

Wasserman	Watson Coleman	Yarmuth
Schultz	Welch	
Waters, Maxine	Wilson (FL)	

NOT VOTING—9

Crowley	Hinojosa	Salmon
Fattah	Johnson, E. B.	Swalwell (CA)
Herrera Beutler	Johnson, Sam	Takai

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (during the vote). There are 2 minutes remaining.

□ 2206

So the bill was passed.

The result of the vote was announced as above recorded.

The title of the bill was amended so as to read: "A bill to authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2017 for military activities of the Department of Defense, for military construction, and for defense activities of the Department of Energy, to prescribe military personnel strengths for such fiscal year, and for other purposes."

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

AUTHORIZING THE CLERK TO MAKE CORRECTIONS IN ENGROSSMENT OF H.R. 4909, NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2017

Mr. THORNBERRY. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that the Clerk be authorized to make technical corrections in the engrossment of H.R. 4909, to include corrections in spelling, punctuation, section and title numbering, cross-referencing, conforming amendments to the table of contents and short titles, and the insertion of appropriate headings.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Texas?

There was no objection.

HOOR OF MEETING ON TOMORROW

Mr. DENT. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that when the House adjourns today, it adjourn to meet at 9 a.m. tomorrow.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Pennsylvania?

There was no objection.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION AND VETERANS AFFAIRS AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2017

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. DENT. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 4974, and that I may include tabular material on the same.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Pennsylvania?

There was no objection.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to House Resolution 736 and rule

XVIII, the Chair declares the House in the Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union for the consideration of the bill, H.R. 4974.

The Chair appoints the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. COLLINS) to preside over the Committee of the Whole.

□ 2209

IN THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Accordingly, the House resolved itself into the Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union for the consideration of the bill (H.R. 4974) making appropriations for military construction, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2017, and for other purposes, with Mr. COLLINS of Georgia in the chair.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The CHAIR. Pursuant to the rule, the bill is considered read the first time.

The gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. DENT) and the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. BISHOP) each will control 30 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Pennsylvania.

□ 2210

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chairman, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Today, it is my honor and privilege to bring H.R. 4974, the fiscal year 2017 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies Appropriations Act to the House for consideration.

I present this bill alongside my very good friend and ranking member of the subcommittee, the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. BISHOP), who has been an essential partner all along the way. I greatly appreciate the participation and support of our committee members on both sides of the aisle as we considered priorities and funding levels for the important programs in our bill.

We analyzed the budget request, developed questions, and held oversight hearings to get direct feedback from members of all the services, the Department of Defense leadership, the Secretary of the VA, and the VA inspector general. We received over 1,000 requests from Members, again, from both sides of the aisle, and we gave them full and fair consideration.

The bill is also the product of actively listening to the concerns of our veterans and veteran advocates, servicemembers, spouses, caregivers, military family members, and healthcare providers both within and outside the VA over the past year.

As we consider this bill, I can't proceed further without noting that this subcommittee has a formidable level of support from the chair and ranking member of the full committee. So I thank Chairman ROGERS and the ranking member, Mrs. LOWEY. Their attention, oversight, and genuine care for the military and veterans has been inspiring.

To round out the team, we have some great support from our professional

staff: Maureen Holohan, Sue Quantius, Sarah Young, Tracey Russell, and Matt Washington on the committee staff; and Sean Snyder, Drew Kent, and Heather Smith on my personal staff. I would also like to note Michael Reed and Michael Calcagni with Mr. BISHOP of Georgia's office. We couldn't do it without them.

I would also like to note the retirement of the senior member of our subcommittee, SAM FARR. He has been on this subcommittee since 1999. In our full committee meeting, we went into detail about Sam's accomplishments on this subcommittee, including being the architect of the Monterey model, which is now the benchmark for successful public-private partnership in a community with a base closure. Sam, wherever you may be, your commitment, passion, and good humor will be missed. All the best to you in your pending retirement.

H.R. 4974 demonstrates our firm commitment to fully supporting our Nation's veterans and servicemembers. Our investment of \$81.6 billion for military construction, VA, and related agencies, \$1.2 billion over last year's level, is unprecedented. The bill addresses issues to help veterans in every part of the country—every congressional district—and our troops around the world.

This bill provides comprehensive support for servicemembers, military families, and veterans. It supports our troops with the facilities and services necessary to maintain readiness and morale at bases here in the States and overseas. It provides for Defense Department schools and health clinics that take care of our military families.

The bill funds our veteran healthcare systems to ensure that our promise to care for those who sacrificed in defense of this great Nation continues as those men and women return home. We owe this to our veterans and are committed to sustained oversight so that programs deliver what they promise and taxpayers are well served by the investments we make.

On the military construction side, the bill provides a total of \$7.9 billion for military construction projects and family housing, including base and overseas contingency operations funding, OCO funding—an increase of \$250 million over the President's request.

This funding meets DOD's most critical needs, including priority projects for combatant commanders and funding new mission requirements.

It provides \$304 million for military medical facilities. It provides \$246 million for Department of Defense educational facilities, for construction or renovation of four schools. It supports our Guard and Reserve through \$673 million for facilities in 21 States.

It includes \$514 million for projects from the Department of Defense's unfunded priority list, benefiting the most critical projects—as identified by the services—that were not included in the budget request.

It fully funds military family housing at \$1.3 million. It provides \$178 million for the NATO Security Investment Program, which is \$43 million over last year's level, to deal with increasing threats and necessary investments overseas.

On Veterans Affairs, this legislation includes a total of \$176 billion in combined discretionary and mandatory funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Discretionary funding alone for Veterans programs in the bill is \$73.5 billion. Total fiscal year 2017 discretionary funding is \$2 billion above fiscal year 2016, which is a 3 percent increase, and \$1.5 billion below the budget request. Within that total, VA medical care is provided with \$64 billion, a 5 percent increase over last year—again, a 5 percent increase over last year for VA medical care.

Again, on VA medical services, the bill funds VA medical services at \$52.5 billion. That includes \$850 million that VA came back and asked for this year, on top of the advanced funding provided last year.

Many Members expressed concerns about medical services, and we were able to fully fund the budget request for hepatitis C at \$1.5 billion. We are paying for treatments for so many of our veterans who are being cured from this horrible disease of hepatitis C. The drugs are very expensive. They have come down in price a bit, and that has helped us serve more veterans.

Veterans homelessness is at \$1.6 billion, long-term care at \$8.6 billion, caregiver stipends at \$725 million, and Office of Inspector General is at \$160 million.

For disability claims, we provide the full request for the Veterans Benefits Administration, which is a \$118 million increase over fiscal year 2016, and the full budget request for the Board of Veterans Appeals, which is a \$46 million increase.

The bill will enhance transparency and accountability at the VA through further oversight and an increase for the VA Office of Inspector General's independent audits and investigations.

The legislation also contains \$260 million for the modernization of the VA electronic health record and includes restricting all of the funding until the VA meets milestones and certifies interoperability to meet statutory requirements.

Major construction, we continue to focus on major construction oversight. The bill includes language that will hold back 100 percent of the funding for the largest construction projects until VA contracts for outside Federal management, and we maintain strict restrictions on transfers, use of bid savings, and scope changes.

The bill provides \$528 million for major construction projects in Reno, Nevada; Long Beach, California; as well as cemeteries in Florida, New York, and Colorado.

We include bill language regarding improved standards for the suicide hot-

line and certification of mental health therapists to expand access for veterans who need their care. I don't need to explain to anybody in this body this great need here to help with the mental health needs of so many of our veterans.

□ 2220

VA performance awards. The bill prohibits all performance awards for VA senior executives. This was in response to multiple Member requests to restrict bonuses of various types at the VA. I understand this is controversial. But given the horrendous mismanagement that we have seen at many of the VA facilities across the country, we were compelled to send a strong message about accountability. The prohibition we included has passed as a floor amendment several years in a row, so that is why it is included in the base bill this year.

I will tell you that we have, obviously, many great and wonderful employees at the VA who are doing their best every day to provide for our veterans, whether it is through benefits or through the health system or on their educational needs, so I wanted to make sure that we make that point. But there is a need for some accountability, and that is why we had to insert this particular provision.

We have received some unfounded criticism from the administration for the actions that we have taken. The administration may not be happy with any change to its budget proposal. But this bill provides very generous funding that adheres to the law and our responsibility to practice fiscal responsibility.

Overall, with this bill and the funds that were provided in advance last year, for fiscal year 2017, the VA will have available 98 percent of what it asked for—98 percent of what they asked for is provided. I would wager that there won't be another Department in that enviable position. This shows the level of commitment we have to our veterans and their families. I think that should be noted. So despite any criticism, we should all be proud of this bill and what we have done in it.

Let me tell you, I can say with absolute certainty, the VA's problems stem from poor management and not too little money. We continue to push for better management, and the Secretary has replaced most of the senior managers at headquarters and in the field.

So many VA employees, as I mentioned earlier, are deeply committed—overwhelmingly, they are committed—to the veteran. They are talented, and they work very hard. I have met these folks, and I appreciate them very much. I visit with them in eastern Pennsylvania on a regular basis and in south central Pennsylvania.

