SUMMARY—S. 1950

Comprehensive Veterans Health and Benefits and Military Retirement Pay Restoration Act of 2014

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References to title 38, United States Code

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Budgetary effects

TITLE I—SURVIVOR AND DEPENDENT MATTERS

Section 101

Section 101 would require additional dependency and indemnity compensation (DIC) paid to the surviving spouses of veterans with children to be increased for each month occurring during a three-year period beginning on the date of entitlement. Currently, additional DIC is only paid for each month during the two year period following the date of entitlement.

Section 102

Section 102 would provide that remarriage after age 55 of a surviving spouse of certain veterans shall not bar the furnishing of DIC, medical care for survivors and dependents of certain veterans, educational assistance and housing loans.

Section 103

Section 103 would extend the marriage delimiting date for surviving spouses of Persian Gulf War veterans to qualify for death pension from January 1, 2001, to the date that is 10 years and one day after the date on which the Persian Gulf War ends.

Section 104

Section 104 would make effective date provisions consistent with provisions for benefits eligibility of a veteran's child based upon termination of remarriage by annulment.

Section 105

Section 105 would expand the Marine Gunnery Sergeant John David Fry Scholarship to include surviving spouses of members of the Armed Forces who die in the line of duty.

Section 106

Section 106 would expand eligibility for the Yellow Ribbon Program to beneficiaries of the Marine Gunnery Sergeant John David Fry Scholarship.

Section 107

Section 107 would authorize VA to provide, to any spina bifida-affected child of a veteran who served on active duty in Thailand beginning on January 9, 1962, and ending on May 7, 1975, and was exposed to a herbicide agent during such service, the same health care, vocational training and rehabilitation, and monetary allowance required to be paid to a similarly-affected child of a Vietnam veteran.

Section 108

Section 108 would direct VA to carry out a three-year program to assess the feasibility and advisability of providing assisted living, group home care or similar services, and transportation to individuals entitled to VA benefits as children of Vietnam and Korean War veterans born with spina bifida who live in rural areas and have no access to such services otherwise. In addition, it requires VA to notify eligible individuals and enter into an agreement with appropriate service providers.

Section 109

Section 109 would direct VA to carry out a two-year program to assess the feasibility and advisability of providing grief counseling services in group retreat settings for surviving spouses of veterans who died while serving on active duty.

Section 110

Section 110 would require VA to conduct a program evaluation of the Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance Program.

TITLE II—EDUCATION MATTERS

Section 201

Section 201 would require VA to disapprove a course of education provided by a public institution of higher learning for purposes of Post-9/11 GI Bill and Montgomery GI Bill (MGIB) education benefits, if the institution charges tuition and fees for that course for the covered individual at a rate that is higher than the rate the institution charges for tuition and fees for that course for residents of the State in which the institution is located. The public institution would be required to charge the in-state tuition rate for Post-9/11 GI Bill and MGIB beneficiaries while the individual is living in the State and enrolls in a course of education within three years from discharge or release from military service.

Section 202

Section 202 would reauthorize VA's Work-Study Program. In addition, it would expand the program to allow veterans to work in congressional offices to conduct outreach and assistance to servicemembers, veterans, and their families.

Section 203

Section 203 would prohibit any person, except with written permission from VA, from using the phrases "GI Bill" and "Post-9/11 GI Bill" in connection with any promotion, goods, services, or commercial activity in a manner that reasonably and falsely suggests that such use is approved, endorsed, or authorized by VA, despite any disclaimer to the contrary. The Attorney General may obtain injunctive relief to enforce this prohibition.

Section 204

Section 204 would direct VA to complete a program review of the on-the-job training program administered by the VA and submit a report to Congress.

Section 205

Section 205 would require GAO to submit a report to Congress on VA's processes for identifying and resolving incorrect payments under the Post-9/11GI Bill and MGIB.

Section 206

Section 206 would decrease the amount of reporting fees paid by VA to educational and training institutions that are used by institutions for making certifications required by title 38 or for supporting programs for veterans.

TITLE III—HEALTH CARE MATTERS

Subtitle A—Expansion and Improvements of Benefits Generally

Section 301

Section 301 would require the Department of Veterans Affairs to provide health care and nursing home services to veterans enrolled in the VA health care system.

Section 302

Section 302 would allow veterans who do not have a service-connected disability or have noncompensable service-connected disabilities rated at zero percent that do not have access to health insurance except through a health exchange (as established under the Affordable Care Act) to enroll in VA's health care system beginning on or before December 31, 2014. VA would also be required to provide public notification of the date that veterans may begin enrolling in the VA health care system. This section clarifies that the existing priority levels, which require VA to prioritize care to the most severely service-connected disabled and lowest-income veterans, remain unchanged by this legislation.

