

get to have any degree of access, so we understand that there is a big void out there. What happened at Walter Reed, in spite of the fact that that is a DOD facility, we also need to look at the facilities in the VA sites. And we know that we have been negligent in not providing the resources to upgrade those.

The reports that are going to be required by this language allow an opportunity for us to get a good grasp of what some of our needs are out there in terms of our VA facilities, and allows an opportunity for us to improve on those, from nursing homes that are out there to clinics and to others.

As also indicated, in South Texas we have a large number of our veterans that don't have access and have to travel long distance for access to health care. I want to thank the leadership on both sides for going there and listening to the reports, Congressman ORTIZ, Congressman HINOJOSA, Congressman CUELLAR and others, about the lack of services for our veterans in Deep South Texas and the need for some of these facilities and resources.

Once again, I thank the chairman for allowing me this opportunity and for passing this piece of legislation.

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

Mr. RODRIGUEZ, when you go back to Texas over the Memorial Day break, I want you to share with your good friends in Deep South Texas how much I enjoyed the visit and their tequila. I don't know what it is about tequila that makes you either forget or remember the most, but I really enjoyed that, and you have much to smile for when you go back to Texas.

When I went to Deep South Texas, I also went to San Antonio and toured not only the burn unit at Brook and the Intrepid at Fort Sam Houston, but also I went over to the VA hospital and met with your hospital director and the team for the polytrauma center, and they are extraordinary. If you have the opportunity at all, I welcome you to visit the other polytrauma centers, or any of them. It is extraordinary what they do in that full continuum of care, and it is seamless as they move from the military to the VA and then back in.

There are always some bumps in the road, so as you take on this fifth site in your backyard, too often we place that burden on the families to be the case manager, and now in Wounded Warrior we say okay, we are going to assign case managers. But as we open up that fifth polytrauma center, we are going to look to your leadership to make sure the fifth site opens up and opens well. I just wanted to share that with you.

Mr. RODRIGUEZ. Mr. BUYER, I want to thank you also, because I do have a beautiful community, and we have a large number of both Afghan and Iraqi theatre soldiers that have come to the

San Antonio area and the community there. We know that we have had our problems and our difficulties, but we are expanding those services, and I am extremely elated.

One thing I tell our veterans now is if they ever have had difficulties in the past, I am urging them to go back, go back and visit the VA. There is a lot of enthusiasm out there, and I am really pleased. Thank you very much for those comments, and you are welcome to come down and share a tequila.

Mr. BUYER. Please also know that I spoke with John Barnes, who is the owner of Panther Racing. We coordinated with the Surgeon General of the Army, and he is going to take the Indy car which is sponsored by the National Guard along with some of the Indy drivers to Fort Sam Houston to go to Brook Army Hospital to the burn unit and the Intrepid, and I think that is going to occur the first week of June.

I also would like to compliment Chairman FILNER and Chairman MICHAUD with regard to working with myself and Mr. LATHAM as we addressed his concerns that were brought to the committee in Northeast Iowa. We also had other issues that were brought regarding Fort Ord. As we all know, CARES was sort of that snapshot in time, and now we are 4 years beyond CARES and it is almost being overtaken by certain events. So I appreciate Chairman FILNER allowing us to work through some of these in our language, and we are going to have to address CARES No. 2 probably or redux here in the upcoming future.

With that, I urge my colleagues to adopt the bill.

Madam Speaker, I yield back my time.

Mr. FILNER. Madam Speaker, I certainly appreciate the remarks of Mr. BUYER and the bipartisan work that was necessary to get this bill to the floor in the current form.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. FILNER. Madam Speaker, I would ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 5856.

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

There was no objection.

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Madam Speaker, I rise today in strong support of H.R. 5856, the VA Medical Facility Authorization and Lease Act of 2008. I am pleased that this bill will comprehensively address the needs of veterans throughout the Nation.