But the "corrosive culture" that has been cited at the VA remains the root of VA's problem.

I want to briefly discuss the Choice Act or, as we call it, the VACAA, a lit-

tle bit. I, and probably all of you, fully support the Choice Act, and want veterans to have access to quality health care at a convenient location for them. Veterans want to be served. They want to be taken care of in the communities where they live. It is better for the veteran. It is better for the family. And we want to make sure our veterans have access to some of the finest health care institutions in the world that may not be part of the VA system. We need to do that.

The Choice Act was so popular that it brought a lot of demand to the VA, and the VA has been spending both Choice Act funds and discretionary funds to meet the increased demand.

The Choice Act expires at the end of fiscal year 2017, and its funding is being depleted sooner than that. Some of the Choice programs are already out of money, and others will be out of money halfway through the year.

For example, the Choice Act hires of medical professionals to cut the backlog of appointments runs out of funds to pay those people halfway through the year. We—and when I say we, that is discretionary appropriations—are picking up a \$600 million tab to pay them through the end of fiscal year 2017. It is the right thing to do, but it is not something that we had planned for.

There will be unprecedented and massive demands on the discretionary side to continue programs started with a \$15 billion surge of emergency funding a few years ago through the VACAA. That is a huge issue for fiscal year 2018. Right now, it is incumbent on Congress to reform VA health care with a responsible plan that meets the needs of veterans in a sustainable manner, and I hope that we can take that matter very seriously. It will be a huge issue next year, and it is an issue already this year.

With respect to the related agencies, we fund the American Battle Monuments Commission, the Armed Forces Retirement Home, Arlington National Cemetery, and the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans at the requested funding levels, which total \$241 million.

In closing, this is a very solid, bipartisan bill that is focused on the needs of servicemembers, veterans, and, most especially, all their families. We are \$1.8 billion over the fiscal year 2016 level. That is more than a 2 percent increase. We have provided for our military and veterans to the very best level we can in a manner that is fiscally responsible and consistent with the budget agreement we enacted into law last year.

Did we fund every last dime requested? No. But not every idea has merit, and not every project is mission critical. We did not fund some projects, we cut some requested increases, and we rescinded funds. These were fair decisions and part of our responsibility, as appropriators.

We will do a lot of good with this bill. It is fair. It is balanced. It is generous.

May 18, 2016

CONGRESSIONAL RECORD — HOUSE

H2815

And on behalf of our servicemembers, military families, and veterans, I urge support for this legislation. Let's take care of those who have sacrificed for our country. the way with this bill, both all of the Members and staff.

Again, I would like to thank everybody for their help and support along

I reserve the balance of my time.

Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, FY 2017 (H.R. 4974)
(Amounts in thousands)

	FY 2016 Enacted	FY 2017 Request	Bill	Bill vs. Enacted	Bill vs. Request

TITLE I - DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE					
Military Construction, Army.....	663,245	503,459	503,459	-159,786	---
Military Construction, Navy and Marine Corps.....	1,669,239	1,027,763	1,021,580	-647,659	-6,183
Military Construction, Air Force.....	1,389,185	1,481,058	1,398,758	+9,573	-82,300
Military Construction, Defense-Wide.....	2,242,867	2,056,091	2,024,643	-218,224	-31,448

Total, Active components.....	5,964,536	5,068,371	4,948,440	-1,016,096	-119,931

Military Construction, Army National Guard.....	197,237	232,930	232,930	+35,693	---
Military Construction, Air National Guard.....	138,738	143,957	143,957	+5,219	---
Military Construction, Army Reserve.....	113,595	68,230	68,230	-45,365	---
Military Construction, Navy Reserve.....	36,078	38,597	38,597	+2,519	---
Military Construction, Air Force Reserve.....	65,021	188,950	188,950	+123,929	---

Total, Reserve components.....	550,669	672,664	672,664	+121,995	---
=====					
Total, Military Construction.....	6,515,205	5,741,035	5,621,104	-894,101	-119,931
=====					
North Atlantic Treaty Organization Security Investment Program.....	135,000	177,932	177,932	+42,932	---
Family Housing Construction, Army.....	108,695	200,735	200,735	+92,040	---
Family Housing Operation and Maintenance, Army.....	375,611	325,995	325,995	-49,616	---
Family Housing Construction, Navy and Marine Corps....	16,541	94,011	94,011	+77,470	---
Family Housing Operation and Maintenance, Navy and Marine Corps.....	353,036	300,915	300,915	-52,121	---
Family Housing Construction, Air Force.....	160,498	61,352	61,352	-99,146	---
Family Housing Operation and Maintenance, Air Force....	331,232	274,429	274,429	-56,803	---
Family Housing Operation and Maintenance, Defense-Wide	58,668	59,157	59,157	+489	---
Department of Defense Family Housing Improvement Fund.....	---	3,258	3,258	+3,258	---
=====					
Total, Family Housing.....	1,404,281	1,319,852	1,319,852	-84,429	---
=====					
Chemical demilitarization construction, Defense-Wide..	---	---	---	---	---
Department of Defense Base Closure Account.....	266,334	205,237	230,237	-36,097	+25,000
ADMINISTRATIVE PROVISIONS					
Military Construction - fiscal year 2014.....	---	---	---	---	---
Military Construction - fiscal year 2015.....	---	---	---	---	---
Military Construction, Army (Sec. 125).....	-86,420	---	-25,000	+61,420	-25,000
Military Construction, Navy and Marine Corps (Sec. 126).....	---	---	-51,848	-51,848	-51,848
Defense Access Roads (Sec. 132).....	30,000	---	---	-30,000	---
Military Construction, Air Force.....	---	---	---	---	---
Military Construction, Defense-Wide (Sec. 127).....	-134,000	---	-37,377	+96,623	-37,377
Military Construction, Army (Sec. 128).....	34,500	---	40,500	+6,000	+40,500
Military Construction, Navy and Marine Corps (Sec. 129).....	34,500	---	293,600	+259,100	+293,600
Military Construction, Army National Guard (Sec. 130)...	51,300	---	67,500	+16,200	+67,500
Military Construction, Army Reserve (Sec. 131).....	34,200	---	86,500	+52,300	+86,500
NATO Security Investment Program (Sec. 135).....	---	---	-30,000	-30,000	-30,000
Military Construction, Air Force (rescission).....	-46,400	---	---	+46,400	---
42 USC 3374 (Sec. 133).....	-105,000	---	-25,000	+80,000	-25,000
Military Construction, Air Force (Sec. 132).....	21,000	---	26,000	+5,000	+26,000
Military Construction, Air National Guard.....	6,100	---	---	-6,100	---

Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, FY 2017 (H.R. 4974)
(Amounts in thousands)

	FY 2016 Enacted	FY 2017 Request	Bill	Bill vs. Enacted	Bill vs. Request
Military Construction, Air Force Reserve.....	10,400	---	---	-10,400	---
	=====	=====	=====	=====	=====
Total, Administrative Provisions.....	-149,820	---	344,875	+494,695	+344,875
Appropriations.....	(222,000)	---	(514,100)	(+292,100)	(+514,100)
Rescissions.....	(-371,820)	---	(-169,225)	(+202,595)	(-169,225)
	=====	=====	=====	=====	=====
Total, title I, Department of Defense.....	8,171,000	7,444,056	7,694,000	-477,000	+249,944
Appropriations.....	(8,542,820)	(7,444,056)	(7,863,225)	(-679,595)	(+419,169)
Rescissions.....	(-371,820)	---	(-169,225)	(+202,595)	(-169,225)
	=====	=====	=====	=====	=====
TITLE II - DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS					
Veterans Benefits Administration					
Compensation and pensions:					
Advance from prior year.....	---	(86,083,128)	(86,083,128)	(+86,083,128)	---
Current year request.....	76,865,545	---	---	-76,865,545	---
	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Subtotal, current year.....	76,865,545	86,083,128	86,083,128	+9,217,583	---
Advance appropriation, FY 2018.....	86,083,128	90,119,449	90,119,449	+4,036,321	---
Readjustment benefits:					
Advance from prior year.....	---	(16,340,828)	(16,340,828)	(+16,340,828)	---
Current year request.....	14,313,357	---	---	-14,313,357	---
	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Subtotal.....	14,313,357	16,340,828	16,340,828	+2,027,471	---
Advance appropriation, FY 2018.....	16,340,828	13,708,648	13,708,648	-2,632,180	---
Veterans insurance and indemnities:					
Advance from prior year.....	---	(91,920)	(91,920)	(+91,920)	---
Current year request.....	77,160	16,605	16,605	-60,555	---
	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Subtotal.....	77,160	108,525	108,525	+31,365	---
Advance appropriation, FY 2018.....	91,920	107,899	107,899	+15,979	---
Veterans housing benefit program fund:					
(indefinite).....	---	---	---	---	---
(Limitation on direct loans).....	(500)	(500)	(500)	---	---
Administrative expenses.....	164,558	198,856	167,612	+3,054	-31,244
Vocational rehabilitation loans program account.....	31	36	36	+5	---
(Limitation on direct loans).....	(2,952)	(2,517)	(2,517)	(-435)	---
Administrative expenses.....	367	389	389	+22	---
Native American veteran housing loan program account..	1,134	1,163	1,163	+29	---
	=====	=====	=====	=====	=====
Total, Veterans Benefits Administration.....	193,938,028	104,153,045	104,121,801	-89,816,227	-31,244
Appropriations.....	(91,422,152)	(217,049)	(185,805)	(-91,236,347)	(-31,244)
Advance appropriations, FY 2018.....	(102,515,876)	(103,935,996)	(103,935,996)	(+1,420,120)	---
	=====	=====	=====	=====	=====
Advances from prior year appropriations.....	---	(102,515,876)	(102,515,876)	(+102,515,876)	---
	=====	=====	=====	=====	=====
Veterans Health Administration					
Medical services:					
Advance from prior year.....	(47,603,202)	(51,673,000)	(51,673,000)	(+4,069,798)	---
Current year request.....	2,369,158	1,078,993	850,000	-1,519,158	-228,993
	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Subtotal.....	49,972,360	52,751,993	52,523,000	+2,550,640	-228,993
Advance appropriation, FY 2018.....	51,673,000	44,886,554	44,886,554	-6,786,446	---

Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, FY 2017 (H.R. 4974)
(Amounts in thousands)

	FY 2016 Enacted	FY 2017 Request	Bill	Bill vs. Enacted	Bill vs. Request
Medical community care:					
Advance appropriation, FY 2018.....	---	9,409,118	9,409,118	+9,409,118	---
Transfer from medical care accounts.....	---	(7,246,181)	(7,246,181)	(+7,246,181)	---
Medical support and compliance:					
Advance from prior year.....	(6,144,000)	(6,524,000)	(6,524,000)	(+380,000)	---
Current year request.....	---	---	---	---	---
Subtotal.....	6,144,000	6,524,000	6,524,000	+380,000	---
Advance appropriation, FY 2018.....	6,524,000	6,654,480	6,654,480	+130,480	---
Medical facilities:					
Advance from prior year.....	(4,915,000)	(5,074,000)	(5,074,000)	(+159,000)	---
Current year request.....	105,132	649,000	---	-105,132	-649,000
Subtotal.....	5,020,132	5,723,000	5,074,000	+53,868	-649,000
Advance appropriation, FY 2018.....	5,074,000	5,434,880	5,434,880	+360,880	---
Medical and prosthetic research:					
Offsetting collections.....	-2,445,000	-2,637,000	-2,637,000	-192,000	---
Appropriations (indefinite).....	2,445,000	2,637,000	2,637,000	+192,000	---
Subtotal.....	---	---	---	---	---
Medical care cost recovery collections:					
Offsetting collections.....	-2,445,000	-2,637,000	-2,637,000	-192,000	---
Appropriations (indefinite).....	2,445,000	2,637,000	2,637,000	+192,000	---
Subtotal.....	---	---	---	---	---
DoD-VA Joint Medical Funds (transfers out).....	(-286,000)	(-274,731)	(-274,731)	(+11,269)	---
DoD-VA Joint Medical Funds (by transfer).....	(286,000)	(274,731)	(274,731)	(-11,269)	---
DoD-VA Health Care Sharing Incentive Fund (Transfer out).....	(-15,000)	(-15,000)	(-15,000)	---	---
DoD-VA Health Care Sharing Incentive Fund (by transfer).....	(15,000)	(15,000)	(15,000)	---	---
Total, Veterans Health Administration.....	66,376,025	68,776,391	67,898,398	+1,522,373	-877,993
Appropriations.....	(3,105,025)	(2,391,359)	(1,513,366)	(-1,591,659)	(-877,993)
(By transfer).....	(301,000)	(7,535,912)	(7,535,912)	(+7,234,912)	---
Advance appropriations, FY 2018.....	(63,271,000)	(66,385,032)	(66,385,032)	(+3,114,032)	---
Advances from prior year appropriations.....	(58,662,202)	(63,271,000)	(63,271,000)	(+4,608,798)	---
National Cemetery Administration					
National Cemetery Administration.....	271,220	286,193	271,220	---	-14,973
Departmental Administration					
General administration.....	336,659	417,959	336,659	---	-81,300
Board of Veterans Appeals.....	109,884	156,096	156,096	+46,212	---
General operating expenses, VBA.....	2,707,734	2,826,160	2,826,160	+118,426	---
Information technology systems.....	4,133,363	4,278,259	4,220,869	+87,506	-57,390
Office of Inspector General.....	136,766	160,106	160,106	+23,340	---
Construction, major projects.....	1,243,800	528,110	528,110	-715,690	---
Construction, minor projects.....	406,200	372,069	372,069	-34,131	---
Grants for construction of State extended care facilities.....	120,000	80,000	80,000	-40,000	---
Grants for the construction of veterans cemeteries....	46,000	45,000	45,000	-1,000	---
Total, Departmental Administration.....	9,240,406	8,863,759	8,725,069	-515,337	-138,690
Administrative Provisions					
Section 226 (FY16)					
Medical services.....	1,400,000	---	---	-1,400,000	---
(Rescission).....	-1,400,000	---	---	+1,400,000	---
Medical support and compliance.....	100,000	---	---	-100,000	---
(Rescission).....	-100,000	---	---	+100,000	---

Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, FY 2017 (H.R. 4974)
(Amounts in thousands)

	FY 2016 Enacted	FY 2017 Request	Bill	Bill vs. Enacted	Bill vs. Request
Medical facilities.....	250,000	---	---	-250,000	---
(Rescission).....	-250,000	---	---	+250,000	---
JIF rescission (Sec. 232).....	-30,000	---	-30,000	---	-30,000
Payraise absorption rescission (Sec. 233).....	---	---	-337,382	-337,382	-337,382
Payraise absorption reduction (Sec. 234).....	---	---	-46,618	-46,618	-46,618
Total, Administrative Provisions.....	-30,000	---	-414,000	-384,000	-414,000
=====					
Total, title II.....	269,795,679	182,079,388	180,602,488	-89,193,191	-1,476,900
Appropriations.....	(105,788,803)	(11,758,360)	(10,648,842)	(-95,139,961)	(-1,109,518)
Rescissions.....	(-1,780,000)	---	(-367,382)	(+1,412,618)	(-367,382)
(By transfer).....	(301,000)	(7,535,912)	(7,535,912)	(+7,234,912)	---
Advance Appropriations, FY 2018:					
Mandatory.....	(102,515,876)	(103,935,996)	(103,935,996)	(+1,420,120)	---
Discretionary.....	(63,271,000)	(66,385,032)	(66,385,032)	(+3,114,032)	---
Advances from prior year appropriations:					
Mandatory.....	---	(102,515,876)	(102,515,876)	(+102,515,876)	---
Discretionary.....	(58,662,202)	(63,271,000)	(63,271,000)	(+4,608,798)	---
(Limitation on direct loans).....	(3,452)	(3,017)	(3,017)	(-435)	---
Discretionary.....	(76,023,741)	(78,126,787)	(76,649,887)	(+626,146)	(-1,476,900)
Advances from prior year less FY 2018 advances	(-4,608,798)	(-3,114,032)	(-3,114,032)	(+1,494,766)	---
Net discretionary.....	(71,414,943)	(75,012,755)	(73,535,855)	(+2,120,912)	(-1,476,900)
Mandatory.....	(193,771,938)	(103,952,601)	(103,952,601)	(-89,819,337)	---
Advances from prior year less FY 2018 advances	(-102,515,876)	(-1,420,120)	(-1,420,120)	(+101,095,756)	---
Net mandatory.....	(91,256,062)	(102,532,481)	(102,532,481)	(+11,276,419)	---
Total mandatory and discretionary.....	162,671,005	177,545,236	176,068,336	+13,397,331	-1,476,900
=====					
TITLE III - RELATED AGENCIES					
American Battle Monuments Commission					
Salaries and expenses.....	105,100	75,100	75,100	-30,000	---
Foreign currency fluctuations account.....	2,000	---	---	-2,000	---
Total, American Battle Monuments Commission.....	107,100	75,100	75,100	-32,000	---
U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims					
Salaries and expenses.....	32,141	30,945	30,945	-1,196	---
Department of Defense - Civil					
Cemeterial Expenses, Army					
Salaries and expenses.....	79,516	70,800	70,800	-8,716	---
Armed Forces Retirement Home - Trust Fund					
Operation and maintenance.....	43,300	63,300	41,300	-2,000	-22,000
Capital program.....	1,000	1,000	1,000	---	---
Payment from General Fund.....	20,000	---	22,000	+2,000	+22,000
Total, Armed Forces Retirement Home.....	64,300	64,300	64,300	---	---
=====					
Total, title III.....	283,057	241,145	241,145	-41,912	---
=====					

Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, FY 2017 (H.R. 4974)
(Amounts in thousands)

