

National Legislative May 9, 2019

Many of you know I serve on the National Sons of The American Legion Legislative Commission and I have just read the article below. These are a few legislative issues that we have talked about and urge congress to move forward. Thank you to all who served!!

Stripes: Veteran suicide, 'blue water' benefits among topics addressed in 18 bills OK'd by House panel
By NIKKI WENTLING | STARS AND STRIPES
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WASHINGTON - The House Committee on Veterans' Affairs sent 18 bills to the full House Wednesday, including legislation to address veteran suicides, create a fourth administration at the Department of Veterans Affairs and extend benefits to "Blue Water" Navy veterans. The hearing marked the first time that the committee has met during this congressional session to advance legislation. It remained uncertain Wednesday when the bills might be scheduled for votes on the House floor. "The 18 bills we have before us today represent considerable time and hard work by members of this committee on both sides of the aisle," said Rep. Mark Takano, D-Calif., the committee chairman. Rep. Phil Roe, R-Tenn., the ranking Republican on the committee, voted in favor of the bills but cautioned Takano against advancing legislation in the future without including methods to pay for them. "Several of the bills on today's agenda have preliminary scores from the Congressional Budget Office that include millions of dollars in discretionary spending costs," Roe said. "Given the number of worthy proposals competing for limited tax dollars, I believe it is incumbent upon this committee to do the hard work of prioritizing which proposals provide the most bang for the buck of our veterans." Some of the bills approved Wednesday were:

- H.R. 299, the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019, which extends benefits to veterans who served offshore on ships during the Vietnam War and have fought for years to prove they were exposed to the chemical herbicide Agent Orange. To help pay for the benefits, the bill increases fees for nondisabled veterans who apply through the VA home loan program. The bill would also extend benefits to veterans who served in or near the demilitarized zone of the Korean Peninsula beginning Sept. 1, 1967 and require the VA to identify U.S. military bases in Thailand where Agent Orange was used.
- H.R. 2340, FIGHT Veterans Suicide Act, which requires the VA to notify Congress of suicides and suicide attempts at VA campuses within seven days. The VA must also provide medical and housing information about the veterans, as well as an explanation of their most recent encounters with VA employees. The bill was introduced after three veterans died by suicide at VA facilities in five days in April.
- H.R. 2333, Support for Suicide Prevention Coordinators Act, which requires the comptroller general of the United States to review the responsibilities, workload and vacancy rates of VA suicide prevention coordinators and submit a report to Congress after one year.
- H.R. 2045, VET OPP Act, which creates a fourth administration within the VA dedicated solely to veterans' transition into education and employment. The VA is made up of three administrations: the National Cemetery Administration, the Veterans Health Administration and the Veterans Benefits Administration. The bill would add the Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration and a new senior official to lead it.

Three bills that aim to increase veterans' access to medical marijuana were omitted from the hearing Wednesday after originally being listed for consideration. Committee staff said the bills were withdrawn in order to solicit more feedback. The bills would prohibit the VA from denying veterans benefits because of their participation in state marijuana programs, authorize VA health care providers to recommend veterans for state marijuana programs and direct the VA secretary to carry out a clinical trial of the effects of marijuana on chronic pain and post-traumatic stress disorder. During a hearing last week, VA representatives voiced their

opposition to the measures, citing the Drug Enforcement Agency's listing of marijuana as a Schedule I drug.

David Lee, Legislative Commission