



HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
VETERANS' AFFAIRS
Chairman Phil Roe, M.D.



VETERANS DAY RESOURCE PACKET

Dear Colleague:

This weekend, we celebrate the service and sacrifice of every man and woman who has worn the uniform of our great nation. As Chairman of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs and a veteran myself, this is a special weekend for me, and I know it is for many of you also.

In Congress, we're working hard and celebrating the service of veterans every day, not just November 11th. I'm proud to report that President Trump just signed the largest cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for veterans since 2012. In the last several months we've made great progress to spark the kind of change at the Department of Veterans Affairs that President Trump promised. These reforms have already begun to make a difference in the lives of the men and women who served.

From working together to ensure veterans will be able to utilize their GI Bill benefits for life to modernizing the disability claims appeals process, little by little we're transforming VA into the agency it was intended to be, and we couldn't do it without the friendships and partnerships we've developed with our Senate counterparts, Veterans Service Organizations, Secretary Shulkin and the Trump administration.

Just this week my committee passed legislation to follow through on one of the bipartisan Commission on Care recommendations to conduct a comprehensive review of VA's assets. This bill will start the process of bringing VA health care facilities into the 21st century so the department can serve veterans for generations to come. I look forward to speaking with you about this and other major reforms soon.

I've visited VA facilities around the country – from upstate New York to Southern California – and it's clear to me that VA is on the verge of something big, but we've got to keep the momentum going if we intend to deliver the results veterans deserve. The House isn't letting up. This week alone the House passed fourteen bipartisan bills. These bills will protect veterans from financial fraud, improve VA's organ transplant program, expand mental health care for veterans with an other than honorable discharge, streamline VA's tele-health program and provide better in-home care for disabled veterans – to name a few.

As we celebrate our best and bravest this weekend, I hope you'll join me in sharing these accomplishments with your constituents. It's an honor to serve alongside you, and I appreciate your continued dedication to our nation's heroes. Please don't hesitate to reach out if there's ever anything I can do for you or your constituents.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Phil", written in a cursive style.

Phil Roe, M.D.
Chairman

INCREASING VETERANS' ACCESS TO CARE



IMPROVING VA ACCOUNTABILITY &
EFFICIENCY



PROVIDING VETERANS WITH THE
CERTAINTY THEY DESERVE & THE
BENEFITS THEY'VE EARNED



INVESTING IN JOBS & EDUCATION



MESSAGING RESOURCES

INCREASING ACCESS TO CARE

H.R. 918: The Veteran Urgent Access to Mental Healthcare Act

The Veteran Urgent Access to Mental Healthcare Act, introduced by Rep. Coffman, would require VA to provide an initial mental health assessment and any subsequent mental health services required to meet urgent mental health care needs to former service members who would otherwise be ineligible for such services because they were discharged from military service under OTH conditions.

Bill Status: Passed the House on November 7, 2017

H.R. 1133: Veterans Transplant Coverage Act

The Veterans Transplant Coverage Act, introduced by Rep. John Carter, would authorize VA to provide all care and services needed for a veteran to receive an organ transplant from a live donor, regardless of whether the donor is eligible for VA health care or whether the health care facility is part of the VA.

Bill Status: Passed the House on November 7, 2017

H.R. 2123: Veterans E-Health and Telemedicine Support Act of 2017 (VETS) Act

The VETS Act, introduced by Rep. Glenn Thompson, would give the VA Secretary the legislative authority to allow VA providers to practice telemedicine across state lines.

Bill Status: Passed the House on November 7, 2017

H.R. 2601: Veterans Increased Choice for Transplanted Organs and Recovery (VICTOR) Act

The Veterans Increased Choice for Transplanted Organs and Recovery (VICTOR) Act, introduced by Rep. Neal Dunn, would enable veterans who aren't able to access care at a VA transplant center to seek care at a community transplant facility.

Bill Status: Passed the House on November 7, 2017

H.R. 3262: Grow Our Own Directive: Physician Assistant Employment and Education Act

The Grow Our Own Directive: Physician Assistant Employment and Education Act, introduced by Rep. Kuster, would direct VA to carry out the Grow Our Own Directive or G.O.O.D. pilot program to provide educational assistance to certain former members of the Armed Forces with medical or military health experience for education and training as VA physician assistants.

