

12/4/25

Remarks for Congressman Gabe Vasquez

REMARKS

Thank you, Chairman Bost and Ranking Member Takano, for the opportunity to discuss my three bills currently before the Veterans Affairs Committee.

We owe an immense debt of gratitude to our veterans. In exchange for their brave service, we promised assistance so that they can pursue a higher education, achieve their academic goals, and become leaders in the workforce as they transition back to civilian life.

That is why I proudly introduced H.R. 1965, the bipartisan Veteran Education Assistance Adjustment Act. This common-sense bill increases the GI Bill's annual book stipend for the first time in nearly two decades — from \$1,000 a year to \$1,400 a year and allows for an annual adjustment of this stipend to keep up with inflation.

This stipend no longer reflects today's costs and falls woefully short of meeting the financial needs of our veterans today. At a time when millions of veterans are already working to make ends meet, Congress should not allow outdated policy to become yet another barrier to their success.

My bill has garnered the support of 22 bipartisan cosponsors, including eight Members of this committee. Leading veterans groups such as Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) and the American Legion have publicly endorsed this legislation, and President Trump's own Department of Veterans Affairs agreed earlier this year that the book stipend needs to be increased.

I urge you to make passing this bill a priority of the committee.

Secondly, I would like to discuss H.R. 2020, the bipartisan New Mexico Rural Veteran Health Care Access Act. This bill will improve access to health care services for rural veterans in southeast New Mexico by moving Otero and Eddy County from the Veterans Integrated Service Network Region 22 into VISN 17.

Currently, veterans in the southeast corner of my state drive as far as five to six hours to get to their health care appointments at the main VA hospital in Albuquerque. By moving Otero and Eddy Counties into VISN 17 and giving them access to the El Paso VA, they could cut their commute in half - removing a massive hurdle these veterans face when trying to see their doctors.

This bill also enjoys bipartisan support, including from a Republican Member of this committee, and represents a straightforward fix to a serious problem veterans in my district face every day.

Lastly, I would like to discuss H.R. 1964, the Las Cruces Bataan Memorial Clinic Act. This bill would rename the Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC/"see-bock") in Las Cruces, New Mexico in honor of the Bataan Death March.

In April 1942, the Japanese Army marched 75,000 American and Filipino POW's from the Bataan Peninsula on a 65-mile death march, where thousands perished. Approximately 1,800 New Mexicans were among them — but only 829 of those soldiers returned home.

New Mexico suffered greatly from this tragedy. So much so, that the old state capitol building in Santa Fe was renamed the "Bataan Memorial Building" and White Sands Missile Range hosts an annual march on base to commemorate those we lost.

Renaming the Las Cruces CBOC will serve as a permanent memorial for the brave New Mexican soldiers lost in Bataan.

I strongly urge you to advance these bills to the House floor so that we may fulfill our promise to support our veterans in their education, provide well-deserved health care, and enshrine the memory of those we lost for future generations.

Thank you, and I yield the balance of my time.