	FY 2016 Enacted	FY 2017 Request	Bill	Bill vs. Enacted	Bill vs. Request
TITLE IV - OVERSEAS CONTINGENCY OPERATIONS					
Overseas Contingency Operations					
Navy.....	---	38,409	38,409	+38,409	---
Air Force.....	---	11,440	11,440	+11,440	---
Subtotal.....	---	49,849	49,849	+49,849	---
European Reassurance Initiative					
Army.....	---	18,900	18,900	+18,900	---
Navy.....	---	21,400	21,400	+21,400	---
Air Force.....	---	68,300	68,300	+68,300	---
Defense-Wide.....	---	5,000	5,000	+5,000	---
Subtotal.....	---	113,600	113,600	+113,600	---
Counter Terrorism Support					
Air Force.....	---	9,000	8,551	+8,551	-449
Total, title IV.....	---	172,449	172,000	+172,000	-449
Grand total.....	278,249,736	189,937,038	188,709,633	-89,540,103	-1,227,405
Appropriations.....	(114,614,680)	(19,443,561)	(18,753,212)	(-95,861,468)	(-690,349)
Rescissions.....	(-2,151,820)	---	(-536,607)	(+1,615,213)	(-536,607)
Advance appropriations, FY 2018.....	(165,786,876)	(170,321,028)	(170,321,028)	(+4,534,152)	---
Advances from prior year appropriations.....	(58,662,202)	(165,786,876)	(165,786,876)	(+107,124,674)	---
(By transfer).....	(301,000)	(7,535,912)	(7,535,912)	(+7,234,912)	---
(Transfer out).....	(-301,000)	(-289,731)	(-289,731)	(+11,269)	---
(Limitation on direct loans).....	(3,452)	(3,017)	(3,017)	(-435)	---

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Mr. Chair, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I would like to begin by thanking Mrs. LOWEY and Mr. ROGERS, who serve as the distinguished ranking member and chairman of the full committee, and, of course, Chairman DENT, my colleague, on the Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Subcommittee. I couldn't have a better, more collaborative partner in support of our military and our veterans, and I really appreciate the collegiality.

And certainly I want to thank our staff. From the minority staff, I would like to thank Matt Washington, as well as Mike Reed and Mike Calcagni from my personal office. From the majority committee staff, I would like to thank Maureen Holohan, Sue Quantius, Sarah Young, Tracey Russell, and Sean Snyder from Chairman DENT's office.

As you all know, this bill has a strong history.

Before I begin, I really also want to share the comments and the accolades and salutations for our colleague from California, SAM FARR, who is retiring from the committee; and this, of course, will be his last MILCON/VA bill. He has been a longstanding member of this committee, very insightful, compassionate, and pragmatic. We are certainly going to miss Sam with his valuable, valuable contributions.

I would like to point out that this bill has a strong history of finding common ground and bipartisan support across the aisle to provide resources for our men and women in uniform who have chosen to serve and to protect our great Nation's way of life and our individual freedoms.

With this bill, we fund military construction projects in the Department of Veterans Affairs to the benefit of our soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines, both past and present.

For those who have given so much of themselves, we owe a great deal. So let me start our consideration of the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs appropriations bill by recognizing those in our military who cannot be with us here tonight as they serve across the globe. Thank you for your service.

The account taking care of the construction of military facilities is provided \$7.7 billion, an increase of \$250 million above the fiscal year 2017 budget request. Overall, the Department of Veterans Affairs is funded at \$73.5 billion, which is \$2.5 billion above the FY16-enacted level, and \$1.4 billion below the FY17 request.

I am pleased with several aspects of the bill. As we saw throughout the markup process, the bill provides robust funding for our military construction and provides adequate funding for both active and reserve military forces.

I was pleased that the bill provides \$25 million above the FY17 budget request to help speed up the cleanup of former Department of Defense sites.

For too long, we have been waiting for an end to the tunnel for the elec-

tronic health records integration between the Department of Defense and the VA. To strengthen oversight on the issue, I am pleased to see the bill maintains tough, but fair, reporting requirements for the electronic health records endeavor. To better serve those veterans shortchanged for too long, the bill continues to prioritize the elimination of the VA's claims backlog and includes healthy funding for the Board of Veterans' Appeals, though I am concerned with the proposed reforms to the BVA.

□ 2230

Nonetheless, I believe these are positive steps that are necessary to ensure that the VA continues to improve its service for our veterans.

Mr. Chair, while the MILCON-VA bill has many positive attributes, one item I am not particularly pleased about is the inclusion of bill language that limits performance awards. As I have stated for the past 3 years, this language will not provide a short-term solution and, in fact, may have long-term consequences, compounding the very problem that it attempts to address. All this language will do is make the VA a less attractive option than other agencies when it comes to recruiting and retaining quality executive leaders, resulting in the Department's not having the very talent that it needs to solve the problems it faces today. This is an issue that must be addressed as we move through this process.

Turning away from the bill for a second, our committee was off to a very fast start. However, because of the budget resolution impasse, we have had to wait a month for the MILCON-VA bill to be able to come to the floor. As a result, we will not be able to get back to regular order this year, and with roughly 45 days left in the legislative calendar, it will be nearly impossible to fulfill our obligation to the American people and pass all 12 bills through the House. We are in this situation because an upset, small minority of the House wants to revisit issues that were already decided and acted upon by a bipartisan majority of both Houses and signed into law by the President.

That being said, I applaud Chairman ROGERS for honoring the allocation the bipartisan budget agreement set for fiscal year 2017. The BBA will have to suffice until we can get past these unrealistic beliefs that we can cut our way to prosperity.

As we are all aware of our level of discretionary resources this year, it will be tough, especially tough for this subcommittee, because our bill advances funds to the medical services account. While we start out in the hole every year, the VA's annual second bite of the apple makes balancing the needs of nonmedical VA services with other Federal agencies that much more difficult. As I have said numerous times, we must be more strategic about how we handle our Federal budget.

Mr. Chair, would I have done some things differently? Of course, but here we are.

Nevertheless, with reservations, I urge my colleagues to defeat any poison pill amendments and move to support this bill to fund the construction of military facilities and strive to improve the quality of life and the care afforded to current servicemembers, to our veterans, and to our military families.

Mr. Chair, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chair, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from Kentucky (Mr. ROGERS), the distinguished chairman of the full committee.

Mr. ROGERS of Kentucky. I thank the chairman for yielding the time.

Mr. Chair, I rise tonight to support this first bill of the 2017 appropriations cycle. Shepherding through appropriations legislation is the constitutional duty of the Congress, and so here we go.

The passage of these bills in a timely fashion is in the best interest of the Nation. It will help provide for our national security, the stability of our economy, and give certainty to all Americans who count on the Federal Government's programs and services. I believe this bill, in particular, starts off this process on the right foot.

H.R. 4974 is a balanced, bipartisan piece of legislation that provides critical funding for our troops, their families, and our veterans. We have made a commitment to our servicemen and -women that we will care for them during and after their service, and this bill helps fulfill that promise.

In total, as you have heard, the bill provides \$81.6 billion in discretionary funding for the Department of Defense infrastructure and quality-of-life programs as well as for the Department of Veterans Affairs. This represents a \$1.8 billion increase above current levels. This increase is directed to Veterans Affairs programs, which receive a 3 percent bump above fiscal year 2016 levels.

Of the total \$73.5 billion for the Department of Veterans Affairs, \$52.5 billion will support the VA's medical services, which is funding that will treat some 7 million patients this year. In particular, I want to highlight funding increases that will address mental health care, suicide prevention, hepatitis C treatment, and homelessness. The increase will also help the VA tackle some of its greatest challenges—reducing the disability claims backlog and continuing the modernization of the electronic health records system to ensure no gaps in care occur as our current troops become veterans.

This bill also provides funding to support our Active Duty military and their families whether they are at home or abroad. Funding for hospitals, educational facilities, and housing tells our servicemembers that they have the full backing of their government as they lay their lives on the lines for this

Nation. Beyond these quality-of-life programs, military construction funding is prioritized to respond to threats around the globe, including Russia, the Middle East, and North Africa.

While overall funding is increased in the bill, the committee took many steps to ensure that every cent of taxpayers' money is spent responsibly and with good purpose. We made difficult decisions to find savings wherever possible. The bill also includes good-government provisions that increase oversight for the VA, helping to stop waste and improve service for our veterans.

Mr. Chair, this is a very good bill, one I am proud to support. I want to thank the chairman of the subcommittee, Congressman DENT, for his leadership. I want to thank the ranking member, Mr. BISHOP, and the rest of the subcommittee for their teamwork and their effort in bringing the bill to the floor today.

Lastly, I join the chair and ranking member in thanking the staff for the many hours they put in helping to usher this bill to the floor today. Caring for our troops and veterans is a great responsibility, and the subcommittee and our staff have not taken that responsibility lightly.

I urge my colleagues to support this bill. It is balanced; it is responsible; and it needs to be passed.

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Mr. Chair, I yield 5 minutes to the gentlewoman from New York (Mrs. LOWEY), the distinguished ranking member of the Committee on Appropriations.

Mrs. LOWEY. I thank the distinguished ranking member of this committee, Mr. SANFORD BISHOP, for that very generous introduction.

I would like to thank my good friend on the other side of the aisle, Chairman DENT from the neighboring State of Pennsylvania, for his good work and the partnership that he has made to make this an excellent bill. I also want to thank Chairman ROGERS for his leadership and, of course, for the hard work of the committee members on both sides of the aisle who are so critical to this process.