Section 303

Section 303 would extend the period of time individuals – including members of the active component, National Guard and Reserves – are eligible to enroll in the VA health care system from five years to ten years post-deployment.

Section 304

Section 304 would extend VA's Caregiver Program to all seriously injured veterans incurred or aggravated in the line of duty, regardless of era.

Section 305

Section 305 would ensure veterans receive the immunizations listed on the recommended adult immunization schedule established by the Centers of Disease Control's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices. This section would direct the VA to include information on such immunizations in VA's annual report to Congress. Additionally, it would require VA to report to Congress on VA's development and implementation of quality measures and metrics, including targets for compliance.

Section 306

Section 306 would require the increased provision of chiropractic care services to veterans at VA medical centers and clinics.

Section 307

Section 307 would amend the date of eligibility for purposes of obtaining hospital care and medical services at VA in connection with exposure to contaminated water at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, from January 1, 1957, to August 1, 1953.

Section 308

Section 308 would expand eligibility for reimbursement for emergency medical treatment to certain veterans that were unable to receive care because of a waiting period imposed by VA for new patient examinations. This section would also authorize funds to be appropriated for this purpose and would take effect on the date that is one year after the date of the enactment of this Act.

Section 309

Section 309 would relocate, within Chapter 17, VA's authority to continue to provide hospital care and medical services, nursing home care, and extended care services during any fiscal year only to the extent and in the amount provided in advance in appropriations to a more appropriate section of title 38, U.S.C.

Section 310

Section 310 would require VA to streamline its formula to determine eligibility for VA health care based on income to one income level per state.

Section 311

Section 311 would extend the authority for VA to transport individuals to and from VA facilities in connection with vocational rehabilitation, counseling, examination, treatment, or care.

Section 312

Section 312 would authorize VA to cover the cost of care for veterans receiving long-term care through VA's Medical Foster Home Program.

Section 313

Section 313 would extend for an additional three years, a pilot program to provide rehabilitation, quality of life, and community integration services to veterans with complex-mild to severe traumatic brain injury. It would also authorize VA to enter into agreements with community providers to deliver brain injury rehabilitative care to veterans. VA would be required to report to Congress on the program and on any recommendations to improve it.

Section 314

Section 314 would direct VA to carry out a two-year program to assess the feasibility and advisability of promoting health through the payment of fitness center membership for veterans determined to be overweight or obese and who reside more than 15 minutes driving distance from a VA fitness facility.

Section 315

Section 315 would require VA to carry out a three-year program to assess the feasibility and advisability of promoting the achievement of a healthy weight in veterans enrolled in VA health care through the designation of VA fitness facilities within VA medical centers and clinics.

Subtitle B—Health Care Administration

Section 321

Section 321 would reauthorize the Health Professional Scholarship Program.

Section 322

Section 322 would provide funds to VA for the purpose of developing a partnership with institutions of higher education to ensure the availability of clinicians in orthotics and prosthetics trained at the masters or doctoral level to meet the needs of veterans receiving orthotic and prosthetic care.

Section 323

Section 323 would require VA to use its existing capitation-based resource allocation model when entering into contracts for furnishing health care services. Such contracts would be required to give preference, as appropriate, to Federally-Qualified Health Centers and Community Health Centers. This section would also require VA to incorporate best practices when entering into contracts for furnishing health care services, such as requiring contractors to provide information on scheduling and appearance for appointments.

Section 324

Section 324 would prohibit VA from expanding the dialysis pilot program to any facility that is not an initial facility until after the date that: the secretary has fully implemented the dialysis pilot program at each initial facility for a period of not less than two years; an independent analysis of the dialysis pilot program has been conducted at each initial facility; and a report has been submitted to Congress after the date of completion of the independent analysis. This section would take effect on the date that is one year after the date of the enactment of this Act.

Section 325

Section 325 would require VA to implement local and state reporting requirements of infectious diseases and develop performance measures to assess whether Veterans Integrated Service Networks and medical centers are complying with such requirements. This section would take effect on the date that is one year after the date of the enactment of this Act.

Section 326

Section 326 would require VA to contract with a third party to conduct an independent study to assess the organizational structures of medical centers and improve succession planning of key leadership of the Veterans Integrated Service Networks and medical centers. The Secretary must report to Congress on the findings of the study within 90 days of its completion. This section would take effect on the date that is one year after the date of the enactment of this Act.

Section 327

Section 327 would require VA to develop and transmit to Congress a strategic plan for improving access and quality of health care services for veterans in rural areas. This plan would include goals and objectives for: the recruitment and retention of health care personnel in rural areas; ensuring timeliness and improving quality in the delivery of health care services in rural areas through contract and fee-basis providers; implementation, expansion, and enhanced use of telemedicine services; ensuring the full and effective use of mobile outpatient clinics.