Important to delivering high quality care to our Nation's veterans is the planning for the construction of VA's substantial health care infrastructure. It is vital that veterans can continue to receive care where they need it most and will be able to receive it where they need it in the future. They have given so much for our country, and providing them with timely

access to the best health care possible is just one important way we can show them how thankful we are for what all they have done.

This legislation improves access to care for veterans by ensuring that current VA facilities are modernized and that future construction occurs where it is needed. That means keeping track of where veterans live and locating facilities in those areas. Too often, veterans must travel great distances to receive their health care, but this is something that we can fix, and the VA Medical Facility Authorization and Lease Act of 2008 is an important step in that direction.

I commend Chairman MICHAUD for his work on this legislation through the Subcommittee on Health and the full Veterans' Affairs Committee, and look forward to its passage.

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

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 5856.

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. FILNER. Madam 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 and the Chair's prior announcement, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

PROVIDING FOR PROTECTION OF CHILD CUSTODY ARRANGEMENTS FOR CERTAIN PARENTS

Mr. FILNER. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 6048) to amend the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act to provide for the protection of child custody arrangements for parents who are members of the Armed Forces deployed in support of a contingency operation.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 6048

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. PROTECTION OF CHILD CUSTODY ARRANGEMENTS FOR PARENTS WHO ARE MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES DEPLOYED IN SUPPORT OF A CONTINGENCY OPERATION.

(a) CHILD CUSTODY PROTECTION.—Title II of the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (50 U.S.C. App. 521 et seq.) is amended by adding at the end the following new section:

“SEC. 208. CHILD CUSTODY PROTECTION.

“(a) RESTRICTION ON CHANGE OF CUSTODY.—If a motion for change of custody of a child of a servicemember is filed while the servicemember is deployed in support of a contingency operation, no court may enter an order modifying or amending any previous judgment or order, or issue a new order, that changes the custody arrangement for that child that existed as of the date of the deployment of the servicemember, except that a court may enter a temporary custody order

if there is clear and convincing evidence that it is in the best interest of the child.

“(b) COMPLETION OF DEPLOYMENT.—In any preceding covered under subsection (a), a court shall require that, upon the return of the servicemember from deployment in support of a contingency operation, the custody order that was in effect immediately preceding the date of the deployment of the servicemember is reinstated, unless there is clear and convincing evidence that such a reinstatement is not in the best interest of the child.

“(c) EXCLUSION OF MILITARY SERVICE FROM DETERMINATION OF CHILD’S BEST INTEREST.—If a motion for the change of custody of the child of a servicemember is filed, no court may consider the absence of the servicemember by reason of deployment, or possibility of deployment, in determining the best interest of the child.

“(d) CONTINGENCY OPERATION DEFINED.—In this section, the term ‘contingency operation’ has the meaning given that term in section 101(a)(13) of title 10, United States Code, except that the term may include such other deployments as the Secretary may prescribe.”

(b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of contents in section 1(b) of such Act is amended by adding at the end of the items relating to title II the following new item: “208. Child custody protection.”

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

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California.

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

Madam Speaker, this bill, which was introduced by Mr. TURNER of Ohio, a member of our committee, amends the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act to provide for the protection of child custody arrangements for parents who are members of the Armed Forces deployed in support of a contingency operation.

This measure restricts the ability of a court to order change in a custody arrangement that predates the deployment of a servicemember. It mandates that once a deployment is completed, the custody arrangements will be reinstated if changed during the deployment. The bill also requires that a court may not consider the absence of the servicemember because of deployment as a factor in determining the best interests of the child. Importantly, this bill provides courts with the ability to order a temporary custody arrangement or to prevent the reinstatement of a prior custody arrangement when the servicemember returns upon a showing of clear and convincing evidence that it is in the best interests of the child.

We are faced with a conflict between the protection of the rights of our servicemembers, which is a Federal responsibility, and child custody issues, which are traditionally within the purview of our States. I believe that Mr. TURNER’s bill strikes the necessary balance between these interests and pro-

vides an important safeguard for our servicemembers and their children, and I urge my colleagues to support the measure.

