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# U.S. House passes bill to raise federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The U.S. House of Representatives on Thursday passed legislation to raise the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour by October 2025, a big win for workers and labor groups, even as it remained unlikely the bill would pass a Republican-controlled Senate.

The move comes at a time when the \$15 minimum wage fight, first started by fast-food workers in New York in 2012, has been gaining momentum around the country with several states and large private-sector employers that hire entry-level workers. Cities and states including Seattle, San Francisco, New York state, California, Arkansas and Missouri have raised their minimum wage. Over the past year, employers like Amazon.com Inc (AMZN.O) and Costco Wholesale Corp (COST.O) have raised their base wages to \$15 an hour while others like Target Corp (TGT.N) have committed to going up to that level by the end of 2020.

Even some opposed to the move like fast-food chain operator McDonald's Corp (MCD.N) said recently it would no longer fight proposals to raise the federal minimum wage.

The country's largest private sector employer Walmart Inc (WMT.N), which pays \$11 in base wages to its employees, recently said it supports raising the federal minimum wage, calling it "too low."

The Democratic-majority House approved the legislation titled Raise the Wage Act, in a mostly partisan vote of 231-199. Only three Republicans voted for it, while six Democrats opposed it.



FILE PHOTO: The U.S. Capitol building is seen through flowers in Washington, U.S., April 23, 2019. REUTERS/Shannon Stapleton

## Financier Jeffrey Epstein to remain jailed until sex trafficking trial

NEW YORK (Reuters) - American financier Jeffrey Epstein will remain behind bars while he awaits trial on charges of sex trafficking dozens of underage girls, a U.S. judge ruled on Thursday.

U.S. District Judge Richard Berman announced his decision at a hearing in federal court in Manhattan, rejecting Epstein's request to stay under house arrest in his New York mansion valued at \$77 million. Epstein has pleaded not guilty.

Prosecutors had argued that Epstein should remain jailed both because he posed a danger to the community and because there was a high risk he would use his vast wealth to flee the country. "The government has established a danger to others and the community by clear and convincing evidence," Berman said at the

hearing. The judge said he would issue a written opinion explaining his decision more fully later on Thursday.

The judge also scheduled a hearing in the case for July 31.

Epstein's social circle over the years has included Donald Trump before he became U.S. president, former President Bill Clinton and Britain's Prince Andrew

Epstein is accused of arranging for girls under the age of 18 to perform nude "massages" and other sex acts, and of paying some girls to recruit others, from at least 2002 to 2005. Prosecutors have said that a search of Epstein's Upper East Side home, which has been valued at about \$77 million, turned up hundreds or thousands of pictures of nude women, some of

them minors, along with cash, diamonds and valuable art.

Epstein is being held at the Metropolitan Correctional Center, a fortress-like jail that has been criticized by inmates and lawyers for harsh conditions.

In a one-page summary of his finances filed in court, Epstein said he had a net worth of \$559 million, with assets including his jet, four homes and two private islands.

Epstein had offered to pay for private armed guards to watch him under house arrest, and sign a bail bond of \$100 million or more secured by his assets. However, Berman said Thursday that the bail package was inadequate, and that no other possible package was likely to do better.

# 2020 休斯頓黃頁



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# Editor's Choice



Golf - The 148th Open Championship - Royal Portrush Golf Club, Portrush, Northern Ireland - July 18, 2019 Tiger Woods of the U.S. during the first round REUTERS/Ian Walton TPX IMAGES OF THE DAY



One of a members of the Franciscan Action Network and immigration rights activists is arrested during a demonstration calling for the end of immigrant detention on Capitol Hill in Washington, U.S., July 18, 2019. REUTERS/Joshua Roberts TPX IMAGES OF THE DAY



U.S. President Trump departs Washington for travel to North Carolina at Joint Base Andrews in Maryland



Fifth day of protests calling for the resignation of Governor Ricardo Rossello in San Juan U.S., July 4, 2019. Susan Walsh/Pool via REUTERS TPX IMAGES OF THE DAY



Attendee Ana Niebla arrives in costume as Princess Penny Wise for opening night of the pop culture festival Comic Con International in San Diego



Lawyer Sigrid McCawley leaves the Southern District of New York federal courthouse after bail hearing in Jeffrey Epstein's sex trafficking case in New York City



F/A-18F aircrafts are seen on the deck of USS Abraham Lincoln in the Gulf of Oman near the Strait of Hormuz



Juan Cerdas, whose hobby is feeding wild crocodiles, kisses a large crocodile in the Tarcoles River, a river with one of the highest crocodile population in the world, in Tarcoles