Mr. Chair, the fiscal year 2017 Military Construction-Veterans Affairs bill would allocate \$81.6 billion in discretionary funding—\$1.2 billion less than the fiscal year 2017 budget request and a \$1.8 billion increase above the fiscal year 2016 enacted level—and allow for several critical improvements, including: the further reduction of the veterans' claims backlog, which has dropped from 600,000 to 74,000 in the past 2 years; \$7.8 billion to support outreach, prevention, and awareness to reduce unacceptably high levels of suicide and other mental health challenges among our veterans; a greater focus on the gender-specific needs of female veterans, including prosthetics designed for women and enhancing access to both medical health services; a \$32 million increase for medical and prosthetic research; \$1.3 billion for family housing construction; and

strong oversight of the electronic health records system, requiring that the VA meet key benchmarks throughout the fiscal year and improve interoperability with the Department of Defense.

□ 2240

Mr. Speaker, as I close, I want to again congratulate Chairman DENT and Ranking Member BISHOP for you are truly outstanding in making this a good, bipartisan bill.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chair, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. HILL).

Mr. HILL. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of the bill. Over the past few years, we have seen mismanagement, cost overruns, and project delays at our Veterans Affairs facilities and hospitals across this country.

While the biggest construction failures are the ones that have gathered the headlines, such as the billion-dollar cost overrun in Colorado, the VA has a knack for dropping the ball on simple and smaller projects as well. One of these is an \$8 million ongoing solar panel project at the VA Medical Center in Little Rock. It has been 3 years since the planned activation of the system. However, engineering changes and the relocation of the panels to make way for a new parking garage, which was even known in advance of the award, has cost valuable taxpayer resources.

Last year, I sent a letter, along with Senator JOHN BOOZMAN, to the VA Office of the Inspector General calling for an investigation into this solar panel project, which resulted in the VA Inspector General conducting a national review of all the solar panel projects across the VA.

While this review is being finalized, many questions remain unanswered about these solar projects. Currently, the VA lists 34 key renewable energy projects dating back to 2010 that remain nonoperational.

Today's bill contains an important provision in the report language that will protect the taxpayer dollars by prohibiting funding for solar projects at the VA due to these concerns about the mismanagement in these projects.

I am pleased that the committee has included this essential language as we await the results from the VA Inspector General's investigation into these costly projects.

This small piece is an important part of the overall reevaluation of the VA's construction oversight and implementation that Congress has developed and that taxpayers deserve.

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

With reservations, I urge my colleagues to support this bill. I think it is a bipartisan bill. It is a good bill. I think it is a good product for what we had to work with.

I would like to urge my colleagues to support it, to fund the construction of

newer facilities, to strive to improve the quality of life and the care that we give to our military, to our veterans, and to our military families.

I yield back the balance of my time. Mr. DENT. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I would like to conclude by saying that I want to thank everyone again for their full cooperation on both sides of the aisle: Mr. BISHOP, Mrs. LOWEY, and the entire team on their side, and Mr. ROGERS on our side, and all the members of the subcommittee on both sides.

This bill does provide for our veterans, our military, our servicemembers, and their families. It is a very good bill. I urge its adoption.

I yield back the balance of my time.

The CHAIR. All time for general debate has expired.

Pursuant to the rule, the bill shall be considered for amendment under the 5-minute rule.

During consideration of the bill for amendment, each amendment shall be debatable for 10 minutes equally divided and controlled by the proponent and an opponent. No pro forma amendment shall be in order except that the chair and ranking minority member of the Committee on Appropriations or their respective designees may offer up to 10 pro forma amendments each at any point for the purpose of debate. The chair of the Committee of the Whole may accord priority in recognition on the basis of whether the Member offering an amendment has caused it to be printed in the portion of the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD designated for that purpose. Amendments so printed shall be considered read.

The Clerk will read.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 4974

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That the following sums are appropriated, out of any money in the Treasury not otherwise appropriated, for military construction, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2017, and for other purposes, namely:

TITLE I

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, ARMY

For acquisition, construction, installation, and equipment of temporary or permanent public works, military installations, facilities, and real property for the Army as currently authorized by law, including personnel in the Army Corps of Engineers and other personal services necessary for the purposes of this appropriation, and for construction and operation of facilities in support of the functions of the Commander in Chief, \$503,459,000, to remain available until September 30, 2021: *Provided*, That, of this amount, not to exceed \$98,159,000 shall be available for study, planning, design, architect and engineer services, and host nation support, as authorized by law, unless the Secretary of the Army determines that additional obligations are necessary for such purposes and notifies the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress of the determination and the reasons therefor.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, NAVY AND MARINE CORPS

For acquisition, construction, installation, and equipment of temporary or permanent public works, naval installations, facilities, and real property for the Navy and Marine Corps as currently authorized by law, including personnel in the Naval Facilities Engineering Command and other personal services necessary for the purposes of this appropriation, \$1,021,580,000, to remain available until September 30, 2021: *Provided*, That, of this amount, not to exceed \$88,230,000 shall be available for study, planning, design, and architect and engineer services, as authorized by law, unless the Secretary of the Navy determines that additional obligations are necessary for such purposes and notifies the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress of the determination and the reasons therefor.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, AIR FORCE

For acquisition, construction, installation, and equipment of temporary or permanent public works, military installations, facilities, and real property for the Air Force as currently authorized by law, \$1,398,758,000, to remain available until September 30, 2021: *Provided*, That of this amount, not to exceed \$143,582,000 shall be available for study, planning, design, and architect and engineer services, as authorized by law, unless the Secretary of the Air Force determines that additional obligations are necessary for such purposes and notifies the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress of the determination and the reasons therefor: *Provided further*, That none of the funds made available under this heading shall be for construction of the Joint Intelligence Analysis Complex Consolidation, Phase 3, at Royal Air Force Croughton, United Kingdom, unless authorized in an Act authorizing appropriations for fiscal year 2017 for military construction.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, DEFENSE-WIDE (INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

For acquisition, construction, installation, and equipment of temporary or permanent public works, installations, facilities, and real property for activities and agencies of the Department of Defense (other than the military departments), as currently authorized by law, \$2,024,643,000, to remain available until September 30, 2021: *Provided*, That such amounts of this appropriation as may be determined by the Secretary of Defense may be transferred to such appropriations of the Department of Defense available for military construction or family housing as the Secretary may designate, to be merged with and to be available for the same purposes, and for the same time period, as the appropriation or fund to which transferred: *Provided further*, That of the amount appropriated, not to exceed \$201,422,000 shall be available for study, planning, design, and architect and engineer services, as authorized by law, unless the Secretary of Defense determines that additional obligations are necessary for such purposes and notifies the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress of the determination and the reasons therefor.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MRS. WAGNER

Mrs. WAGNER. Mr. Chair, I have an amendment at the desk.

The CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

Page 4, line 20, after the dollar amount, insert “(reduced by \$801,000) (increased by \$801,000)”.

The CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 736, the gentlewoman from Mis-

souri and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Missouri.

Mrs. WAGNER. Mr. Chair, I thank Chairman DENT for letting me offer this very important amendment. I thank my colleagues from the entire Missouri delegation—Mr. CLAY, Mr. CLEAVER, Mr. GRAVES, Ms. Hartzler, Mr. LONG, Mr. LUETKEMEYER, and Mr. SMITH—for their steadfast support and bipartisan cosponsorship.

This amendment is critical to meeting the current and future mission requirements of the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency and its replacement West headquarters in north St. Louis.

This amendment allocates \$801,000 for land and transfer acquisition activities associated with acquiring the land for the headquarters, conforming with the Senate’s MILCON-VA bill.

After an exhaustive process, the NGA identified the north St. Louis city site as a superior location because of its ability to provide the most technological, academic, and professional environment for the agency to develop the capabilities and solutions necessary to solve the country’s most vital intelligence and national security challenges.

Mr. Chair, the City of St. Louis is providing the land for this project at no cost to the Federal Government. Its selection ensures that NGA West’s 70-year history in St. Louis continues and that the 2,000 NGA West employees who live in Missouri remain in close proximity to the headquarters.

The St. Louis region has a proven track record in national defense and technology capabilities that make it an ideal choice for NGA’s new home.

I ask that my colleagues vote in favor of this amendment to ensure NGA West can continue to perform its critical role in our national security within a community that understands its needs and strongly supports its mission.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Missouri’s First District (Mr. CLAY).

□ 2250

Mr. CLAY. Mr. Chair, I want to thank the gentlewoman from Missouri (Mrs. WAGNER) for yielding. I rise today in strong support of this amendment as offered by Mrs. WAGNER.

The National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency’s decision to locate their new western headquarters in north St. Louis was the right choice to support their vital national security mission, the best decision for the over 3,000 exceptional Federal employees who work there, and it will transform a great Federal failure into a transformational Federal success.

The misguided and shortsighted attempt to withhold funding from this project not only is petty and parochial, it is completely irresponsible because delaying this project would put our na-

tional security at risk. NGA Director Robert Cardillo said it best in his message to his employees on April 1.