I reserve the balance of my time.

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

Madam Speaker, H.R. 6048 would amend the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act to provide for the protection of child custody arrangements for parents who are members of the Armed Forces deployed in supporting a contingency operation.

Very briefly, this bill would place restrictions on changes in child custody that a court could order during a period of a servicemember’s deployment and upon the servicemember’s return from deployment. Also, this bill would exclude consideration of military service from a court’s determination of a “child’s best interests.”

Madam Speaker, I would explain to my colleagues that the paramount consideration in child custody cases is the best interests of the child. The simple fact that a servicemember parent is subject to deployment should not be permitted to work against him or her in child custody cases.

At this time I would defer to the author of this legislation, Mr. TURNER, who is an active member of the Veterans Affairs Committee, for a more detailed explanation of his legislation.

Madam Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. TURNER).

Mr. TURNER. Madam Speaker, I would like to thank House leadership, the House Armed Services Committee chairman, Chairman SKELTON, Ranking Member HUNTER, as well as the leaders from House Judiciary, Chairman JOHN CONYERS, and the Veterans Affairs Committee Chair and ranking member for their assistance in bringing H.R. 6048 to the floor today. I would like to thank our presiding Chair, ELLEN TAUSCHER, also for her support of this bipartisan bill.

This bill was originally included as an amendment to the House version of last year’s National Defense Authorization Act when it passed the House by voice vote. The purpose of this bill is straightforward. It provides certainty to servicemembers deployed in a contingency operation that their child custody arrangements will be protected.

Imagine the stress and conflict in serving your country and fearing that a court will take your children away because of your service. In some cases, courts have overturned established custody arrangements because a custodial parent has served our country in a contingency operation such as Iraq or Afghanistan.

Recently, many cases have come to light where servicemembers who have been deployed have had their military service used against them in custody

hearings. One such case was that of Eva Slusher. Eva spent nearly \$25,000 and years trying to regain custody of her daughter after fighting courts that used her deployment as a factor against her.

We have heard from other servicemembers who have had similar court battles. In fact, recently my office learned about a servicemember who during her custody proceedings was told by a judge that the mere possibility of her deployment weighed against the best interests of the child in denying her custody.

Madam Speaker, I would like to submit for the RECORD two letters that were written to my office by servicemembers detailing their stories of how this legislation could have helped.

□ 1500

One of those letters is from Heather Watkins, and I want to read some excerpts from that letter. She writes:

At the time of the final custody hearing for my children, the court stated that even though he believed I was a good parent, my being stationed on the USS *Dwight D. Eisenhower* prevented me from being able to care for my children. Shared custody was granted.

In a subsequent court proceeding, the court again stated that he believed I was a good parent and stated that, with the way of the world today, I cannot be sure that you will not be called off of shore duty and deployed back to sea.

In June 2005, I was honorably discharged. It was implied to me by the court that once I was out of the Navy, I would be able to obtain custody of my children. This has not proven to be true. I was proud to serve my country in the Armed Forces for 13 years, but at this time I believe my children were the price I paid for the privilege of protecting the United States of America.

DEAR SIR AND MADAM, I urge you to support the Bill for amendment of the Service Members Civil Relief Act to provide for the protection of child custody for parents who are members of the Armed Forces deployed in the support of a contingency operation as presented by Congressman Mike Turner.

I have been separated/divorced from my ex-husband since 1998. At the time of my divorce I did not dream that my being a Proud Active member of the United States Armed Services could or would be utilized as a tool to separate me from my children.

At the time of the final custody hearing for my children the court stated that even though he believed that I was a good parent, my being stationed on the USS *Dwight D. Eisenhower* prevented me from being able to care for my children. Shared custody was granted.