**Subic Lures ‘Firm Prospects’  
In Two-State U.S. Trade Mission**



**SBMA Chairman Wilma Eisma signs a cooperation agreement with Leonides Reyes (left), president of the Filipino-American Chamber of Commerce of Greater Houston.**

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

**SUBIC BAY FREEPORT**—The Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority (SBMA) has drawn strong interest from prospective investors in the United States during a series of investment promotion meetings last week with various business groups in the states of Texas and California. SBMA Chairman and Administrator Wilma T. Eisma, who led the business mission, said that among the firm prospects they encountered was a \$10-million hotel operation and management project from owners of the Ramada Hotel in National City, California. “It was a fruitful mission overall, but the most successful was in San Diego County where we received firm commitments for the hotel project,” Eisma said in a briefing here on Wednesday. She said the other areas that potential investors favored were ship repair, refrigeration facility operation, home care, fintech Paypal system and green energy.



Subic Bay, The Philippines

Eisma said business groups, particularly in communities with a high concentration of Filipino expatriates, had responded positively to SBMA’s marketing efforts. “Part of the attraction was the pitch for them to come back and give their original home a chance [to develop further],” she added. “Because of this strong interest in Subic, they are now scheduling a counterpart trade mission to Subic this October,” she also said. Eisma said the 10-day SBMA investment road show took them first to Houston, Texas, where she discussed Subic synergies and trade prospects with officials of the Port of Houston Authority led by Chief Commercial Officer John Moseley, and then signed a cooperation agreement to expand SBMA’s global network with Leonides Reyes, president of the Filipino-American Chamber of Commerce of Greater Houston. Next, the SBMA team met with top executives of the Los Angeles Port Authority and the Federation of Philippine American Chambers of Commerce at the Port

of Los Angeles in California, taking the opportunity to talk about connectivity between the Port of LA and the Port of Subic.



The SBMA official also briefed members of the chamber of commerce in Chula Vista, the second-biggest city in the San Diego metropolitan area, and received inquiries on cold storage facility, ship repair and cruise ship home port projects in Subic.

Eyeing ties between the Port of San Diego and Subic Bay, Eisma also met separately with San Diego Port Commissioner Rafael Castellanos and Director Matthew Andersen of the US Commercial Service in San Diego, and San Diego International Airport Senior Director Hampton Brown and Domenic D’Ambrosio, VP for Marketing and Innovation.

At a business forum in San Diego on June 14, Eisma said she highlighted Subic investment opportunities in manufacturing, shipbuilding, ICT, renewable energy, retirement, leisure and tourism.



Eisma’s US trade mission successfully concluded with her receipt of two awards: a “Bayani” award from the Olongapo City Bayanihan Club (OCBC) of San Diego County, and a citation from

National City Vice Mayor Ron Morrison. The first, signed by OCBC Chairman Elen Nobles and Vice Chairman Jimmy Yap, recognized Eisma’s exemplary contributions “by opening channels of opportunities in job creation, business development and community-based programs,” and hailed her as “a radiant symbol of optimism to the Filipino com-

munities globally.” The citation from Morrison, meanwhile, cited the SBMA official for “her vision and inclusive leadership in public service by creating economic opportunities for the families of Olongapo City with ties in San Diego, California, USA.” (Courtesy <https://businessmirror.com.ph>)



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**VA Mission Act Will Provide New Patient Care Options And More Community Assistance Choices**

**Vets Get Access To Urgent Care And Private Medical Care Under New Law**



Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

The Department of Veterans Affairs MISSION Act has officially launched, working to expand patient access to care and boost community care options.

“The changes not only improve our ability to provide the health care Veterans need, but also when and where they need it,” VA Secretary Robert Wilkie said in a statement on the day of the program’s launch. “It will also put Veterans at the center of their care and offer options, including expanded telehealth and urgent care, so they can find the balance in the system that is right for them.”

The program, which revamps the previous Veterans Choice program, was made official nearly one year ago when President Trump signed the \$5.2 billion MISSION Act into law.

“In every generation there have been heroes like them, patriots who answer the call to serve, who do whatever it takes, wherever and whenever we need them to defend America,” the President said upon signing the bill. “They put everything on the line for us. And when they come home, we must do everything that we can possibly do for them.

And that’s what we’re doing.”



**The Department of Veterans Affairs will pay for treatment from non-VA doctors under certain conditions.**

Foremost, the MISSION Act overhauls the Veterans Choice program, which had long received scrutiny from industry leaders. Choice came with long wait times and was too complicated to be functional, many lawmakers agreed.