Director Cardillo said: “The future of our agency and our profession rests on our present talent and that of the next generations we can recruit onto our team. We face tough competition, and offering an environment that appeals to these future generations is critical to our success. Studies point to a desire by today’s millennials to be in urban environments, and this trend is expected to continue.”

He went on to say: “Our partnership with industry and academia will continue to grow and expand as we transform some of our work to a more open, connected and transparent environment. Our ability to engage with local universities and innovative, technology-based companies is enhanced by remaining in St. Louis city. I am confident that we will build a facility in St. Louis that will be a remarkable home for us to master our craft and engage with our partners in a flexible, technologically advanced environment that is enticing to current and future generations.”

I urge my colleagues to support the gentlewoman’s amendment.

Mrs. WAGNER. Mr. Chair, I reserve the balance of my time.

The CHAIR. Does any Member claim time in opposition?

Mrs. WAGNER. Mr. Chair, in closing, I just want to say that NGA chose St. Louis because the location best supports the agency’s mission.

The superiority of the urban setting is ideal for recruiting and retaining a highly skilled workforce. When focusing on the most technological, academic, and professional environment to ensure our Nation’s security, the NGA chose St. Louis. The decision has been made, and my amendment supports the NGA’s decision.

Mr. Chair, I thank the chairman and my colleague from the First District of Missouri.

I yield back the balance of my time.

The CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentlewoman from Missouri (Mrs. WAGNER).

The amendment was agreed to.

The Clerk will read.

The Clerk read as follows:

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, ARMY NATIONAL GUARD

For construction, acquisition, expansion, rehabilitation, and conversion of facilities for the training and administration of the Army National Guard, and contributions therefor, as authorized by chapter 1803 of title 10, United States Code, and Military Construction Authorization Acts, \$232,930,000, to remain available until September 30, 2021: *Provided*, That, of the amount appropriated, not to exceed \$8,729,000 shall be available for study, planning, design, and architect and engineer services, as authorized by law, unless the Director of the Army National Guard determines that additional obligations are necessary for such purposes and notifies the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress of the determination and the reasons therefor.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, AIR NATIONAL GUARD

For construction, acquisition, expansion, rehabilitation, and conversion of facilities for the training and administration of the Air National Guard, and contributions therefor, as authorized by chapter 1803 of title 10, United States Code, and Military Construction Authorization Acts, \$143,957,000, to remain available until September 30, 2021: *Provided*, That, of the amount appropriated, not to exceed \$10,462,000 shall be available for study, planning, design, and architect and engineer services, as authorized by law, unless the Director of the Air National Guard determines that additional obligations are necessary for such purposes and notifies the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress of the determination and the reasons therefor.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, ARMY RESERVE

For construction, acquisition, expansion, rehabilitation, and conversion of facilities for the training and administration of the Army Reserve as authorized by chapter 1803 of title 10, United States Code, and Military Construction Authorization Acts, \$68,230,000, to remain available until September 30, 2021: *Provided*, That, of the amount appropriated, not to exceed \$7,500,000 shall be available for study, planning, design, and architect and engineer services, as authorized by law, unless the Chief of the Army Reserve determines that additional obligations are necessary for such purposes and notifies the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress of the determination and the reasons therefor.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, NAVY RESERVE

For construction, acquisition, expansion, rehabilitation, and conversion of facilities for the training and administration of the reserve components of the Navy and Marine Corps as authorized by chapter 1803 of title 10, United States Code, and Military Construction Authorization Acts, \$38,597,000, to remain available until September 30, 2021: *Provided*, That, of the amount appropriated, not to exceed \$3,783,000 shall be available for study, planning, design, and architect and engineer services, as authorized by law, unless the Secretary of the Navy determines that additional obligations are necessary for such purposes and notifies the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress of the determination and the reasons therefor.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, AIR FORCE RESERVE

For construction, acquisition, expansion, rehabilitation, and conversion of facilities for the training and administration of the Air Force Reserve as authorized by chapter 1803 of title 10, United States Code, and Military Construction Authorization Acts, \$188,950,000, to remain available until September 30, 2021: *Provided*, That, of the amount appropriated, not to exceed \$4,500,000 shall be available for study, planning, design, and architect and engineer services, as authorized by law, unless the Chief of the Air Force Reserve determines that additional obligations are necessary for such purposes and notifies the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress of the determination and the reasons therefor.

NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION SECURITY INVESTMENT PROGRAM

For the United States share of the cost of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization Security Investment Program for the acquisition and construction of military facilities and installations (including international military headquarters) and for related expenses for the collective defense of the North Atlantic Treaty Area as authorized by sec-

tion 2806 of title 10, United States Code, and Military Construction Authorization Acts, \$177,932,000, to remain available until expended.

FAMILY HOUSING CONSTRUCTION, ARMY

For expenses of family housing for the Army for construction, including acquisition, replacement, addition, expansion, extension, and alteration, as authorized by law, \$200,735,000, to remain available until September 30, 2021.

FAMILY HOUSING OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE, ARMY

For expenses of family housing for the Army for operation and maintenance, including debt payment, leasing, minor construction, principal and interest charges, and insurance premiums, as authorized by law, \$325,995,000.

FAMILY HOUSING CONSTRUCTION, NAVY AND MARINE CORPS

For expenses of family housing for the Navy and Marine Corps for construction, including acquisition, replacement, addition, expansion, extension, and alteration, as authorized by law, \$94,011,000, to remain available until September 30, 2021.

FAMILY HOUSING OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE, NAVY AND MARINE CORPS

For expenses of family housing for the Navy and Marine Corps for operation and maintenance, including debt payment, leasing, minor construction, principal and interest charges, and insurance premiums, as authorized by law, \$300,915,000.

FAMILY HOUSING CONSTRUCTION, AIR FORCE

For expenses of family housing for the Air Force for construction, including acquisition, replacement, addition, expansion, extension, and alteration, as authorized by law, \$61,352,000, to remain available until September 30, 2021.

FAMILY HOUSING OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE, AIR FORCE

For expenses of family housing for the Air Force for operation and maintenance, including debt payment, leasing, minor construction, principal and interest charges, and insurance premiums, as authorized by law, \$274,429,000.

FAMILY HOUSING OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE, DEFENSE-WIDE

For expenses of family housing for the activities and agencies of the Department of Defense (other than the military departments) for operation and maintenance, leasing, and minor construction, as authorized by law, \$59,157,000.

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE FAMILY HOUSING IMPROVEMENT FUND

For the Department of Defense Family Housing Improvement Fund, \$3,258,000, to remain available until expended, for family housing initiatives undertaken pursuant to section 2883 of title 10, United States Code, providing alternative means of acquiring and improving military family housing and supporting facilities.

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BASE CLOSURE ACCOUNT

For deposit into the Department of Defense Base Closure Account, established by section 2906(a) of the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Act of 1990 (10 U.S.C. 2687 note), \$230,237,000, to remain available until expended.

ADMINISTRATIVE PROVISIONS

SEC. 101. None of the funds made available in this title shall be expended for payments under a cost-plus-a-fixed-fee contract for construction, where cost estimates exceed \$25,000, to be performed within the United States, except Alaska, without the specific

approval in writing of the Secretary of Defense setting forth the reasons therefor.

SEC. 102. Funds made available in this title for construction shall be available for hire of passenger motor vehicles.

SEC. 103. Funds made available in this title for construction may be used for advances to the Federal Highway Administration, Department of Transportation, for the construction of access roads as authorized by section 210 of title 23, United States Code, when projects authorized therein are certified as important to the national defense by the Secretary of Defense.

SEC. 104. None of the funds made available in this title may be used to begin construction of new bases in the United States for which specific appropriations have not been made.

SEC. 105. None of the funds made available in this title shall be used for purchase of land or land easements in excess of 100 percent of the value as determined by the Army Corps of Engineers or the Naval Facilities Engineering Command, except: (1) where there is a determination of value by a Federal court; (2) purchases negotiated by the Attorney General or the designee of the Attorney General; (3) where the estimated value is less than \$25,000; or (4) as otherwise determined by the Secretary of Defense to be in the public interest.

SEC. 106. None of the funds made available in this title shall be used to: (1) acquire land; (2) provide for site preparation; or (3) install utilities for any family housing, except housing for which funds have been made available in annual Acts making appropriations for military construction.

SEC. 107. None of the funds made available in this title for minor construction may be used to transfer or relocate any activity from one base or installation to another, without prior notification to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress.

SEC. 108. None of the funds made available in this title may be used for the procurement of steel for any construction project or activity for which American steel producers, fabricators, and manufacturers have been denied the opportunity to compete for such steel procurement.

SEC. 109. None of the funds available to the Department of Defense for military construction or family housing during the current fiscal year may be used to pay real property taxes in any foreign nation.

SEC. 110. None of the funds made available in this title may be used to initiate a new installation overseas without prior notification to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress.

SEC. 111. None of the funds made available in this title may be obligated for architect and engineer contracts estimated by the Government to exceed \$500,000 for projects to be accomplished in Japan, in any North Atlantic Treaty Organization member country, or in countries bordering the Arabian Gulf, unless such contracts are awarded to United States firms or United States firms in joint venture with host nation firms.

