

117TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. R. 7431

To direct the Secretary of Commerce to establish a grant program to facilitate the training and employment of veterans for certain conservation activities, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

APRIL 6, 2022

Mr. SOTO (for himself, Ms. SALAZAR, Mr. POSEY, Mr. CASE, Mr. GIMENEZ, Mr. LAWSON of Florida, Ms. MALLIOTAKIS, Mr. RUPPERSBERGER, and Mr. BILIRAKIS) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

A BILL

To direct the Secretary of Commerce to establish a grant program to facilitate the training and employment of veterans for certain conservation activities, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Don Young Veterans
5 Advancing Conservation Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 Congress makes the following findings:

1 (1) Veterans are among the greatest assets of
2 the United States.

3 (2) Veterans are highly skilled and trained indi-
4 viduals whose mission is to protect their commu-
5 nities.

6 (3) Studies show that community-focused
7 growth and engagement assists veterans with mental
8 health and combat-related trauma.

9 (4) SCUBA diving has been found to help im-
10 prove mental, physical, and emotional health and
11 has been specifically linked to improvement in the
12 symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder.

13 **SEC. 3. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE VETERANS ADVANC-**
14 **ING CONSERVATION GRANT PROGRAM.**

15 (a) **ESTABLISHMENT.**—Not later than 120 days after
16 the date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall es-
17 tablish a program, to be known as the Veterans Advancing
18 Conservation Grant Program, to award grants, on a com-
19 petitive basis, to facilitate the training and employment
20 of veterans for marine and coastal conservation activities.

21 (b) **ELIGIBLE ENTITIES.**—

22 (1) **IN GENERAL.**—The Secretary may award a
23 grant under this section to a non-profit organization
24 that conducts marine and coastal conservation ac-

1 activities in partnership with Federal, State, or sci-
2 entific organizations.

3 (2) APPLICATIONS.—To be eligible to receive a
4 grant under this section, an organization shall sub-
5 mit to the Secretary an application in such form, at
6 such time, and containing such information as the
7 Secretary determines appropriate.

8 (c) USE OF FUNDS.—An organization awarded grant
9 funds under this section may use such funds to train or
10 employ veterans to conduct marine and coastal conserva-
11 tion activities, which may include—

- 12 (1) coral disease response;
- 13 (2) coral restoration and rehabilitation;
- 14 (3) invasive species eradication;
- 15 (4) marine debris removal;
- 16 (5) marine mammal and reptile rescue;
- 17 (6) scientific research and development;
- 18 (7) shark tagging;
- 19 (8) shipwreck mapping; and
- 20 (9) underwater survey work.

21 (d) COORDINATION.—In carrying out this section, the
22 Secretary shall coordinate with the Secretary of the Inte-
23 rior and the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

24 (e) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is
25 authorized to be appropriated to carry out this section—

- 1 (1) \$1,000,000 for fiscal year 2022;
- 2 (2) \$1,200,000 for fiscal year 2023;
- 3 (3) \$1,400,000 for fiscal year 2024;
- 4 (4) \$1,600,000 for fiscal year 2025; and
- 5 (5) \$1,800,000 for fiscal year 2026.

6 (f) SECRETARY.—In this section, the term “Sec-
7 retary” means the Secretary of Commerce, acting through
8 the Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmos-
9 pheric Administration.

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