Section 328

Section 328 would require VA to report to Congress regarding telemedicine services (the use by a health care provider of telecommunications to assist in the diagnosis or treatment of a patient's medical condition) for veterans, including updates on VA teleconsultation and telemedicine initiatives, training, and partnerships with primary care providers. This section would take effect on the date that is one year after the date of the enactment of this Act.

Section 329

Section 329 would designate the VA medical center at 3900 Woodland Avenue in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, as the "Corporal Michael J. Crescenz Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center".

Subtitle C—Complementary and Alternative Medicine

Section 331

Section 331 would direct VA to develop a plan to expand materially and substantially the scope of research and education on and delivery of complementary and alternative medicine services for veterans.

Section 332

Section 332 would require VA to carry out a three-year program to assess the feasibility and advisability of various approaches for integrating the delivery of complementary and alternative medicine services with other health care services provided by VA. The program shall be conducted at not fewer than 15 different VA medical centers.

Section 333

Section 333 would direct VA to conduct a comprehensive study of barriers encountered by veterans in accessing and receiving complementary and alternative medicine and the barriers encountered by providers in delivering such services.

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Section 334

Section 334 would require VA to establish a three-year program for the award of grants to public or private nonprofit entities to assess the feasibility and advisability of using wellness programs to complement the provision of mental health care to veterans and family members eligible for VA counseling services.

Subtitle D—Mental Health Care

Section 341

Section 341 would direct VA to include, as a component of VHA health care personnel education and training programs, education and training of marriage and family therapists as well as licensed professional mental health counselors. This section would take effect on the date that is one year after the date of the enactment of this Act.

Section 342

Section 342 would require VA to contract with outside providers to establish a program of supportive services to family members and caregivers of veterans suffering with mental illness. The education program would provide these individuals with information on different mental health disorders, mental health first aid and techniques for coping with the stress of living with someone with mental illness.

Within two years, successful graduates of the education program would replace contractors and become trained volunteer peer support coordinators. This section would require VA to offer the program to children, teens and young adults, using age-appropriate materials and programming. Furthermore, it would require VA to conduct an annual study of participation and satisfaction within the educational program and peer support program for the next five years and to report to Congress annually during that period.

Section 343

Section 343 would require VA to submit a report to Congress, not later than one year after the date of enactment of this Act, on the feasibility and advisability of providing mental health services for families of certain veterans at facilities of the Department.

Section 344

Section 344 would require VA to submit a report to Congress, not later than one year after the date of enactment of this act and each year following, on VA's Community Mental Health Partnership Pilot. The report would include information on the number of participating sites, the number of participating individuals, the effectiveness of the pilot and any plans for expansion of the pilot.

Subtitle E—Dental Care Eligibility Expansion and Enhancement

Section 351

Section 351 would authorize VA to provide restorative dental services to veterans to reinstate dental functions lost as a result of VA dental care services or treatment. Currently, VA may provide dental care services to certain veterans under limited circumstances but is unable to provide restorative services, such as dentures. This section would take effect on the date that is one year after the date of the enactment of this Act.

Section 352

Section 352 would direct VA to carry out a 3-year program to provide comprehensive dental care services to 30,000 veterans not currently eligible to receive VA dental care services. The program would be conducted at not fewer than 16 locations, with the number of veterans served divided appropriately between each location. VA would be required to determine the annual limit on expenditures per veteran, which may not be less than $1,000. This section would take effect on the date that is one year after the date of the enactment of this Act.

Section 353

Section 353 would direct VA to carry out a program of education to promote dental health for veterans who are enrolled in VA's health care system. The program would provide veterans with education on proper techniques for dental care and the benefits of maintaining proper dental hygiene. The program would help veterans identify signs and symptoms of commonly occurring dental issues and options for obtaining dental care. This section would take effect on the date that is one year after the date of the enactment of this Act.

Section 354

Section 354 would require VA to include dental care services provided by private sector dental providers in the electronic medical records of veterans, survivors, and dependents enrolled in the VA Dental Insurance Program. This section would also extend the VA Dental Insurance

Program for an additional two years. This section would take effect on the date that is one year after the date of the enactment of this Act.

Section 355

Section 355 would authorize funds to be appropriated to carry out this subtitle.

Subtitle F—Health Care Related to Sexual Trauma

Section 361

Section 361 would extend counseling and treatment to servicemembers who suffered sexual trauma while serving on inactive duty training.

Section 362

Section 362 would expand eligibility for care and services for Military Sexual Trauma (MST) at a VA facility to active duty servicemembers. Active duty servicemembers would not be required to initially be seen by the Department of Defense (DOD) and receive a referral before seeking treatment at a VA facility for MST. This section would take effect on the date that is one year after the date of the enactment of this Act.

