

are ready to work together on bipartisan proposals such as H.R. 1624 with the goal of strengthening the law. Unfortunately, though, I do not agree with the approach this bill takes.

H.R. 1624 would permanently change the law to make the small group expansion currently required under the ACA optional for states and allow states to “opt in” if they choose. Research tells us that some states simply are not ready to expand their small group market and that expansion in these states could result in higher costs for certain consumers. However, the small group expansion was included in the ACA for good reason. The benefits of expansion such as added consumer protections and increased stability for small employers are important and achievable goals. States like Washington are already experiencing the benefits of an expanded small group market.

I am concerned that H.R. 1624 is premature, and I would instead prefer a few year transitional delay of the small group expansion or an “opt out” option for states instead. I believe these alternatives would ensure that states continue to work towards the goal of expansion, rather than disregarding the provision altogether.

Mr. Speaker, I am also disappointed that this bill was not considered under regular order. Such an important issue deserves thoughtful discussion and opportunities for amendments. I had hoped to offer an amendment that would allow states to “opt out” of the expansion. Since I was unable to discuss this amendment and other potential changes to the bill with my colleagues in a committee markup, I remain uncertain that this legislation is the best course of action.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. PITTS) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 1624, 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.

□ 1515

GOLD STAR FATHERS ACT OF 2015

Mr. WALBERG. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (S. 136) to amend chapter 21 of title 5, United States Code, to provide that fathers of certain permanently disabled or deceased veterans shall be included with mothers of such veterans as preference eligibles for treatment in the civil service.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

S. 136

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 “Gold Star Fathers Act of 2015”.

SEC. 2. PREFERENCE ELIGIBLE TREATMENT FOR FATHERS OF CERTAIN PERMANENTLY DISABLED OR DECEASED VETERANS.

Section 2108(3) of title 5, United States Code, is amended by striking subparagraphs (F) and (G) and inserting the following:

“(F) the parent of an individual who lost his or her life under honorable conditions while serving in the armed forces during a period named by paragraph (1)(A) of this section, if—

“(i) the spouse of that parent is totally and permanently disabled; or

“(ii) that parent, when preference is claimed, is unmarried or, if married, legally separated from his or her spouse;

“(G) the parent of a service-connected permanently and totally disabled veteran, if—

“(i) the spouse of that parent is totally and permanently disabled; or

“(ii) that parent, when preference is claimed, is unmarried or, if married, legally separated from his or her spouse; and”.

SEC. 3. EFFECTIVE DATE.

The amendment made by this Act shall take effect 90 days after the date of enactment of this Act.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. WALBERG) and the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. LYNCH) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Michigan.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. WALBERG. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which 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 Michigan?

There was no objection.

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of S. 136, the Gold Star Fathers Act of 2015. This important piece of legislation supports fathers of permanently disabled or deceased veterans in their search for employment with the Federal Government.

Mr. Speaker, under current law, mothers of certain permanently disabled or deceased veterans receive preference in hiring for civil service positions in recognition of their sacrifice. That preference applies when the mother is widowed, divorced, or separated, or if their husband is totally or permanently disabled.

The Gold Star Fathers Act of 2015 extends this same benefit to fathers. The bill also grants preference in hiring to parents who never married along with those that are widowed, divorced, or legally separated.

I thank Senators WYDEN, BROWN, and COLLINS for their work over several Congresses on this important issue, and Congresswoman ESTY for sponsoring the House companion bill.

Mr. Speaker, we owe a debt of gratitude to our veterans and to the mothers and fathers of our veterans. I urge my colleagues to support this bipartisan legislation.

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

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of S. 136, the Gold Star Fathers Act of 2015, bipartisan legislation introduced

by my colleague, Senator RON WYDEN of Oregon, last January and cosponsored by Senators SHERROD BROWN of Rhode Island and SUSAN COLLINS of Maine. This bill passed the United States Senate by unanimous consent in May of this year and was favorably reported out of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee in July.