I re-enlisted in 2001 on the advice of my lawyer to maintain work and income stability. My ship was in dry dock for many months of scheduled maintenance and I was on the shore duty portion of my enlistment contract. My next court date was in October 2001. At the time of my court date, the terrorist attack of September 11 against the United States of America was very fresh in the minds of the U.S. citizens and the court.

He again stated that he believed that I was a good parent and stated that, with the way of the world today, I cannot be sure that you will not be called off of shore duty and deployed back to sea. The court also voiced concerns that I would join the reserves and not be available to my children. The custody arrangement for my children was left unchanged.

In June 2005, I was Honorably Discharged. It was implied to me by the court that once I was out of the Navy, I would be able to obtain custody of my children. This has not proven to be true. As of today, I do not have custody of my children. The court does not wish to hear this case again. I have permission to change venue but am unable to find a Judge or court that will hear my case.

I have not spoken to or had other contact with my children since 12-26-2007. My calls to them have been unanswered and unreturned. I have been unable to get any assistance on local or state levels.

I was proud to serve my country in the Armed Forces for 13 years but at this time I believe my children were the price I paid for the privilege of protecting the United States of America. Again, I urge you to support this Bill as presented by Congressman Mike Turner and prevent any other children being separated from loving parents by virtue of their serving their country.

Respectfully,

HEATHER A. WATKINS.

Another letter I have is from Eva Slusher, and she writes that she was a full-time member of the Kentucky Army National Guard, proudly serving her country for nearly 19 years. In February of 2003, she was called to Active Duty to support the war on terror. She writes:

Initially, it was believed that I was going to Iraq, but once we arrived at Fort Knox, it was decided that our Personnel Services Detachment would be better used at Fort Knox to assist with the large number of troops mobilizing and that they were not equipped to facilitate. When I was alerted, I had three days to report. As a single parent, I made arrangements for my child, packed her up and moved her, and wrapped up all my affairs, financial and otherwise, in those three days. My ex-husband and I decided that Sara should stay with him while I was gone, but that it would only be temporary and that she would come back home when our tour was over.

After her tour was over, custody to her was refused.

In August 2004, we went to court. I was under the impression that we were there to have my rights as the custodial parent enforced as no one had filed a motion to change custody. However, the next week I received the ruling that Sara was to stay with her father as she was settled in and that was in her best interest. I was penalized for the time spent away from her in service of my country.

She ends with: Everyone wants to talk about supporting our troops. I beg you to support this legislation in order to support our troops.

MAY 19, 2008.

MEMBERS OF CONGRESS,
Washington, DC.

DEAR MEMBERS OF CONGRESS:

I am writing this letter in reference to Congressman Turner's Bill, HR 6048. I, personally, experienced the injustice of losing custody of my child, for no other reason than service to my country. It cost me 2 years of anguish and nearly \$25,000 to get my daughter back. This proposed legislation is necessary to prevent this discrimination against our servicemembers.

I am LT Eva Slusher (formerly Crouch). I am a full time member of the Kentucky Army National Guard, proudly serving my country and State for nearly 19 years. I joined the military when I was 17 years old and a senior in high school. The military has paid for my college education and provided me with reliable, steady employment all of these years.

I am also a mother. My daughter, Sara, was born in 1994. Her father and I were divorced in 1996. When we divorced, I was awarded primary physical custody of my daughter, and her father had visitation. My military service was not questioned. This arrangement went unchallenged, even when I moved over 150 miles away from my ex-husband. I raised that child by myself, without any help from him while I worked full time and put myself through college. Sara was my life. Every day revolved around her. I volunteered at her school every other Monday (my day off); she played softball, soccer and cheered. I was an assistant coach of her soccer and cheerleading. I cooked dinner, helped with homework, bathed her and read her bedtime stories every night. I was an exceptional, loving and attentive mother.

In February 2003, I was called to active duty to support the War on Terror. Initially, it was believed that I was going to Iraq, but once we arrived at Ft. Knox, it was decided that our Personnel Services Detachment would be of better use at Ft. Knox to assist with the large number of troops mobilizing that they were not equipped to facilitate.