Bill Status: Passed the House on November 7, 2017

H.R. 4173: The Veterans Crisis Line Study Act of 2017

The Veterans Crisis Line Study Act of 2017, introduced by Rep. Jim Banks, would require VA to conduct a study on the outcomes and efficacy of the Veterans Crisis Line based on an analysis of national suicide data and data collected from the VCL.

Bill Status: Passed the House on November 8, 2017

H.R. 3819: The Department of Veterans Affairs Expiring Authorities Act of 2017

H.R. 3819, introduced by Rep. Brian Mast, would extend a number of expiring authorities impacting veterans' benefits, health care, and homeless programs, including nursing home care, support services for caregivers, transportation, child care assistance, adaptive sports programs and housing and home loan services.

★ Bill Status: Signed by President Trump

H.R. 1848: Veterans Affairs Medical Scribe Pilot Act of 2017

The Veterans Affairs Medical Scribe Pilot Act of 2017, introduced by Chairman Phil Roe, M.D., would create a two-year medical scribes pilot program within VA.

Bill Status: Passed the House on July 24, 2017

H.R. 1367: "To improve the authority of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to hire and retain physicians and other employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes"

This legislation, introduced by Health Chairman Brad Wenstrup, would establish a recruiting database to make high-quality potential employees aware of positions at VA and create opportunities for career training and advancement for current VA employees through fellowship positions and a promotional track for technical experts.

★ Bill status: Passed the House 412-0 on March 17, 2017 and was signed into law as part of S. 114

H.R. 1162: The No Hero Left Untreated Act

The No Hero Left Untreated Act, introduced by Rep. Stephen Knight, would require VA to carry out a one-year pilot program at up to two VA medical facilities to provide access to magnetic EEG/EKG-guided resonance therapy to veterans with PTSD, TBI, MST, chronic pain or opiate addiction for up to 50 veterans.

Bill Status: Passed the House on May 23, 2017

H.R. 1058: The VA Provider Equity Act

The VA Provider Equity Act, introduced by Rep. Wenstrup, would make podiatrists equal to their physician peers in terms of pay and eligibility for promotion and leadership positions.

Bill Status: Passed the House on July 24, 2017

H.R. 1005: "To improve the provision of adult day health care services for veterans"

H.R. 1005, introduced by Rep. Lee Zeldin, would direct VA to enter into an agreement or a contract with state veterans homes to pay for adult day health care for a veteran eligible for, but not receiving, nursing home care.

Bill Status: Passed the House on May 23, 2017

Senate companion to H.R. 369: Eliminating the sunset date of the Choice program

The Eliminating the Sunset Date of the Choice Act, introduced by Chairman Phil Roe, M.D., would eliminate the statutory sunset date for the Choice Program and instead allow the program to continue until the original funding has been expended.

★ Bill Status: Signed by President Trump

IMPROVING VA ACCOUNTABILITY & EFFICIENCY

H.R. 1066: The VA Management Alignment Act of 2017

The VA Management Alignment Act of 2017, introduced by Rep. Derek Kilmer, would require VA to submit a report regarding the roles, responsibility, and accountability of elements and individuals of VA, using the findings of the Independent Assessment, the Commission on Care and relevant GAO reports as resources.

Bill Status: Passed the House on November 7, 2017

H.R. 2772: The VA Senior Executive Accountability Act

The VA Senior Executive Accountability Act, introduced by Rep. Taylor, will improve transparency by requiring VA to inform Congress about where senior executives are being moved.

Bill Status: Passed the House on July 28, 2017

S. 114: A bill to authorize appropriations for the Veterans Choice Program

S. 114 would provide \$2 billion to continue the Choice Program for six months while Congress works on other reforms to the Choice Program. It would also authorize 28 major medical facility leases and enhance the recruitment, retention and training of the VA workforce.