This legislation also has bipartisan support in the House in the form of identical legislation, H.R. 1222, introduced by my colleague, Representative ELIZABETH ESTY, of Connecticut.

In appreciation of the sacrifices that Gold Star families have made on behalf of our grateful Nation, the Gold Star Fathers Act would extend the 10-point hiring preference for Federal civilian jobs to the fathers of servicemembers who have been permanently disabled or who lost their lives while serving on Active Duty. This would be identical to the Federal hiring preference that has been available to our Gold Star Mothers since 1948.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation is reflective of the immense gratitude that we hold as a nation for the parents of our fallen and disabled heroes. It also recognizes the profound sacrifice that our Gold Star families continue to endure every day. It is a burden that is shouldered by the very few on behalf of the entire Nation.

Back in South Boston, my mother-in-law, Helen Shaughnessy, originally Helen Bailey, is a Gold Star sister. She lost her brother, Arnie Bailey, in April of 1944 on his first jump over the Rhine close to the end of the Second World War in Europe. I know that their family continues to carry that pain and that burden each and every day.

I urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to support Ms. ESTY in her efforts, along with Senator WYDEN and others in the Senate, to support S. 136.

Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as she may consume to the gentlewoman from Connecticut (Ms. ESTY). I would like to introduce and welcome her remarks. She is the lead sponsor of this bill in the House and has been a true champion on behalf of veterans all over this country.

Ms. ESTY. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of S. 136, the Senate companion to my bill in the House, the Gold Star Fathers Act of 2015.

I want to thank Chairman CHAFFETZ and Ranking Member CUMMINGS for their support of our Gold Star families and for prioritizing this bipartisan bill that would bring equity to the treatment of all Gold Star families, and I want to thank my friends Mr. WALBERG and Mr. LYNCH for their support today.

Mr. Speaker, on Memorial Day last year, I met with Gold Star families in Waterbury, Connecticut, and I heard the stories of how deeply they feel the loss of their loved ones, whether that loss was a year ago, 20 years ago, or 40 years ago. I heard from mothers and I heard from fathers about the difficulty of continuing on without a member of their family that they held so dear.

Those willing to make the ultimate sacrifice for their country deserve to know that we will support and care for their loved ones they leave behind. After talking with these families, I knew that we needed to do more for these grieving families and we needed to do more to recognize the sacrifice of their loved ones. That is why I introduced the House bill companion of the Gold Star Fathers Act.

Mr. Speaker, our country has long recognized that mothers who have lost a child in military service or are caring for their son or daughter who was permanently disabled in the military deserve a hand when seeking Federal employment. Currently, qualifying mothers of certain disabled or deceased veterans are eligible to receive the veterans hiring preference that will no longer be used by their loved one when applying for certain Federal service jobs.

However, mothers are not the only ones who grieve. The loss of a child is felt just as strongly by our veterans' fathers as by their mothers. It is time to ensure equal treatment of and respect for all parents of deceased or disabled veterans. That is why the Gold Star Fathers Act would extend this hiring preference to fathers as well.

In many cases, not only have the parents undergone significant trauma emotionally, but they have lost a working-age member of their family; and in the case of a permanently disabled child, they may have mounting medical bills to deal with as well. It is time to establish equality in our Nation's treatment of the parents of deceased and disabled veterans.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank Senators WYDEN, COLLINS, and BROWN for their leadership on the Gold Star Fathers Act in the Senate, and I want to thank my former colleague Representative Tim Bishop for his past leadership on this issue as well.

Mr. Speaker, I call on all of my colleagues to join us in honoring our Gold Star families. I urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to vote in favor of this bipartisan, unanimously supported Gold Star Fathers Act.

Mr. LYNCH. Mr. Speaker, I urge passage.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. WALBERG. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time.

Mr. Speaker, I urge adoption of this commonsense bill. It is more than common sense. We talk about family values a lot. These are family values. These are highest family values of parents that have raised young people who are willing to step forward for our country without consideration of their own lives or their futures in most cases. So I applaud my colleagues' efforts on this behalf, and I support and ask that this bill be supported fully by this body.