When I was alerted, I had 3 days to report. As a single parent, I had to make arrangements for my child, pack her up and move her and wrap up all of my affairs (financial and otherwise) in those 3 days. My ex-husband and I decided that Sara should stay with him while I was gone, but that it would only be temporary and that she would come back home when my tour was over.

I was very fortunate to have stayed in country and close enough that I could visit with Sara on the weekends. Nearly every weekend, I drove the 4½ hours from Ft. Knox to Ashland, KY to see her. I would pick her up and we'd stay in a hotel, and go to movies, dinner, shopping, etc. Many weekends, I would stop by Frankfort on my way and pick up one of her friends, so she could stay in touch with them. I spent about \$300 per trip on gas money, hotels, food and entertainment, but it was all worth it to be with my daughter.

On July 20, 2004, as I pulled into my driveway, I called my ex-husband on the cell phone and told him I was home and that I would be picking Sara up the next day, and to please have her things packed. His response was "Not without a court order". Until that moment, no one made any indication to me that Sara would not be coming home as planned. I immediately hired an attorney to file a motion to have my daughter returned to me. In August 2004, we went to court. I was under the impression that we were there to have my rights as the custo-

dial parent enforced, as no one filed a motion for change of custody. However, the next week I received the ruling that Sara was to stay with her father, as she was settled in there and it was in her "best interest". I was penalized for the time spent away from her in service to my country. When I got divorced the courts deemed me a fit parent, but now, suddenly, because I served my country, I should not be allowed to raise my child anymore? I was completely appalled! It never occurred to me that this could happen. Soldiers are protected under the Servicemember's Civil Relief Act, or so I thought; an employer has to give me my job back after I return from a deployment, but they don't have to give me my child back? That is insane!

I was devastated. After having a life that was so full of her, I now came home to an empty house every day! I didn't know what to do with myself! Sara was terribly distraught over the whole situation, to the point that we had to take her to Cincinnati Children's Hospital for stomach problems, all stress related. I only got to see her every other weekend, and she would cry and beg me not to make her go back. It ripped my heart out! Why would a parent put his child through all of this? The real question is: How could our justice system allow this to happen? I still don't have an answer for that.

After the Court ruling, I hired a new lawyer and we appealed the ruling. In September 2005, they ruled in my favor and my ex-husband appealed to the Kentucky Supreme Court. In September 2006, they also ruled in my favor and my daughter came home on October 15, 2006. I spent more than 2 years and between \$20,000 and \$25,000 in legal fees. Sara is now a happy, healthy, well adjusted child, but I lost so much time with her, and she is not the child I set out to raise. Our lives were turned upside down and the results are everlasting. All of this because I was deployed . . .

It is a disgraceful injustice to punish a Soldier for their service. The military has done so much for me: a college education, a way to pay my bills and feed my family, a sense of honor and pride . . . When they called on me to do my part, what should I have done? Said "No thanks, I need to stay home . . ." Even if that were an option, which it is not, I could not do that. It is not the right thing to do. Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, Integrity, and Personal Courage: these are the things I stand for, should I lose my child for that? What kind of message is that sending? How is the United States Military supposed to recruit when you send a message like that? Don't we, as Soldiers, already sacrifice enough? How is a Soldier to concentrate on his/her mission while worrying about what will happen to their children? No Soldier should have to incur the emotional and financial cost that I have, only because they serve their country.

I have my daughter back home with me, but I cannot sit back and allow this to happen to others if I can do anything about it. Since my story was publicized, I have learned that many other Soldiers have also had to deal with similar situations. Not to mention that every unmarried parent in the military, and every parent that has children from previous relationships and any parent that may be divorced in the future has to be concerned with whether or not they may be penalized for their service. This is not the way to treat our military service members.