Section 363

Section 363 would require VA to develop a clinical screening tool to better identity and treat veterans who have experienced domestic abuse and to better assess the prevalence of domestic abuse in the veteran population.

Section 364

Section 364 would require VA to report on the prevalence of domestic abuse in the veteran population, the types of treatments and care offered to this group of veterans, the effectiveness of these approaches, and on any correlation between MST or other sexual trauma and experiencing domestic abuse. It would also require the VA-DOD Joint Executive Committee to conduct an annual assessment for the next five years of the processes and procedures regarding the transition and continuum of care from the DOD to VA for individuals who have experienced MST or domestic abuse. The assessment would also include the processes and collaboration by the agencies to assist individuals filing a claim for MST or domestic abuse related disability. This section would take effect on the date that is nine months after the date of the enactment of this Act.

Subtitle G—Reproductive Treatment and Services

Section 371

Section 371 would clarify that fertility counseling and treatment, including through assisted reproductive technology, are included in the medical services package.

Section 372

Section 372 would allow spouses and surrogates of veterans, whose infertility was related to military service, to access fertility counseling and treatment through VA. This section would allow VA to coordinate the fertility treatment of spouses with that of the veteran's, if the veteran's infertility is not related to military service. This section would clarify that VA will not be required to find or certify surrogates, or to provide maternity care to a spouse or surrogate.

Section 373

Section 373 would allow veterans, whose infertility is related to military service, to access a monetary benefit equal to the lesser of one cycle of fertility treatment through assisted reproductive technology or the cost of three adoptions, to assist in the adoption of one or more child.

Section 374

Section 374 would allow stakeholders and interested parties to participate in the regulatory process to determine how best to implement new services added by sections 2 through 4 of this Committee Print. VA would be required to complete the rulemaking process within 540 days after enactment, and would not be allowed to provide any of these services until this process is complete.

Section 375

Section 375 would require VA and DOD to share best practices and refer patients, as appropriate.

Section 376

Section 376 would require VA to request that DOD and HHS work together to research ways that VA can meet the long-term reproductive care needs of veterans with genitourinary injuries and infertility related to their military service.

Section 377

Section 377 would require VA to submit an annual report detailing the statistics on the population that accessed fertility services and treatments, the types and volumes of services provided, the costs of these services, and a description of how services are coordinated with DOD services.

Section 378

Section 378 would make permanent a program to provide child care for veterans receiving health care and mental health care at VA facilities and creates a similar program for vet centers.

Section 379

Section 379 would make permanent a program to provide reintegration and readjustment counseling in retreat settings to newly separated women veterans.

Subtitle H--Major Medical Facility Leases

Section 381

Section 381 would authorize VA to enter into 27 major medical facility leases in 18 states and Puerto Rico.

Section 382

Section 382 would require the funding prospectus of a proposed lease to include a detailed analysis of how the lease is expected to comply with Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Circular A-11 and the Anti-Deficiency Act. It also directs VA, at least 30 days before entering into a lease, to submit to the congressional veterans committees: (1) notice of the intention to enter into, and a copy of, such lease; (2) a description and analysis of any differences between the lease prospectus submitted and the proposed lease; and (3) a scoring analysis demonstrating that the proposed lease fully complies with OMB Circular A-11. VA must also to report any material differences between the proposed lease and the lease entered, no later than 30 days after entering into a lease.

TITLE IV—EMPLOYMENT AND RELATED MATTERS

Subtitle A—Training and Other Services for Veterans Seeking Employment

Section 401

Section 401 would reauthorize the Veterans Retraining Assistance Program (VRAP), created by the VOW to Hire Heroes Act of 2011, for an additional two years. This section would delay the sunset date to June rather than March to coincide with the standard academic term. It would also allow veterans to enroll in an eligible program at a four-year institution if such program is not reasonably available at a community college or technical school.

Section 402

Section 402 would reauthorize, for an additional two years, the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) authority to provide benefits under the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) Program to members of Armed Forces with severe injuries or illnesses.

Section 403

Section 403 would reauthorize, for an additional two years, VA's authority to provide veterans who have exhausted benefits under the VR&E program and state-provided unemployment benefits up to 12 additional months of VR&E benefits.

Section 404

Section 404 would create a new, unified, online employment portal containing information regarding all federal programs and activities concerning employment, unemployment and training resources for veterans.

Section 405

Section 405 would require the Department of Labor (DOL) to compile a list of Internet websites and applications that are beneficial for veterans in pursuit of employment. This section would also require DOL to report to the Veterans' Affairs Committees on the feasibility and advisability of creating a single, unified, employment portal.

Section 406

Section 406 would improve DOD's Transition Assistance Program by requiring DOL to provide transitioning servicemembers with information regarding disability-related employment and education protections.