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 Michigan (Mr. WALBERG) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, S. 136.

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.

WOUNDED WARRIORS FEDERAL LEAVE ACT OF 2015

Mr. WALBERG. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 313) to amend title 5, United States Code, to provide leave to any new Federal employee who is a veteran with a service-connected disability rated at 30 percent or more for purposes of undergoing medical treatment for such disability, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 313

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 "Wounded Warriors Federal Leave Act of 2015".

SEC. 2. ADDITIONAL LEAVE FOR FEDERAL EMPLOYEES WHO ARE DISABLED VETERANS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Subchapter II of chapter 63 of title 5, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following:

"§ 6329. Disabled veteran leave

"(a) During the 12-month period beginning on the first day of employment, any employee who is a veteran with a service-connected disability rated at 30 percent or more is entitled to leave, without loss or reduction in pay, for purposes of undergoing medical treatment for such disability for which sick leave could regularly be used.

"(b)(1) The leave credited to an employee under subsection (a) may not exceed 104 hours.

"(2) Any leave credited to an employee pursuant to subsection (a) that is not used during the 12-month period described in such subsection may not be carried over and shall be forfeited.

"(c) In order to verify that leave credited to an employee pursuant to subsection (a) is used for treating a service-connected disability, such employee shall submit to the head of the employing agency certification, in such form and manner as the Director of the Office of Personnel Management may prescribe, that such employee used such leave for purposes of being furnished treatment for such disability by a health care provider.

"(d) In this section—

"(1) the term 'employee' has the meaning given such term in section 2105, and includes an officer or employee of the United States Postal Service or of the Postal Regulatory Commission;

"(2) the term 'service-connected' has the meaning given such term in section 101(16) of title 38; and

"(3) the term 'veteran' has the meaning given such term in section 101(2) of such title."

(b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections for chapter 63 of title 5, United States Code, is amended by adding after the item relating to section 6328 the following:

"6329. Disabled veteran leave."

(c) APPLICATION.—The amendments made by subsection (a) shall apply with respect to any employee (as that term is defined in section 6329(d)(1) of title 5, United States Code, as added by subsection (a)) hired on or after the date that is one year after the date of enactment of this Act.

(d) REGULATIONS.—Not later than 9 months after the date of enactment of this Act—

(1) the Director of the Office of Personnel Management shall prescribe regulations with respect to the leave provided by the amendment in subsection (a) for employees, but not including employees of the United States Postal Service or the Postal Regulatory Commission; and

(2) the Postmaster General shall prescribe regulations for such leave with respect to officers and employees of the United States Postal Service and the Postal Regulatory Commission.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. WALBERG) and the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. LYNCH) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Michigan.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. WALBERG. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which 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 Michigan?

There was no objection.

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 313, the Wounded Warriors Federal Leave Act of 2015, sponsored by my colleague, Congressman STEPHEN LYNCH. This important piece of legislation supports wounded warriors newly hired in the Federal Government.

The Wounded Warriors Federal Leave Act of 2015 supports our disabled veterans transitioning to civilian careers by providing sick leave for medical treatments and appointments that are related to their service-connected disability.

Mr. Speaker, this bipartisan legislation provides immediate access to sick leave for any new Federal employee who is a veteran with a service-connected disability rated at 30 percent or more for the purposes of undergoing medical treatment for such disability.

Because Federal employees begin with a zero sick leave balance and accrue sick leave over time, disabled veterans beginning civilian jobs often have insufficient sick leave to attend medical appointments required for treatment of their service-connected disabilities. This bill provides our newly hired disabled veterans with immediate access of up to 13 days for sick leave so that our disabled veterans do not have to take unpaid leave to care for their service-connected injuries.

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 313 is supported by a number of veterans and employee organizations, including the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and Federal Managers Association.