Under the MISSION Act, veterans will face more simplified parameters to qualify for third-party care. Additionally, the MISSION Act gets rid of some administrative properties tied to the referral process, ideally reducing the amount of time patients must wait between VA referral and connecting with the third-party clinician.

The law expands VA’s community care program and streamlines it into one program.

The MISSION Act also extends caregiver access to veterans who served prior to 9/11; previous to the law, the caregiver programs only applied to post-9/11 veterans.

Ultimately, the MISSION Act was designed to make it easier for veterans to access healthcare and to put those veterans at the center of their care.

“We owe our veterans the best possible care and support that they have earned,” said Senator Johnny Isakson, one of the bipartisan bill’s co-sponsors. “This is a truly meaningful victory for our nation’s veterans, who will benefit from more choice and fewer barriers to care. The signing of this legislation marks the completion of the final piece in a great mosaic of veterans reforms that we set out to accomplish over the last two years.”



**As of last Thursday, U.S. veterans have been granted expanded access to medical care outside Department of Veterans Affairs as part of a law signed last year by President Donald Trump.**

This law has not come without its controversies. Senate probes and investigations from the Government Accountability Office (GAO) have looked into whether the program will result in VA privatization and whether the agency is genuinely prepared for the program’s rollout.

“Since the Mission Act was signed into law, my concern is that VA’s primary focus is supplanting in-house care, as opposed to supplementing that care when it makes the most sense for veterans,” said Senator Jon Tester during a hearing on the MISSION Act. “In its rush to open the door to the private sector, my concern is that VA is outsourcing its responsibility to ensure veterans receive timely and high-quality care.”

Tester acknowledged VA’s limited knowledge about the timeliness of veteran community care access as well as the quality of care delivered, despite VA promises to

allocate funds to community providers who deliver top-notch care.

“So on one hand, VA doesn’t have a clear understanding of how much this Program will cost. And on the other, VA openly states that it would make funding decisions based on whether its facilities are meeting the standards it fails to enforce on the private sector,” Tester said. “What I see is behavior that smacks of a deliberate effort – not to implement the best policy but to carry out a political agenda.”



**The John Cochran VA Medical Center in St. Louis, Mo. (Shown above) New rule changes Thursday have expanded veterans’ ability to seek care from private physicians. (Photo UPI)**

For its part, VA has worked to address concerns about VA privatization, stating that this program is about expanding veteran choice for care access.

“It is important to note that the proposed Veterans Community Care Program does not supplant VA’s mission to provide care in VA facilities to Veterans who have earned it,” Richard A. Stone, MD, VA’s executive in charge, explained during the hearing. “VA’s proposed access standards will complement existing VA care by providing Veterans with greater choice to receive care in the community based on their individual needs and preferences.”

GAO has likewise noted some issues with the MISSION Act, launching an investigation into the VA’s preparedness to roll out the program. Specifically, GAO found that the agency lacked sufficient systems to carry out the Veterans Community Care Program (VCCP) and did not have enough information about referral times. Additionally, GAO stated that VA had now carried out recommendations for improving the VCCP. Other critics have pointed to issues with the VA’s new EHR rollout as a detriment to VCCP, but the agency has noted that the

community care program is not contingent on the revamped EHR software.



**The Department of Veterans Affairs MISSION Act has officially launched delivering expanded patient access to health care while boosting community care options.**

“While electronic health records modernization is an important improvement, it’s not central to the success of the MISSION Act,” VA Secretary Robert Wilkie, said in a recent response to media critics. “No one from the VA has ever said implementation of the new private care option Veterans will have under the MISSION Act is ‘years’ away because of our effort to modernize health records.” Instead, VA promised fewer bureaucratic hurdles for its veteran beneficiaries upon the MISSION Act’s launch, Wilkie said in an emailed statement to veterans earlier this week.

“What can Veterans expect on June 6?” he posited. “Less red tape, more satisfaction and predictability for patients, more efficiency for our clinicians, and better value for taxpayers.”

Additionally, veterans can expect expanded access to community care options, access to walk-in or urgent care clinics, and what Wilkie said will be a stronger patient-provider relationship.



**The official Urgent Care Provider badge.**

It is difficult to say how the program will impact veterans on only the first day of implementation. If VA can, in fact, overcome the hurdles laid out by its critics, the program has the promise to expand veteran access to care and choice in care. But the challenges are clear, and limited systems for addressing wait times and third-party clinician referrals may prove daunting for the agency. (Courtesy patientengagementthit.com)



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