★ Bill Status: Signed by President Trump

S. 1094: The Department of Veterans Affairs Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act of 2017

The Department of Veterans Affairs Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act of 2017 would create a new streamlined and efficient process to remove, demote or suspend any VA employee for poor performance or misconduct with a concrete shortened timeline, while still protecting employees' due process rights, and would provide them with the right to appeal the action. It would also provide expanded protections for whistleblowers and would specifically bar VA from using this removal authority if the employee has an open whistleblower complaint/case with the Office of Special Counsel.

★ Bill Status: Signed by President Trump

H.R. 2749: The Protecting Business Opportunities for Veterans Act of 2017

The Protecting Business Opportunities for Veterans Act of 2017, introduced by Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee Chairman Jack Bergman and Ranking Member Ann Kuster, would require participants in the Vets First Program to certify that they are performing the required percentage of work and directs VA to refer suspected violators to the Office of the Inspector General for investigation.

Bill Status: Passed the House on July 24, 2017

H.R. 2006: The VA Procurement Efficiency and Transparency Act

The VA Procurement Efficiency and Transparency Act, introduced by Rep. Mike Coffman, would encourage efficiency and transparency in VA's procurement processes by mandating high level parameters for how the department calculates its savings from encouraging competition when awarding procurement contracts.

Bill Status: Passed the House on July 24, 2017

H.R. 1690: The Department of Veterans Affairs Bonus Transparency Act

The Department of Veterans Affairs Bonus Transparency Act, introduced by Rep. Claudia Tenney, would enhance the transparency of high-dollar bonuses being provided to senior executives at VA by requiring VA to submit an annual report to Congress on senior VA leadership bonus awards.

Bill Status: Passed the House on July 24, 2017

H.R. 1545: The VA Prescription Data Accountability Act

The VA Prescription Data Accountability Act, introduced by Rep. Ann Kuster, would clarify current law to stipulate that VHA is required to disclose information to state controlled substance monitoring programs for anyone – veteran or non-veteran – who is prescribed these medications through VA.

Bill Status: Passed the House on March 17, 2017

H.R. 1259: The VA Accountability First Act of 2017

The VA Accountability First Act of 2017, introduced by Chairman Phil Roe, M.D., would provide the VA Secretary increased flexibility to remove, demote, or suspend any VA employee, including Senior Executive Service employees, for performance or misconduct.

Bill Status: Passed by the House on March 16, 2017. The Senate introduced bipartisan compromise legislation on May 11, 2017 which was signed into law on June 23, 2017.

H.R. 467: The VA Scheduling Accountability Act

The VA Scheduling Accountability Act, introduced by Rep. Jackie Walorski, would require VA medical center directors to certify annually that their facility is in compliance with the scheduling directive (or any successor directive that replaces it), prohibit VA from waiving certification and require VA to report to Congress on individual medical facilities' compliance.

Bill Status: Passed the House on May 23, 2017

H.R. 27: The Ensuring VA Employee Accountability Act

The Ensuring VA Employee Accountability Act, introduced by Rep. Ryan Costello, would require all reprimands and admonishments given to VA employees to remain in their file for as long as they are employed by the department.

Bill Status: Passed the House on January 3, 2017

H.R. 28: The Biological Implant Tracking and Veterans Safety Act

The Biological Implant Tracking and Veterans Safety Act, introduced by Chairman Phil Roe, M.D., directs the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to adopt the FDA's unique device identification system (UDI) for labeling of all biological implants and to implement an automated inventory system to ensure veterans do not receive expired or otherwise contaminated tissue.

Bill Status: Passed the House on January 3, 2017

PROVIDING VETERANS WITH THE CERTAINTY THEY DESERVE & THE BENEFITS THEY'VE EARNED

H.R. 3122: Veterans Care Financial Protection Act of 2017

The Veterans Care Financial Protection Act of 2017, introduced by Rep. Matt Cartwright, directs VA to work with federal agencies and states to develop and implement standards that protect individuals who are eligible for this increased pension from dishonest, predatory or otherwise unlawful practices.