Subtitle B—Employment of Veterans and Recognition of Veteran Status With Respect to Employment Related Matters

Section 411

Section 411 would require federal agencies to develop plans to hire an aggregate of 15,000 veterans to existing vacancies within five years using the Veterans Recruitment Appointment and the Veterans Employment Opportunities Act authorities.

Section 412

Section 412 would, as a condition of receiving Jobs for Veterans State Grants, require states to recognize military experience when issuing licenses and credentials to veterans. This section would require states to issue licenses and credentials to certain veterans without requiring such veterans to undergo further training.

Section 413

Section 413 would require the Department of Justice (DOJ) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to award grants to eligible entities to hire veterans as first-responders. This section would give preference to veterans who served on active duty after September 11, 2001. There would be authorized to be appropriated for fiscal year 2015 one hundred twenty-five million dollars for DOJ and one hundred twenty-five million dollars for DHS to carry out this section. The amounts to be authorized to be appropriated would be available for expenditure through September 30, 2018.

Section 414

Section 414 would require federal agencies to favorably consider as an evaluation factor for contracts and task or delivery orders valued at or above twenty-five million dollars, contractors that employ a significant number of veterans.

Section 415

Section 415 would direct the Department of Labor, through its Veterans' Employment and Training Service, to conduct a study on barriers and potential discrimination facing veterans in the labor market. The study would include an evaluation of the adequacy and effectiveness of current federal laws in preventing or ameliorating acts of discrimination against members of the National Guard and Reserves and veterans seeking or retaining employment in the civilian labor market. Additionally, the Department would make such recommendations as it may have for legislative or administrative action to address barriers or discrimination that veterans may face in the civilian labor market and educating employers in the civilian labor market on issues regarding hiring a veteran or member of the National Guard or Reserves and the translation of experience of veterans and members of the National Guard and Reserves. This section would take effect on the date that is one year after the date of the enactment of this Act.

Subtitle C—Program on Career Transition

Section 421

Section 421 would require VA to establish a three year program to provide young veterans, between the ages 18-30, the opportunity to serve in an internship whereby they would be paired with employers in the private sector to gain civilian work experience. This section would require VA to provide such veterans with Professional Skills Workshops to help them develop the skills needed to succeed in the civilian workforce, increased marketable skills, and assist them in obtaining long-term employment. This section would authorize VA to furnish pay and benefits to each eligible participant up to twenty-five thousand dollars per the duration of the eligible individual's participation in the program. Not later than 45 days after the completion of the first year of the program and not later than 180 days after the completion of the second and third years of the program, VA would be required to submit to Congress a report on the program. There would be authorized to be appropriated for fiscal year 2015 six hundred million dollars for VA to carry out this section.

Subtitle D—Improving Employment and Reemployment Rights of Members of the Uniformed Services

Section 431

Section 431 would allow the United States to serve as a named plaintiff in all suits filed by the Attorney General, while preserving the right of the aggrieved person to intervene in such suits, or to bring their own suits where the Attorney General has declined to file suit. It would also allow the Attorney General to investigate and file suit to challenge a pattern or practice in violation of the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA).

Section 432

Section 432 would allow for the suspension and debarment of federal contractors that repeatedly violate the rights of members of the uniformed services provided for under USERRA.

Section 433

Section 433 would provide the Special Counsel with authority to subpoena attendance, testimony, and documents from federal employees and federal executive agencies in order to carry out investigations related to USERRA.

Section 434

Section 434 would authorize the Attorney General to issue civil investigative demands in investigations under USERRA. It would not include the authority to compel oral testimony or sworn answers to interrogatories.

Subtitle E—Small Business Matters

Section 441

Section 441 would expand VA contracting goals and preferences to include conditional ownership of small business concerns if such small business concerns are 100 percent owned by one or more veterans.

Section 442

Section 442 would permit the surviving spouse of a veteran owner of a small business, who is less than 100 percent disabled and whose death is not a result of a service-connected disability, to maintain the status of such small business concern for up to three years following the death of such veteran.

Section 443

Section 443 would permit the surviving spouse of a servicemember, who owns at least 51 percent of a small business concern and dies in the line of duty, to maintain the status of such small business concern for up to ten years following the death of such servicemember.

Section 444

Section 444 would require VA to consider small businesses, licensed in a community property state, as if such small business were licensed in a non-community property state if such consideration would result in a greater ownership of such small business concern for purposes of eligibility as a veteran owned small business.

Section 445

Section 445 would require the DOL, in consultation with VA, the Small Business Administration, and other entities the Secretary considers appropriate, to submit to Congress a report outlining the benefits, services, and other assistance available to veterans to obtain the training necessary to purchase and operate a franchise; any known statistics about the number of veterans who seek this type of training each year and complete this type of training each year; and information regarding any barriers encountered by veterans in obtaining that training.