Due to the nature of military service, there really needs to be guidance at the federal level. This issue needs to be spelled out

as it is in Congressman Turner's Bill: (1) No court may permanently alter an existing custody agreement while a military parent is deployed; (2) Upon the return of the service member from deployment, any temporary change in custody shall be immediately reversed; and (3) No court may consider a military parents' deployment in determining the best interest of the child. Had this been the law in 2004, my daughter and I would not have had to deal with the separation, stress, expense and lifelong effects of a prolonged custody battle.

Everyone wants to talk about supporting our troops, I beg you to support this legislation in order to support troops. We are not asking for any special consideration, only that our military service not be used against us.

Very Respectfully,

V. EVA SLUSHER,
Frankfort, KY.

She has since regained custody of her daughter.

This bill prevents judges from changing the custody arrangements of servicemembers and their children during a servicemember's deployment unless clear and convincing evidence says a change would be in the best interest of the child. The purpose of this provision is to ensure that while one parent is deployed, another party cannot permanently change custody arrangements. Temporary orders may be enacted and entered until the serving parent returns.

Additionally, the bill requires a return to the original predeployment custody arrangement after the servicemember returns from the contingency operation. And, finally, the bill prohibits the use of a servicemember's absence because of their deployment, or the possibility of deployment, against that servicemember when ascertaining the best interest of the child. Their service cannot be used against them.

Much is asked of our servicemembers, and mobilization can disrupt and strain relationships at home. This additional protection is needed to provide them peace of mind that the courts will not take away their children because they answered the country's call to serve or have the possibility of being called to serve. This bill protects them and it protects their children.

Again, I thank the House leadership for their support of this bill, and I urge my colleagues to vote for it.

Mr. BUYER. As a practicing attorney during my private law practice in Monticello, Indiana, I handled a number of child custody cases, and as an Army JAG officer on Active Duty I provided legal assistance to servicemembers in child custody cases. I have a practitioner's perspective on these issues, and, quite frankly, they are some of the hardest cases I have seen where two parents are in a legal contest over the custody of their child.

From my perspective, I appreciate Mr. TURNER's objective of ensuring fair treatment of servicemembers in child custody matters when they are deployed and when they return home.

When I first learned just a few days ago that this bill had been introduced on the suspension calendar without any consideration by the Veterans' Affairs Committee, the committee of jurisdiction, I read the bill and had some questions. I wanted to know what were the official positions of the Department of Defense and the American Bar Association, Family Law Section. The answer was that neither had been asked for an official position, so none was available. There has never been a legislative hearing on this bill by any House committee to examine the legislation and to allow stakeholders to present their views.

Mr. TURNER's initiative and passion on this issue is commendable. As this legislation moves forward, I would like to work with my distinguished colleague from Ohio to ensure that the final product does what we would all like it to accomplish.

Madam Speaker, this amendment to the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act would, to the extent as applicable, have a preemptive effect on the existing body of State case law and statutory law in terms of substantive Servicemembers Civil Relief Act rights and protections, as well as the burdens of proof and procedures of each jurisdiction. However, I want to make clear that this legislation should be construed to provide additional remedies to those already available under the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act and State law. This measure is intended to expand the rights and protections of servicemembers, and not to result in any limitation of the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act as it applies to military family care plans, other custody cases, and family court matters not having a custody order in effect.

Madam Speaker, I want to thank Mr. TURNER for his active support and advocacy of our Nation's servicemembers and veterans, and I look forward to working with him as this bill goes to the United States Senate.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. FILNER. Madam Speaker, we are coming to the conclusion of the 10-bill package that the Veterans' Affairs Committee presented today on the floor in anticipation of the Memorial Day holiday. We honor those whose lives were lost serving their Nation, and in their memory we have presented these 10 bills that provide a variety of benefits in all kinds of ways. And I thanked all the members of our subcommittees, but I want to thank the staff on both the majority and minority side who have participated in the drafting and the amending of these bills. It takes a lot of work from the staff, and we want to both, Mr. BUYER and I, thank them.