Bill Status: Passed the House on November 6, 2017

H.R. 3562: To amend title 38, United States Code, to authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to furnish assistance for adaptations of residences of veterans in rehabilitation programs

H.R. 3561, introduced by EO Chairman Jodey Arrington and Ranking Member Beto O'Rourke, would give VA-designated appraisers the ability to rely solely on information from approved third parties, such as a desktop appraisal, when determining a home's value for a VA home loan.

Bill Status: Passed the House on November 7, 2017

H.R. 3634: The Securing Electronic Records for Veterans Ease (SERVE) Act of 2017

The SERVE Act of 2017, introduced by Rep. Jim Himes, would make BAH documentation available online to all veterans, which would help confirm a veteran's monthly housing stipend and simplify their home or apartment rental process.

Bill Status: Passed the House on November 7, 2017

H.R. 3656: To establish a consistent applicability date for provision of memorial headstones and markers for eligible non-veteran individuals

H.R. 3656, introduced by Rep. Jim Banks, would provide a headstone or marker for all eligible non-veterans who die on or after November 11, 1998.

Bill Status: Passed the House on November 6, 2017

H.R. 3657: To expand authority to provide headstones and markers to eligible spouses and dependents in tribal veterans cemeteries

H.R. 3657, introduced by Rep. Bruce Poliquin, would authorize VA to provide headstones and markers to eligible spouses and dependents who are buried or interred at tribal veterans cemeteries.

Bill Status: Passed the House on November 6, 2017

H.R. 3705: Veterans Fair Debt Notice Act

The Veterans Fair Debt Notice Act, introduced by Rep. Chellie Pingree, would also instruct VA to use plain language in its debt notices to provide a clear explanation of why VA is alleging that the veteran owes such a debt.

Bill Status: Passed the House on November 8, 2017

H.R. 2288: The Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act of 2017

The Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act of 2017, introduced by Reps. Mike Bost and Elizabeth Esty, would modernize the appeals process at the Department of Veterans Affairs.



Signed by President Trump

H.R. 95: Veterans' Access to Child Care Act

The Veterans' Access to Child Care Act, introduced by Rep. Brownley, requires VA to carry out a pilot program to assess the feasibility and advisability of providing child care services for veterans receiving mental health services and other intensive health care services.

Bill Status: Passed the House on July 28, 2017

H.R. 1725: The Quicker Veterans Benefits Delivery Act of 2017

The Quicker Veterans Benefits Delivery Act of 2017, introduced by Ranking Member Walz, as amended, seeks to reduce the number of unnecessary disability examinations by requiring additional information be provided to Congress regarding VA's use of private medical evidence in support of claims for disability compensation.

Bill Status: Passed the House on May 23, 2017

H.R. 1329: The Veterans' Compensation COLA Act of 2017

The Veterans Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2017, introduced by DAMA Chairman Mike Bost and Ranking Member Elizabeth Esty, would increase the rates of compensation for veterans with service-connected disabilities as well as the rates of dependency and indemnity compensation for the survivors of certain disabled veterans as of December 1st, 2017.

★ Bill Status: Signed by President Trump

H.R. 1181: Veterans 2nd Amendment Protection Act

The Veterans 2nd Amendment Protection Act, introduced by Chairman Phil Roe, M.D., would prohibit VA from considering any beneficiary who is assisted by a fiduciary as “mentally defective” without a magistrate or judicial authority ruling that the beneficiary is a danger to themselves or others.

Bill Status: Passed the House on March 16, 2017

H.R. 512: WINGMAN Act

The WINGMAN Act, introduced by Rep. Ted Yoho, allows designated permanent, full time Congressional staffers to look up the status of a veteran's claim on VA's database - but only if the veteran has given the staffer permission.

Bill Status: Passed the House on February 13, 2017

H.R. 282: The Military Residency Choice Act

The Military Residency Choice Act, introduced by Rep. Elise Stefanik, would amend the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (SCRA) to permit the spouse of a service member to elect to use the same residence as the service member for purposes of taxation and voting, regardless of the date that they were married.