TITLE V—ACCOUNTABILITY AND ADMINISTRATIVE IMPROVEMENTS

Section 501

Section 501 would direct VA to reorganize the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) into geographically defined VISNs. In addition, it directs the Secretary to ensure that each VISN provides high quality health care to veterans, increases efficiency in care delivery, implements best practices, enhances collaboration with partner entities, among other management functions. Finally, this section requires the Secretary, at least every three years, to review and assess VISN structure and operations and submit review results to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs.

Section 502

Section 502 would require VA to establish not more than four regional support centers within VHA to assess how effectively and efficiently each VISN conducts outreach to veterans who served in contingency operations; administers programs for the benefits of women veterans; manages programs that address homelessness among veterans, and consumes energy. In addition, the regional support centers would assess the quality of work performed within finance operations, compliance related activities and such other matters concerning the operation and activities of each VISN as the Secretary considers appropriate.

Section 503

Section 503 would require the establishment of a Commission on Capital Planning for VA medical facilities. In addition to voting members appointed by a variety of government entities, the Commission would also include non-voting members representing VSOs and experts in the field of management, construction, and leasing of capital assets. Within six months of the first meeting the Commission would begin to issue a series of reports, beginning with VA's Major Medical Facility Lease Program, including any improvements that can be made to the lease authorization process. Other reports would include management processes of VA's construction projects, from contract award through change order processing; a general review of VA's construction program that would examine issues such as facility master planning, sustainability, and under- and unutilized buildings; and recommendations on the most effective means to work through the existing backlog of construction projects. VA would be required to report to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs on the feasibility and advisability of all recommendations, implement each recommendation that was considered feasible, and provide a description of the actions that are being taken or any legislative action needed to implement those recommendations considered feasible and advisable.

Section 504

Section 504 would provide advance appropriations for mandatory accounts of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Section 505

Section 505 would require VA to establish a free, publicly-available website that aggregates information on Department research data files. VA would also require that any final, peer-reviewed manuscript about VA-funded research be submitted to a free, publicly-available

website. Finally, the VA-DOD Joint Executive Committee would prepare recommendations for establishing a program for long-term cooperation and data sharing to facilitate research.

Section 506

Section 506 would require GAO to conduct an assessment of the information made publically available by the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) in order to determine whether such information supports and improves the timeliness and accuracy of claims decisions. GAO would also examine whether such information supports VA's Strategic Plan to Eliminate the Compensation Claims Backlog, encourages the filing of Fully Developed Claims, and provides sufficient notice to claimants filing electronically that VSOs are available to assist with applications for benefits. Finally, it would require GAO to report to the House and Senate Committees on Veterans' Affairs on recommendations for legislative or administrative action that may be necessary to improve the information made available to the public. This section would take effect on the date that is one year after the date of the enactment of this Act.

Section 507

Section 507 would require GAO to submit to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs a report on the VA's advisory committees.

TITLE VI—IMPROVEMENT OF PROCESSING OF CLAIMS FOR COMPENSATION

Subtitle A—Claims Based on Military Sexual Trauma

Section 601

Section 601 would require, in the case of a claim for disability compensation based on a mental health condition related to military sexual trauma, the Secretary to treat an examination or opinion as being necessary to make a decision on a claim if the evidence of record before the Secretary does not contain a diagnosis and opinion by a mental health professional that may assist in corroborating the occurrence of a military sexual trauma stressor.

Section 602

Section 602 would require VA to assign to each individual seeking compensation for a disability based on military sexual trauma a case representative officer who shall serve as a liaison between such individual and VA and provide advice and general information to such individual on the claims process.

Section 603

Section 603 would require VA to submit to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs a report on the current standard of proof for service-connection under chapter 11 of title 38, U.S.C., for covered mental health conditions based on military sexual trauma. The report would also include any recommendations the Secretary considers appropriate to improve the adjudication of claims for compensation based on military sexual trauma.

Section 604

Section 604 would require VA to report to Congress on claims based on post-traumatic stress disorder alleged to have been incurred or aggravated by military sexual trauma submitted to the Secretary.

Subtitle B—Claims for Dependency and Indemnity Compensation

Section 611

Section 611 would authorize VA to carry out a one-year program to assess the feasibility and advisability of expediting the treatment of certain dependency and indemnity compensation claims that are fully developed at filing. This section would also require VA to report to Congress on the results of the program and provide any recommendations VA may have for legislative or administrative action to improve the adjudication of dependency and indemnity compensation claims.