SEC. 112. None of the funds made available in this title for military construction in the United States territories and possessions in the Pacific and on Kwajalein Atoll, or in countries bordering the Arabian Gulf, may be used to award any contract estimated by the Government to exceed \$1,000,000 to a foreign contractor: *Provided*, That this section shall not be applicable to contract awards for which the lowest responsive and responsible bid of a United States contractor exceeds the lowest responsive and responsible bid of a foreign contractor by greater than 20 percent: *Provided further*, That this section shall not apply to contract awards for military construction on Kwajalein Atoll for

which the lowest responsive and responsible bid is submitted by a Marshallese contractor.

SEC. 113. The Secretary of Defense shall inform the appropriate committees of both Houses of Congress, including the Committees on Appropriations, of plans and scope of any proposed military exercise involving United States personnel 30 days prior to its occurring, if amounts expended for construction, either temporary or permanent, are anticipated to exceed \$100,000.

SEC. 114. Funds appropriated to the Department of Defense for construction in prior years shall be available for construction authorized for each such military department by the authorizations enacted into law during the current session of Congress.

SEC. 115. For military construction or family housing projects that are being completed with funds otherwise expired or lapsed for obligation, expired or lapsed funds may be used to pay the cost of associated supervision, inspection, overhead, engineering and design on those projects and on subsequent claims, if any.

SEC. 116. Notwithstanding any other provision of law, any funds made available to a military department or defense agency for the construction of military projects may be obligated for a military construction project or contract, or for any portion of such a project or contract, at any time before the end of the fourth fiscal year after the fiscal year for which funds for such project were made available, if the funds obligated for such project: (1) are obligated from funds available for military construction projects; and (2) do not exceed the amount appropriated for such project, plus any amount by which the cost of such project is increased pursuant to law.

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 117. Subject to 30 days prior notification, or 14 days for a notification provided in an electronic medium pursuant to sections 480 and 2883 of title 10, United States Code, to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress, such additional amounts as may be determined by the Secretary of Defense may be transferred to: (1) the Department of Defense Family Housing Improvement Fund from amounts appropriated for construction in "Family Housing" accounts, to be merged with and to be available for the same purposes and for the same period of time as amounts appropriated directly to the Fund; or (2) the Department of Defense Military Unaccompanied Housing Improvement Fund from amounts appropriated for construction of military unaccompanied housing in "Military Construction" accounts, to be merged with and to be available for the same purposes and for the same period of time as amounts appropriated directly to the Fund: *Provided*, That appropriations made available to the Funds shall be available to cover the costs, as defined in section 502(5) of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974, of direct loans or loan guarantees issued by the Department of Defense pursuant to the provisions of subchapter IV of chapter 169 of title 10, United States Code, pertaining to alternative means of acquiring and improving military family housing, military unaccompanied housing, and supporting facilities.

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 118. In addition to any other transfer authority available to the Department of Defense, amounts may be transferred from the Department of Defense Base Closure Account to the fund established by section 1013(d) of the Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Development Act of 1966 (42 U.S.C. 3374) to pay for expenses associated with the Homeowners Assistance Program incurred under

42 U.S.C. 3374(a)(1)(A). Any amounts transferred shall be merged with and be available for the same purposes and for the same time period as the fund to which transferred.

SEC. 119. Notwithstanding any other provision of law, funds made available in this title for operation and maintenance of family housing shall be the exclusive source of funds for repair and maintenance of all family housing units, including general or flag officer quarters: *Provided*, That not more than \$35,000 per unit may be spent annually for the maintenance and repair of any general or flag officer quarters without 30 days prior notification, or 14 days for a notification provided in an electronic medium pursuant to sections 480 and 2883 of title 10, United States Code, to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress, except that an after-the-fact notification shall be submitted if the limitation is exceeded solely due to costs associated with environmental remediation that could not be reasonably anticipated at the time of the budget submission: *Provided further*, That the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller) is to report annually to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress all operation and maintenance expenditures for each individual general or flag officer quarters for the prior fiscal year.

SEC. 120. Amounts contained in the Ford Island Improvement Account established by subsection (h) of section 2814 of title 10, United States Code, are appropriated and shall be available until expended for the purposes specified in subsection (i)(1) of such section or until transferred pursuant to subsection (i)(3) of such section.

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 121. During the 5-year period after appropriations available in this Act to the Department of Defense for military construction and family housing operation and maintenance and construction have expired for obligation, upon a determination that such appropriations will not be necessary for the liquidation of obligations or for making authorized adjustments to such appropriations for obligations incurred during the period of availability of such appropriations, unobligated balances of such appropriations may be transferred into the appropriation "Foreign Currency Fluctuations, Construction, Defense", to be merged with and to be available for the same time period and for the same purposes as the appropriation to which transferred.

SEC. 122. (a) Except as provided in subsection (b), none of the funds made available in this Act may be used by the Secretary of the Army to relocate a unit in the Army that—

(1) performs a testing mission or function that is not performed by any other unit in the Army and is specifically stipulated in title 10, United States Code; and

(2) is located at a military installation at which the total number of civilian employees of the Department of the Army and Army contractor personnel employed exceeds 10 percent of the total number of members of the regular and reserve components of the Army assigned to the installation.

(b) EXCEPTION.—Subsection (a) shall not apply if the Secretary of the Army certifies to the congressional defense committees that in proposing the relocation of the unit of the Army, the Secretary complied with Army Regulation 5-10 relating to the policy, procedures, and responsibilities for Army stationing actions.

SEC. 123. Amounts appropriated or otherwise made available in an account funded under the headings in this title may be transferred among projects and activities within the account in accordance with the

reprogramming guidelines for military construction and family housing construction contained in Department of Defense Financial Management Regulation 7000.14-R, Volume 3, Chapter 7, of March 2011, as in effect on the date of enactment of this Act.

SEC. 124. None of the funds made available in this title may be obligated or expended for planning and design and construction of projects at Arlington National Cemetery.

(RESCISSION OF FUNDS)

SEC. 125. Of the unobligated balances available for "Military Construction, Army", from prior appropriation Acts (other than appropriations designated by law as being for contingency operations directly related to the global war on terrorism or as an emergency requirement), \$25,000,000 are hereby rescinded.

(RESCISSION OF FUNDS)

SEC. 126. Of the unobligated balances available for "Military Construction, Navy and Marine Corps", from prior appropriation Acts (other than appropriations designated by law as being for contingency operations directly related to the global war on terrorism or as an emergency requirement), \$51,848,000 are hereby rescinded.

(RESCISSION OF FUNDS)

SEC. 127. Of the unobligated balances available for "Military Construction, Defense-Wide", from prior appropriation Acts (other than appropriations designated by law as being for contingency operations directly related to the global war on terrorism or as an emergency requirement), \$37,377,000 are hereby rescinded.

SEC. 128. For an additional amount for "Military Construction, Army", \$40,500,000, to remain available until September 30, 2021: *Provided*, That such funds may only be obligated to carry out construction projects, in priority order, identified in the Department of the Army's Unfunded Priority List for Fiscal Year 2017 submitted by the Secretary of Defense to Congress: *Provided further*, That such funding is subject to authorization prior to obligation and expenditure of funds: *Provided further*, That, not later than 30 days after enactment of this Act, the Secretary of the Army shall submit to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress an expenditure plan for funds provided under this section.

SEC. 129. For an additional amount for "Military Construction, Navy and Marine Corps", \$293,600,000, to remain available until September 30, 2021: *Provided*, That such funds may only be obligated to carry out construction projects, in priority order, identified in the Department of the Navy's Unfunded Priority List for Fiscal Year 2017 submitted by the Secretary of Defense to Congress: *Provided further*, That such funding is subject to authorization prior to obligation and expenditure of funds: *Provided further*, That, not later than 30 days after enactment of this Act, the Secretary of the Navy shall submit to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress an expenditure plan for funds provided under this section.

SEC. 130. For an additional amount for "Military Construction, Army National Guard", \$67,500,000, to remain available until September 30, 2021: *Provided*, That such funds may only be obligated to carry out construction projects, in priority order, identified in the Department of the Army's Unfunded Priority List for Fiscal Year 2017 submitted by the Secretary of Defense to Congress: *Provided further*, That such funding is subject to authorization prior to obligation and expenditure of funds: *Provided further*, That, not later than 30 days after enactment of this Act, the Secretary of the Army shall submit to the Committees on Appropriations of both

Houses of Congress an expenditure plan for funds provided under this section.

SEC. 131. For an additional amount for “Military Construction, Army Reserve”, \$86,500,000, to remain available until September 30, 2021: *Provided*, That such funds may only be obligated to carry out construction projects, in priority order, identified in the Department of the Army’s Unfunded Priority List for Fiscal Year 2017 submitted by the Secretary of Defense to Congress: *Provided further*, That such funding is subject to authorization prior to obligation and expenditure of funds: *Provided further*, That, not later than 30 days after enactment of this Act, the Secretary of the Army shall submit to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress an expenditure plan for funds provided under this section.