Bill Status: Passed the House on July 24, 2017

INVESTING IN JOBS AND EDUCATION

H.R. 3949: Veteran Apprenticeship and Labor Opportunity Reform (VALOR) Act

The VALOR Act, introduced by Rep. Ro Khanna, would simplify an approval process by allowing companies to register their apprenticeship programs with one central approval agency.

Bill Status: Passed the House on November 7, 2017

H.R. 3218: The Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017

The Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017, introduced by Chairman Phil Roe, would remove time restrictions to use the GI Bill, enabling future eligible recipients to use their GI Bill benefits for their entire lives, as opposed to the current 15-year timeline.

★ Bill Status: Signed by President Trump

H.R. 2781: Ensuring Veteran Enterprise Participation in Strategic Sourcing Act

The Ensuring Veteran Enterprise Participation in Strategic Sourcing Act, introduced by Rep. Neal Dunn, directs VA to work with GSA to increase the number of Service-Disabled Veteran and Veteran-Owned Small Businesses represented on the contracts, or else stop using the contracts, thereby closing the loophole that is denying veterans the opportunities the Supreme Court ruled they are entitled to in Kingdomware.

Bill Status: Passed the House on July 24, 2017

H.R. 974: Boosting Rates of American Veteran Employment (BRAVE) Act

The BRAVE Act, introduced by Rep. Kathleen Rice, is designed to boost veteran employment by allowing VA to give preference when awarding procurement contracts to government contractors who employ veterans on a full-time basis.

Bill Status: Passed the House on February 13, 2017

H.R. 244: HIRE Vets Act

The HIRE Vets Act, introduced by Rep. Paul Cook, as amended, would require the Department of Labor to establish a HIRE Vets Medallion Program to recognize companies for their efforts to employ veterans.

★ Bill Status: Signed by President Trump

For more information on bills passed by the committee, visit veterans.house.gov/legislation

MESSAGING RESOURCES

TWEET SHEET

Veterans Day

Today we pause to honor the service and sacrifice of every man and women who has worn the uniform of our great nation #VeteransDay.

Our veterans are the very best of this country. We're working to bring wholesale reform to VA so every veteran receives the care and treatment they have earned #VeteransDay.

Commitment to Veterans:

With more than fifty bills passed through the House, Congress has been working hard for America's heroes. Read more at veterans.house.gov/legislation.

The House's legislation to give veterans a cost-of-living adjustment was signed into law. Read more about the House's work on behalf of veterans at veterans.house.gov/legislation.

This Congress, we've had the #ForeverGIBill, legislation to modernize the appeals process and #VAAccountability signed into law. We're committed to improving the lives of our vets.

Improving VA + Holding Employees Accountable:

The House is working to instill #VAAccountability across @DeptVetAffairs. Read more at veterans.house.gov/accountability.

Thanks to a law signed by @POTUS, the VA Secretary now has the power to hold bad actors at VA accountable for their actions #VAAccountability

The House's legislation to modernize the appeals process and give veterans peace of mind is now law. Read more: <https://go.usa.gov/xnjyd>

Expanding Access to Care:

Congress is committed to improving and expanding access to quality health care for our nation's heroes. Read more at veterans.house.gov/legislation.

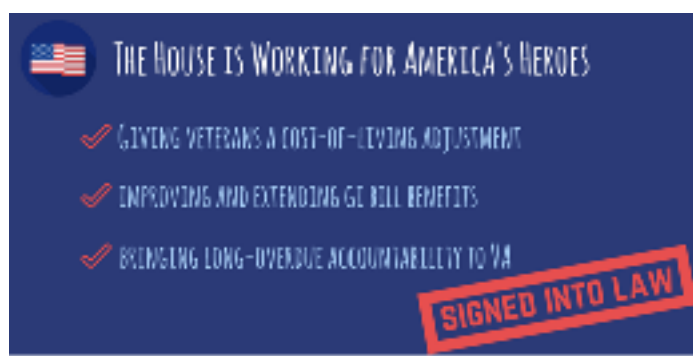
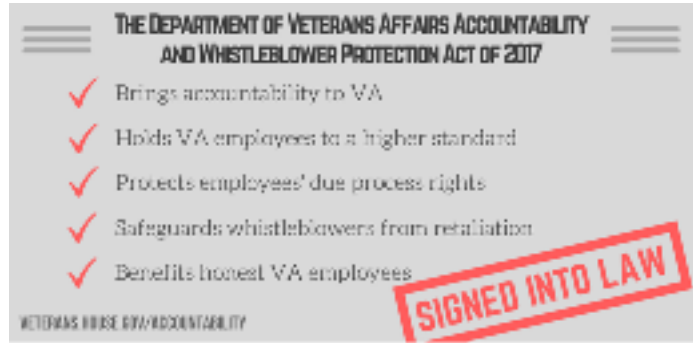
Legislation passed by the House has expanded access to mental health care and provided veterans in crisis with the resources they need to know they are not alone. Read more at veterans.house.gov/legislation.