Section 612

Section 612 would require VA to provide recommendations to the House and Senate Committees on Veterans' Affairs for legislative or administrative action that would improve the timeliness and accuracy with which VA processes certain survivor benefits. This section would take effect on the date that is one year after the date of the enactment of this Act.

Subtitle C—Agency of Original Jurisdiction

Section 621

Section 621 would direct VA to establish a working group to assess and develop recommendations for the improvement of the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) employee work credit and work management systems. The working group is charged with developing a data-based method to revise the employee work credit system, a revision schedule, and recommendations for the improvement of VBA's resource allocation model. It would require the Secretary to carry out the recommendations he considers appropriate and also require VA to submit an interim and final report to Congress.

Section 622

Section 622 would direct VA to establish a task force to assess the retention and training of claims processors and adjudicators that are employed by VA and other departments and agencies of the Federal government. Not later than one year after the establishment of the task force, it would be required to produce a government-wide strategic and operational plan for promoting employment of veterans in claims processing positions across the Federal government.

Section 623

Section 623 would require VA to compile information and report to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs information on attempts to obtain records from a Federal department or agency other than VA.

Section 624

Section 624 would allow VA to recognize representatives of Indian tribes as individuals eligible to represent veterans in the preparation, presentation, and prosecution of claims for VA benefits.

Section 625

Section 625 would require VA to carry out a two-year program to assess the feasibility and advisability of entering into memoranda of understanding with local governments and tribal organizations to improve the quality of disability compensation claims and to provide claims submittal assistance to veterans who may be eligible for disability compensation or pension. Under the program, VA would be required to enter into memoranda of understanding with at least two tribal organizations and 10 state or local governments.

Section 626

Section 626 would require VA to post, at Regional Offices and claims intake facilities and on its webpage, and distribute through other mediums or using other methods such as collaboration with VSOs, information on the average processing time for fully developed claims and claims that are not fully developed.

Section 627

Section 627 would direct VA to submit a quarterly report to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs, which shall also be made available to the public, on claims reduction goals and actual production at both the initial claim and appellate level.

Section 628

Section 628 would require VA to submit a report and plan to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs on the use of existing authorities to expedite benefit decisions. The VA would be required to report on the use of temporary, intermediate and provisional rating decisions and to submit a plan to increase the use of temporary and intermediate rating decisions in order to expedite benefit decisions.

Section 629

Section 629 would require VA to submit information to Congress on the sufficiency of disability examinations. It would also require VA to provide a report and plan on efforts to utilize private medical evidence and to prevent the ordering of unnecessary medical examinations.

Subtitle D—Board of Veterans' Appeals and Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims

Section 631

Section 631 would require the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims to treat documents that are misfiled with the Board of Veterans' Appeals or Agency of Original Jurisdiction and expresses disagreement and a clear intent to seek review as timely filed if misfiled within 120 days after the date of the original decision.

Section 632

Section 632 would require any hearing before the Board of Veterans' Appeals to be conducted using video conferencing technology. This section provides an absolute right that a hearing be conducted in-person before the Board upon the request of the appellant.

TITLE VII—OUTREACH MATTERS

Section 701

Section 701 would direct VA to carry out a two-year program that would competitively award grants to increase veterans' awareness of benefits and services and improve coordination of outreach activities between federal, state and local agencies and nonprofit organizations.

Section 702

Section 702 would codify VA's authority to enter into cooperative agreements and arrangements with State veterans' agencies to carry out, improve, or enhance outreach activities between VA and State veterans' agencies. VA would be required to include such agreements and arrangements in its annual report on outreach activities.

Section 703

Section 703 would direct VA to establish an advisory committee on national outreach activities composed of individuals with backgrounds in: press relations, traditional and new media marketing, shaping a brand image, and communications. Veterans with press and public relations experience would also be appointed to the maximum extent practicable. The advisory committee would collaborate with the Assistant Secretary of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs to advise the Secretary on national outreach activities to ensure VA is effectively communicating its benefits and services to stakeholders. Advisory committee meetings would be required to take place on VA-owned property and make use of teleconference technology when practicable.

Section 704

Section 704 would direct VA to establish an advisory board at each VA healthcare system for purposes of enhancing and improving local outreach activities. Advisory board membership would be voluntary and would be composed of individuals with backgrounds in: press relations, traditional and new media marketing, shaping a brand image, and communications. Veterans with press and public relations experience would also be appointed to the maximum extent practicable. Each advisory board would advise the director of the VA healthcare system, in collaboration with VA employees of the healthcare system and involved in press and public relations, on outreach activities to ensure VA is effectively communicating its benefits and services to local stakeholders, as well as to explain policy changes or new programs at VA. Advisory boards would be required to meet on VA-owned property and make use of teleconference technology when practicable.

Section 705

Section 705 would require VA to submit its report to Congress on outreach activities annually, not biennially.