I will yield to the gentleman from Indiana.

Mr. BUYER. I thank the gentleman for yielding. All of these bills that we

brought to the floor today take many, many hours on behalf of not only the staff on the Republican side but also the Democrat side, and they have grown together and they work well together. I want to thank the gentleman for his cooperation.

Mr. FILNER. Thank you, Mr. BUYER.

Madam Speaker, as I said, as we prepare for Memorial Day, I think all of us in this Congress want to assure the servicemembers who have served this Nation in the past and those who are deployed today.

We are fighting a war that is very divisive in this country and in this Congress, but we are united in saying that every young man and woman who comes back from that conflict is going to get all the care, the love, the attention, the honor, and dignity that they deserve.

They are coming back with enormous difficulties, many of them. Because of the advances in our medicine and the incredible expertise on the battlefield of those who medivac these injured out, the incredible medical teams in the forward base hospitals and the regional hospitals and in Germany, we are saving lives that in previous wars would not have been saved. If you survive a battlefield injury, you will have a 95 percent chance of surviving the war. That is an incredible statistic when compared to any other war in history.

But that means, when these soldiers come back there is a very high percentage of those with brain injury, a very high percentage of those with psychological wounds, one of which we refer to as PTSD, posttraumatic stress disorder. And we have an obligation as a Nation to treat every single one of these with the maximum quality of health care that they can get in this Nation. And yet, we have had examples of soldiers all around the Nation who have simply not gotten the attention that they require.

We have had reports of soldiers showing up to medical facilities saying they had PTSD or suicidal thoughts, being told that there was nobody to meet with them for 4 or 5 weeks, and they would go home and commit suicide. We have had lots of reports of those who did not receive adequate care. At the same time, we were not getting the full information on the numbers of cases of PTSD, the amount of resources needed to deal with them, or the number of suicides that were committed or are being committed by our Nation's veterans.

Madam Speaker, each month we have 1,000 suicide attempts by those under care of our VA system. And those under care mean only about one-fifth of all the veterans in our Nation. That is an astounding statistic which says that we have a job to do about mental health and about dealing with these, especially psychological injuries.

And we know what happens if we don't do our job right with these young men and women. We already had the canaries in the mine with our Vietnam vets. When our veterans returned from Vietnam, many of us who were opposed to that war made a mistake. We did not differentiate between the war and the warrior, and so the warriors did not get all the care, the love, the attention, the honor, and dignity that I talked about earlier. And this society has paid a heavy price for that. Individuals, families, neighborhoods have paid a heavy price. Half of the homeless on the street tonight, Madam Speaker, are Vietnam vets, about 200,000.

There have been more deaths by suicide of Vietnam vets than died in the original war by combat. And we have had the head of our mental health agency in this Nation say that the same will be probably true of Iraq; we will have more suicides than battlefield deaths.

That is not only a tragedy, but it is a preventable tragedy. We have to say that we are going to put the resources in to deal with these issues. It is part of the cost of war. As I said earlier, Madam Speaker, we are spending \$1 billion every 2 days on the war in Iraq. Surely we can spend the hundreds of millions or billions that are required to treat the mental health needs of our older veterans and our newer veterans. This is absolutely required. We must do this job and do it right.

As George Washington said, the biggest factor in the morale of our fighting troops is the sense of how they are going to be treated when they come home. We have to do a better job of treating them when they come home.

Our committee, Madam Speaker, and this Congress provided in this fiscal year and the coming fiscal year almost \$20 billion of new money for health care. That represents over a 40 percent increase in the budgets that we started off with 2 fiscal years ago. Our job is to make sure that the money is spent right, our oversight job. Now that they have the resources, are they hiring the mental health professionals? Are they doing the diagnoses and treatments?