Investing in Jobs and Education:

For the first time in history, veterans would be able to use GI Bill benefits for their entire lives thanks to the #ForeverGIBill which @POTUS signed into law.

GRAPHICS

Click [here](#) to download graphics.



SAMPLE OP-ED

Chairman Roe in The Hill: Congress is Working to Honor America's Heroes

As we approach Veterans Day, we are reminded of the brave men and women who have worn the uniform of our great nation. We honor their service and sacrifice, recognizing we are forever indebted to the soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines who have defended our freedom for generations. From that harbor in Boston to the beaches of Normandy, from the jungles of Vietnam to the deserts of Iraq and Afghanistan and beyond, the character of those who have answered the call to serve exemplifies the very best of what it means to be an American. American servicemembers have set an example for and around the world, and they deserve our respect and honor every day of the year.

In Congress, Republicans and Democrats are united in their commitment to these men and women. Despite our political differences, the debt of gratitude we owe our servicemembers unites legislators and inspires us to reach across the aisle to make good on the promises our nation has made to veterans. As chairman of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, I have the great privilege of serving our nation's heroes year-round. In this political environment, I am proud of the bipartisan, bicameral work done on behalf of veterans this year.

In the last eleven months, Congress has passed - and President Trump has signed - major reforms to bring accountability to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), to expand GI Bill benefits, to modernize VA's appeals process for disability claims and to protect veterans' access to the timely and quality health care they deserve. Congress is fortunate to have great partners in President Trump and VA Secretary Shulkin, and together we've been able to make an incredible amount of progress to provide veterans with the benefits and care they have earned. I'd be remiss not to mention the outstanding partners we have in Veterans Service Organizations. Their persistence and leadership have helped the committee move bills over the finish line, and we would not have been able to achieve what we've done so far without their support.

One of the first times I sat down with Secretary Shulkin I asked what VA needed from Congress to be successful in its mission to serve veterans, and the secretary said it was too difficult to fire or discipline bad employees. I realize the vast majority of VA employees are good, hardworking people who have the best interest of veterans at heart, but the bad actions of a few have tainted the reputations of many for far too long. The committee's ranking member, Rep. Tim Walz, and I were able to work together with Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Johnny Isakson and Ranking Member Jon Tester to reach a bipartisan, bicameral agreement on legislation to bring accountability to the department. Our legislation gives VA the authority they need to fire or discipline employees who fail in their duty to serve veterans while protecting employees' due process rights. President Trump signed this bill into law on June 23, 2017, and it is already being used to turn things around at VA.

Next, we passed bipartisan, bicameral legislation to expand GI Bill benefits. Before the Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017 was signed into law, veterans could use their benefits up to 15 years after their discharge. Now, veterans carry this generous benefit with them throughout their lives. The new law also provides increased GI Bill benefits for Reservists and Guardsmen, dependents, surviving spouses and surviving dependents. It also provides 100 percent GI Bill eligibility to Post 9/11 Purple Heart recipients and protections for student veterans whose school closes in the middle of a semester. Thanks to the leadership of House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy, the law creates a pilot

program that would pay for veterans to take certain high technology courses. As higher education continues to evolve, VA must evolve to ensure it is meeting the needs of student veterans around the country, and I'm pleased President Trump signed this bill into law.