Section 706

Section 706 would require VA, in support of its budget for a fiscal year, to submit to Congress the amount requested for outreach activities of the Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs. VA would also be required to establish and maintain procedures, as well as submit a report on such procedures to Congress, to ensure the effective coordination and collaboration of outreach activities by the Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs across the Veterans Benefits, Veterans Health, and National Cemetery Administrations.

TITLE VIII—OTHER MATTERS

Section 801

Section 801 would repeal section 403 of the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2013, which modified the annual cost-of-living adjustment for certain military retirees by making the adjustments equal to inflation minus one percent, as of the date of the enactment of such Act.

Section 802

Section 802 would provide that if a veteran, surviving spouse, or surviving child is eligible for a pension and disposes of a resource that was part of such individual's estate for less than its fair market value within three years before applying for such pension, then VA shall deny or discontinue the pension payments for a certain number of months based on the value of the resources transferred.

Section 803

Section 803 would extend current law regarding pension payments received by veterans and surviving spouses who have no dependents and are receiving Medicaid-covered nursing home care. This authority provides these veterans $90 per month for incidentals, while preventing the VA pension program from subsidizing Medicaid. This authority has been extended several times, most recently pursuant to P.L. 112-260, the "Dignified Burial and Other Veterans' Benefits Improvement Act of 2012."

Section 804

Section 804 would improve safety requirements for VA's Homeless Grant and Per Diem Program by requiring recipients of per diem payments to comply with codes relevant to operations and level of care provided, including applicable provisions of the most recently published version of the Life Safety Code of the National Fire Protection Association and with any other State or local building codes or licensing regulations.

It would require VA to conduct an inspection of each facility receiving per diem not less than once per year to certify compliance with fire safety standards and would prohibit VA from providing per diem payments to grant recipients that do not meet the certification requirements.

VA would be required to notify Congress within 30 days of terminating per diem payments to a recipient because the building's certification has been revoked. Current recipients of per diem funding would be required to obtain certification within two years of enactment.

Section 805

Section 805 would allow State Veterans Homes with excess bed capacity to enter into contracts grants for residential care for veterans, without triggering recapture requirements related to construction grants.

Section 806

Section 806 would extend the period for scheduling medical exams for veterans receiving temporary disability ratings for severe mental disorders from 6 to 18 months after separation or discharge from active duty.

Section 807

Section 807 would authorize VA to issue veteran identification cards. Additionally, VA would be authorized to work with national retail chains to ensure that such chains recognize the card when offering reduced prices on pharmaceutical, consumer products, and services to veterans.

Section 808

Section 808 would honor as veterans certain persons who performed service in the reserve components of the Armed Forces.

Section 809

Section 809 would extend VA's authority to obtain information from the Secretary of Treasury and the Commissioner of Social Security for income verification purposes.

Section 810

Section 810 would extend VA's authority to issue and guarantee certain loans.

Section 811

Section 811 would direct VA, in consultation with DOD, to review the process for determining whether certain individuals have the requisite service requirements for purposes of receiving specific Filipino veterans' benefits.

Section 812

Section 812 would direct VA, in consultation with DOD, the Department of Homeland Security and such military historians as the DOD recommends, to review the process used to determine whether an individual performed honorable service as a coastwise merchant seaman during the period beginning on December 7, 1941, and ending on December 31, 1946, for purposes of eligibility for veterans' benefits.

Section 813

Section 811 would require VA, in consultation with DOD and such agencies or individuals VA considers appropriate, to submit a report to Congress on the extent to which Laotian military forces provided combat support to the Armed Forces of the United States between February 28, 1961, and May 15, 1975; whether the current classification by the DOD Civilian/Military Service Review Board is appropriate; and any recommendations for legislative action.

Section 814

Section 814 would require VA to submit, not later than two years after enactment, reports on the provision of disability compensation by VA to veterans with hearing loss and other auditory system injuries. Among other requirements, the report would include an evaluation of the extent to which veterans who had a military occupational specialty during service that is not included on the Duty Military Occupational Specialty Noise Exposure Listing are precluded from receiving benefits related to hearing loss from VA. This section would take effect on the date that is one year after the date of the enactment of this Act.

Section 815

Section 815 would require VA, in consultation with DOD to submit, not later than two years after enactment, a report to Congress that identifies goals for prevention, early detection, and treatment of hearing loss by VA's National Center for Rehabilitative Auditory Research and the Hearing Center of Excellence of the Department of Defense. The report would also include recommendations for any legislative or administrative actions necessary with respect to the Hearing Loss and Auditory System Inquiry Registry. This section would take effect on the date that is one year after the date of the enactment of this Act.

Section 816

Section 816 would limit the amount of bonuses payable to VA employees during Fiscal Year 2014.