It is absolutely apparent, Madam Speaker, that tens of thousands of our young people are getting out of the military or the Reserve or the National Guard without being adequately diagnosed for brain injury or PTSD. Let me say that again. We have tens of thousands of our young people being discharged from the military or from the Reserve or National Guard without diagnosis for PTSD or brain injury. That means tens of thousands of ticking time bombs are out on the street. We need to do a better job.

There is a stigma against adequate evaluation and early treatment. The military, or at least many members of the military, seem to give their younger troops the sense that it is not

macho, it is not marine-like, it is not soldier-like to have mental illness. That it is a weakness. You have got to buck up, sergeant, and not have any mental illness. So we have folks who get a questionnaire about some of the risk factors, and they just say no. They know they are supposed to say no, because they want to be home, they don't want any influence on their future career or any possible promotion. So there is a dynamic within our military not to adequately diagnose.

The VA says they have mandatory screening for these illnesses, for these injuries when people come to the VA for treatment. Well, they may not come to the VA for treatment. We don't have an outreach that goes after every single one of them. And when they come in, they get a questionnaire by an intake clerk of two questions. Anybody who wants not to have any of the stigma of mental illness knows to say no on those two questions. Besides, we are told there are 15 risk factors for PTSD and suicide. Why don't we ask about all of them? Why don't we have a mandatory evaluation by competent mental health personnel before anybody gets discharged or leaves the National Guard or leaves the Reserves? This has to be done, Madam Speaker. We have to get rid of the stigma and do it in a way where we allow the soldiers to do it as part of their company, for example, so they have that comradeship and with their family to help both diagnosis and treatment.

So we have a big job to do as we celebrate this Memorial Day. We have a job to do with the 1.6 million troops who have been deployed already, 800,000 of them have returned home. We have a great deal to do with the other 23 million of our veterans from previous wars.

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We have to do this job right, Madam Speaker. And on this Memorial Day, let us recommit ourselves to doing the job right.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. FILNER. Madam Speaker, I would ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and add extraneous material to H.R. 6048.

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

There was no objection.

Mr. FILNER. I would yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 6048.

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.

ADDITIONAL TEMPORARY EXTENSION OF SMALL BUSINESS PROGRAMS

Ms. VELÁZQUEZ. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the Senate bill (S. 3029) to provide for an additional temporary extension of programs under the Small Business Act and the Small Business Investment Act of 1958, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read the title of the Senate bill.

The text of the Senate bill is as follows:

S. 3029

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. ADDITIONAL TEMPORARY EXTENSION OF AUTHORIZATION OF PROGRAMS UNDER THE SMALL BUSINESS ACT AND THE SMALL BUSINESS INVESTMENT ACT OF 1958.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Section 1 of the Act entitled “An Act to extend temporarily certain authorities of the Small Business Administration”, approved October 10, 2006 (Public Law 109-316; 120 Stat. 1742), as most recently amended by section 1 of Public Law 110-136 (121 Stat. 1453), is amended by striking “May 23, 2008” each place it appears and inserting “March 20, 2009”.

(b) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendment made by subsection (a) shall take effect on May 22, 2008.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentlewoman from New York (Ms. VELÁZQUEZ) and the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. CHABOT) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from New York.

GENERAL LEAVE

Ms. VELÁZQUEZ. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative 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 gentlewoman from New York?

There was no objection.

Ms. VELÁZQUEZ. Madam Speaker, I yield myself as much time as I may consume.

Madam Speaker, today we will consider a short-term extension for programs in the Small Business Act and Small Business Investment Act. The measure extends the authorization of the Small Business Administration and these programs through March 20, 2009. This measure will ensure continued operations at the agency.

The legislation comes before us at a time when the American economy is facing many challenges. Fallout from the subprime crisis is driving a tightening of the credit market, the average price of a gallon of gas is almost \$4, and unemployment is rising.

Entrepreneurs can help reverse these trends, if they have the proper tools. Throughout the 110th Congress, the Committee on Small Business has been