Finally, Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs Subcommittee Chairman Mike Bost and Ranking Member Elizabeth Esty led legislation, cosponsored by every member of the full committee, to modernize VA's appeals process. VA data from earlier this year found that nearly half a million veterans were still waiting for a decision from VA on their disability claims appeals. The Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act of 2017 was signed into law on August 23, 2017, and would create three "lanes" for veterans' appeals so they can be processed in a more timely manner.

Despite all we've been able to achieve, the committee's work is just beginning. Right now we are working on legislation to provide veterans with options for care within their communities that will also improve VA's internal capacity. Additionally, I am leading an effort to implement one of the Commission on Care's most important recommendations: a review of Veterans Health Administration assets. This Veterans Day, as we honor the service of so many, rest assured Congress is working tirelessly to move bipartisan reforms to improve the lives of the brave men and women who we owe so much.

MAJOR ISSUE BRIEFS

CHOICE PROGRAM & COMMUNITY CARE

Nearly three years ago when committee oversight and subsequent media reports uncovered that veterans around the country were facing unacceptable wait times for VA care, Congress passed the Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act which established the Choice Program. The Choice Program allowed veterans who meet certain qualifications to seek care from health care providers in the community. Since fiscal year 2014, community care appointments have increased by 61% overall, and in FY 2016 alone, 30% of all VA appointments were held in the community rather than in VA medical facilities.

Though VA has been collaborating with community providers to treat veterans since 1945, the recent increase in veteran demand for community care has highlighted serious issues and inefficiencies within VA's community care system. For example, VA currently uses six different methods to refer veteran patients to community providers. These six different methods often conflict with one another, creating confusion for veterans, community providers and VA employees alike. That's why the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, led by Chairman Roe and Ranking Member Walz, have been working on bipartisan legislation to streamline VA's community care programs while also working to improve VA's internal capacity to care for veteran patients.

On November 3, 2017, Chairman Roe and Ranking Member Walz introduced H.R. 4242, the VA Care in the Community Act. The VA Care in the Community Act will streamline VA's community care accounts into one veteran-centric program that replaces the Choice Program, removing the current 30-day, 40-mile requirement to give veterans more timely access to community care.

This legislation is cosponsored by every single member of the committee. You can read more at veterans.house.gov/communitycare.

ASSET REVIEW

The Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act created an independent commission to take a comprehensive look at veterans' access to VA health care and release a report with their recommendations for transforming the Veterans Health Administration. On June 30, 2016, the Commission on Care released its recommendations for improving VA health care, including a recommendation to review all of VHA's assets through a robust capital asset realignment process.

On July 12, 2017, the full committee held an oversight hearing to assess VA's capital asset needs, followed by a round table discussion on September 7, 2017 with members of Congress, Veterans Service Organizations and stakeholders. At the July hearing, former VA Secretary Anthony Principi highlighted the need for a full review of VHA's assets and stated that without a realignment of VA medical facilities, "the VA will fail." On October 12, 2017, the full committee held a legislative hearing to consider draft legislation entitled, the Asset and Infrastructure Review (AIR) Act of 2017.

After the hearings and roundtable, many changes were made to the legislation to address stakeholder concerns. On October 30, 2017, Chairman Roe wrote a letter to representatives from Veterans Service

Organizations thanking them for their feedback and highlighting the changes made to the AIR Act as a direct result of their input. On November 3, 2017, Chairman Roe introduced H.R. 4243, the Asset and Infrastructure Review (AIR) Act of 2017. This legislation is cosponsored by every Republican member of the committee and was passed out of committee on November 8, 2017. You can read more at veterans.house.gov/assetreview.

FOREVER GI BILL

As higher education continues to evolve, the ways students are learning and the courses they are pursuing in modern-day society differs from even a decade ago. Although the GI Bill has been enhanced since its enactment in 1944, there are still many types of training and education programs that are still not accessible to student veterans through the GI Bill. Furthermore, recent data has shown that student veterans are succeeding at a higher rate than their non-veteran peers, and it is in the country's best interest to continue to invest in these veterans and servicemembers.

The Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017, named for the principal architect of the original GI Bill, will improve and extend GI Bill benefits granted to veterans, their surviving spouses and dependents. This bill was signed into law on August 16, 2017.

This bipartisan, bicameral package is budget neutral and includes provisions that have been proposed and prioritized by Veterans Service Organizations. The Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017 removes time restrictions to use the GI Bill, enabling future eligible recipients to use their GI Bill benefits for their entire lives, as opposed to the current 15-year timeline. It also simplifies the benefit for future servicemembers by consolidating the GI Bill into a single program over time, which will reduce VA's administrative costs.

This new law also provides significant increases in GI Bill funding for Reservists and Guardsmen, dependents, surviving spouses and surviving dependents. It also provides 100 percent GI Bill eligibility to Post 9/11 Purple Heart recipients. In addition, this law restores eligibility for servicemembers whose school closes in the middle of a semester and creates a pilot program that would pay for veterans to take certain high-technology courses.

VETERANS UNEMPLOYMENT

Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) data released November 6, 2017, highlighted that the veteran unemployment rate for October 2017 decreased from 3.0% to 2.7%. This is the lowest veteran unemployment has been since BLS started releasing data on veterans to the public.

APPEALS MODERNIZATION

When a veteran files a claim for a disability they believe is caused by their military service, VA will issue a rating decision, which either grants or denies the claimed disability and assigns an evaluation of disability level. If a veteran disagrees with VA's decision, they may file an appeal with VA and move their claim through several levels of the appeals process.

Unfortunately, VA's current appeals process is broken. Between fiscal year 2015 and fiscal year 2017, the number of pending appeals increased from approximately 380,000 to 470,000 – more than a 20 percent increase. Between fiscal years 2013 and 2016, Congress appropriated nearly \$200 million more than the president's request to address the appeals backlog. Despite the infusion of resources, VA estimates that it will take at least five years just to resolve the appeals currently pending.

The Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act of 2017 - bipartisan, bicameral legislation cosponsored by every member of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs - created three "lanes" for veterans' appeals, including the "Local Higher Level Review Lane" in which an adjudicator reviews the same evidence considered by the original claims processor; the "New Evidence Lane," in which the veteran could submit new evidence for review and have a hearing; and the "Board Lane," in which jurisdiction for the appeal would transfer immediately to the Board of Veterans' Appeals.

The new law gives the secretary the authority to test the new system prior to full implementation and allows some veterans already going through the appeals process to opt into the new system. It also requires VA to provide a comprehensive plan for how the new system will be implemented and a subsequent certification by the secretary that the department is prepared to roll-out the reform. Lastly, the bill requires the secretary to submit periodic reports to Congress, including information on how many appeals are pending in both the modernized system and the legacy system.

This legislation was signed into law on August 23, 2017.

ACCOUNTABILITY

In the past several years, VA's arcane civil service rules have hampered the department's ability to dismiss an employee that engaged in an armed robbery; discipline a VA nurse that participated in a veteran's surgery while intoxicated; and hold employees accountable for the continued failures to manage several major construction projects, including the new hospital in Aurora, Colorado, that is now several years and a billion dollars over budget.

On February 28, 2017, Chairman Phil Roe, M.D. introduced the VA Accountability First Act of 2017. On May 11, 2017, after the Roe bill passed the House, Senators Rubio, Isakson and Tester introduced compromise accountability legislation in the Senate.

The agreement, which was signed into law on June 23, 2017, provides improved protections for whistleblowers; allows the secretary to reduce an employee's federal pension if they are convicted of a felony that influenced their job at VA; recoups bonuses provided to an employee who engaged in misconduct or poor performance prior to receiving the bonus; and allows the secretary to recoup any relocation expenses that were authorized for a VA employee only through the employee's ill-gotten means, such as fraud, waste or malfeasance.

A recent study completed by the U.S. Government Accountability Office found that, on average, it takes six months to a year to remove a permanent civil servant in the federal government, though it often takes longer. Just last year, former VA Deputy Secretary Sloan Gibson testified at a hearing that it was too hard to fire bad employees at VA. You can read more about the legislation at veterans.house.gov/accountability.