and

(2) by inserting after subsection (g) the following new subsection (h):

"(h) Notwithstanding any other provision of this section, a veteran who is catastrophically disabled shall not be required to make any payment otherwise required under subsection (f) or (g) for the receipt of hospital care or nursing home care under this section."

(b) EFFECTIVE DATE.—Subsection (h) of section 1710 of title 38, United States Code, as added by subsection (a), shall apply with respect to hospital care or nursing home care provided after the date of the enactment of this Act.

SEC. 3. EXPANSION OF AUTHORITY OF SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS TO PROVIDE COUNSELING FOR FAMILY MEMBERS OF VETERANS RECEIVING NONSERVICE-CONNECTED TREATMENT.

Section 1782(b) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by striking "if—" and all that follows and inserting a period.

SEC. 4. COMPREHENSIVE POLICY ON PAIN MANAGEMENT.

(a) COMPREHENSIVE POLICY REQUIRED.—Not later than October 1, 2008, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall develop and implement a comprehensive policy on the management of pain experienced by veterans enrolled for health care services provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

(b) SCOPE OF POLICY.—The policy required by subsection (a) shall cover each of the following:

(1) The systemwide management of acute and chronic pain experienced by veterans.

(2) The standard of care for pain management to be used throughout the Department.

(3) The consistent application of pain assessments to be used throughout the Department.

(4) The assurance of prompt and appropriate pain care treatment and management by the Department, systemwide, when medically necessary.

(5) The Department's program of research related to acute and chronic pain suffered by veterans, including pain attributable to central and peripheral nervous system damage characteristic of injuries incurred in modern warfare.

(6) The Department's program of pain care education and training for health care personnel of the Department.

(7) The Department's program of patient education for veterans suffering from acute or chronic pain and their families.

(c) UPDATES.—The Secretary shall revise the policy developed under subsection (a) on a periodic basis in accordance with experience and evolving best practice guidelines.

(d) CONSULTATION.—The Secretary shall develop the policy developed under subsection (a), and revise such policy under subsection (c), in consultation with veterans service organizations and organizations with expertise in the assessment, diagnosis, treatment, and management of pain.

(e) ANNUAL REPORT.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 180 days after the date of the completion and initial implementation of the policy under subsection (a) and on October 1 of every fiscal year thereafter through fiscal year 2018, the Secretary shall submit to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Representatives a report on the implementation of the policy developed under subsection (a).

(2) CONTENTS.—The report required by paragraph (1) shall include the following:

(A) A description of the policy developed and implemented under subsection (a) and any revisions to such policy under subsection (c).

(B) A description of the performance measures used to determine the effectiveness of such policy in improving pain care for veterans systemwide.

(C) An assessment of the adequacy of the Department's pain management services based on a survey of patients managed in Department clinics.

(D) An assessment of the Department's research programs relevant to the treatment of the types of acute and chronic pain suffered by veterans.

(E) An assessment of the training provided to Department health care personnel with respect to the diagnosis, treatment, and management of acute and chronic pain.

(F) An assessment of the Department's pain care-related patient education programs.

(f) VETERANS SERVICE ORGANIZATION DEFINED.—In this section, the term "veterans service organization" means any organization recognized by the Secretary for the representation of veterans under section 5902 of title 38, United States Code.

SEC. 5. ESTABLISHMENT OF CONSOLIDATED PATIENT ACCOUNTING CENTERS.

(a) ESTABLISHMENT OF CENTERS.—Chapter 17 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by inserting after section 1729A the following:

"§ 1729B. Consolidated patient accounting centers

"(a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 5 years after the date of enactment of this section, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall establish not more than seven consolidated patient accounting centers for conducting industry-modeled regionalized billing and collection activities of the Department.

"(b) FUNCTIONS.—The centers shall carry out the following functions:

"(1) Reengineer and integrate all business processes of the revenue cycle of the Department.

"(2) Standardize and coordinate all activities of the Department related to the revenue cycle for all health care services furnished to veterans for nonservice-connected medical conditions.

"(3) Apply commercial industry standards for measures of access, timeliness, and performance metrics with respect to revenue enhancement of the Department.

"(4) Apply other requirements with respect to such revenue cycle improvement as the Secretary may specify."

(b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections at the beginning of such chapter is amended by inserting after the item relating to section 1729A the following:

"1729B. Consolidated patient accounting centers."

SEC. 6. SIMPLIFYING AND UPDATING NATIONAL STANDARDS TO ENCOURAGE TESTING OF THE HUMAN IMMUNODEFICIENCY VIRUS.

Section 124 of the Veterans' Benefits and Services Act of 1988 (38 U.S.C. 7333 note; 102 Stat. 505) and the item relating to such section in the table of contents of such Act (102 Stat. 487) are repealed.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER) and the gentleman from Kansas (Mr. MORAN) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California.

Mr. FILNER. I yield myself such time as I may consume.

We have a number of bills on the floor today, all of which will go to improving both the health and the benefits of our veterans, to whom we owe so