SEC. 132. For an additional amount for “Military Construction, Air Force”, \$26,000,000, to remain available until September 30, 2021: *Provided*, That such funds may only be obligated to carry out construction projects, in priority order, identified in the Department of the Air Force’s Unfunded Priority List for Fiscal Year 2017 submitted by the Secretary of Defense to Congress: *Provided further*, That such funding is subject to authorization prior to obligation and expenditure of funds: *Provided further*, That not later than 30 days after enactment of this Act, the Secretary of the Air Force shall submit to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress an expenditure plan for funds provided under this section.

(RESCISSION OF FUNDS)

SEC. 133. Of the unobligated balances made available in prior appropriation Acts for the fund established in section 1013(d) of the Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Development Act of 1966 (42 U.S.C. 3374) (other than appropriations designated by law as being for contingency operations directly related to the global war on terrorism or as an emergency requirement), \$25,000,000 are hereby rescinded.

SEC. 134. For the purposes of this Act, the term “congressional defense committees” means the Committees on Armed Services of the House of Representatives and the Senate, the Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs of the Committee on Appropriations of the Senate, and the Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs of the Committee on Appropriations of the House of Representatives.

(RESCISSION OF FUNDS)

SEC. 135. Of the unobligated balances available for “NATO Security Investment Program”, from prior appropriations Acts (other than appropriations designated by law as being for contingency operations directly related to the global war on terrorism or as an emergency requirement), \$30,000,000 are hereby rescinded.

SEC. 136. None of the funds made available by this Act may be used to carry out the closure or realignment of the United States Naval Station, Guantánamo Bay, Cuba.

TITLE II

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

VETERANS BENEFITS ADMINISTRATION

COMPENSATION AND PENSIONS

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

For the payment of compensation benefits to or on behalf of veterans and a pilot program for disability examinations as authorized by section 107 and chapters 11, 13, 18, 51, 53, 55, and 61 of title 38, United States Code; pension benefits to or on behalf of veterans as authorized by chapters 15, 51, 53, 55, and 61 of title 38, United States Code; and burial benefits, the Reinstated Entitlement Program for Survivors, emergency and other of-

ficers’ retirement pay, adjusted-service credits and certificates, payment of premiums due on commercial life insurance policies guaranteed under the provisions of title IV of the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (50 U.S.C. App. 541 et seq.) and for other benefits as authorized by sections 107, 1312, 1977, and 2106, and chapters 23, 51, 53, 55, and 61 of title 38, United States Code, \$90,119,449,000, to remain available until expended and to become available on October 1, 2017: *Provided*, That not to exceed \$17,224,000 of the amount made available for fiscal year 2018 under this heading shall be reimbursed to “General Operating Expenses, Veterans Benefits Administration”, and “Information Technology Systems” for necessary expenses in implementing the provisions of chapters 51, 53, and 55 of title 38, United States Code, the funding source for which is specifically provided as the “Compensation and Pensions” appropriation: *Provided further*, That such sums as may be earned on an actual qualifying patient basis, shall be reimbursed to “Medical Care Collections Fund” to augment the funding of individual medical facilities for nursing home care provided to pensioners as authorized.

READJUSTMENT BENEFITS

For the payment of readjustment and rehabilitation benefits to or on behalf of veterans as authorized by chapters 21, 30, 31, 33, 34, 35, 36, 39, 41, 51, 53, 55, and 61 of title 38, United States Code, \$13,708,648,000, to remain available until expended and to become available on October 1, 2017: *Provided*, That expenses for rehabilitation program services and assistance which the Secretary is authorized to provide under subsection (a) of section 3104 of title 38, United States Code, other than under paragraphs (1), (2), (5), and (11) of that subsection, shall be charged to this account.

VETERANS INSURANCE AND INDEMNITIES

For military and naval insurance, national service life insurance, servicemen’s indemnities, service-disabled veterans insurance, and veterans mortgage life insurance as authorized by chapters 19 and 21, title 38, United States Code, \$124,504,000, to remain available until expended, of which \$107,899,000 shall become available on October 1, 2017.

VETERANS HOUSING BENEFIT PROGRAM FUND

For the cost of direct and guaranteed loans, such sums as may be necessary to carry out the program, as authorized by subchapters I through III of chapter 37 of title 38, United States Code: *Provided*, That such costs, including the cost of modifying such loans, shall be as defined in section 502 of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974: *Provided further*, That, during fiscal year 2017, within the resources available, not to exceed \$500,000 in gross obligations for direct loans are authorized for specially adapted housing loans.

In addition, for administrative expenses to carry out the direct and guaranteed loan programs, \$167,612,000.

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION LOANS PROGRAM ACCOUNT

For the cost of direct loans, \$36,000, as authorized by chapter 31 of title 38, United States Code: *Provided*, That such costs, including the cost of modifying such loans, shall be as defined in section 502 of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974: *Provided further*, That funds made available under this heading are available to subsidize gross obligations for the principal amount of direct loans not to exceed \$2,517,000.

In addition, for administrative expenses necessary to carry out the direct loan program, \$389,000, which may be paid to the appropriation for “General Operating Expenses, Veterans Benefits Administration”.

NATIVE AMERICAN VETERAN HOUSING LOAN PROGRAM ACCOUNT

For administrative expenses to carry out the direct loan program authorized by subchapter V of chapter 37 of title 38, United States Code, \$1,163,000.

VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION

MEDICAL SERVICES

For necessary expenses for furnishing, as authorized by law, inpatient and outpatient care and treatment to beneficiaries of the Department of Veterans Affairs and veterans described in section 1705(a) of title 38, United States Code, including care and treatment in facilities not under the jurisdiction of the Department, and including medical supplies and equipment, bioengineering services, food services, and salaries and expenses of healthcare employees hired under title 38, United States Code, aid to State homes as authorized by section 1741 of title 38, United States Code, assistance and support services for caregivers as authorized by section 1720G of title 38, United States Code, loan repayments authorized by section 604 of the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010 (Public Law 111-163; 124 Stat. 1174; 38 U.S.C. 7681 note), and hospital care and medical services authorized by section 1787 of title 38, United States Code; \$850,000,000, which shall be in addition to funds previously appropriated under this heading that became available on October 1, 2016; and, in addition, \$44,886,554,000, plus reimbursements, shall become available on October 1, 2017, and shall remain available until September 30, 2018: *Provided*, That, of the amount made available on October 1, 2017, under this heading, \$1,400,000,000 shall remain available until September 30, 2019: *Provided further*, That, notwithstanding any other provision of law, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall establish a priority for the provision of medical treatment for veterans who have service-connected disabilities, lower income, or have special needs: *Provided further*, That, notwithstanding any other provision of law, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall give priority funding for the provision of basic medical benefits to veterans in enrollment priority groups 1 through 6: *Provided further*, That, notwithstanding any other provision of law, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs may authorize the dispensing of prescription drugs from Veterans Health Administration facilities to enrolled veterans with privately written prescriptions based on requirements established by the Secretary: *Provided further*, That the implementation of the program described in the previous proviso shall incur no additional cost to the Department of Veterans Affairs.

□ 2300

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. GOSAR

Mr. GOSAR. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk.

The CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

Page 29, line 6, after the dollar amount, insert “(increased by \$4,000,000)”.

Page 33, line 12, after the first dollar amount, insert “(reduced by \$5,500,000)”.

The CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 736, the gentleman from Arizona and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Arizona.

Mr. GOSAR. Mr. Chairman, I rise to offer an amendment which seeks to redirect scarce resources to important

mental health programs for our Nation's veterans.

At a hearing just last week entitled "Combating the Crisis: Evaluating Efforts to Prevent Veteran Suicide," Chairman JEFF MILLER stated that the latest data available from the VA reports that 22 veterans per day are committing suicide.

Last fiscal year, the VA General Administration account got a \$15.68 million increase for more bureaucracy within the VA. This year, the Obama administration has requested another \$81 million increase for that account.

The committee wisely chose not to provide funding for the majority of the request in that bill, stating:

"It has doubts about the wisdom of establishing a large new office with regional staffing at this late date in the administration."

My amendment simply transfers a portion of the fiscal year 2016 increase for government bureaucrats to important mental health services for our Nation's heroes returning from combat.

Traumatic brain injuries and post-traumatic stress disorder have been consistently contributing to behavioral issues amongst our veterans; and all too often, these ongoing mental health issues result in suicide. With an average of 22 veteran suicides per day, more resources are desperately needed.

While redirecting funds to where they are needed most, the Congressional Budget Office also states that this amendment would save money and reduce outlays. My amendment also helps bring the level of funding in the bill for mental health closer to the administration's requests for the fiscal year.

The VA doesn't need more money to hire more paper pushers. Instead, let's appropriate that money to where and whom the VA was created for: to serve and help improve the mental health of our Nation's heroes.

I applaud the committee for including my language that ensures the Veterans Crisis Line will provide an immediate response from a trained professional and for the resources already directed in this bill towards mental health.

I ask my colleagues to support this commonsense amendment and help ensure our veterans that are in need get the care they so earned.

Mr. Chair, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chairman, I claim the time in opposition, but I don't oppose the amendment.

The CHAIR. Without objection, the gentleman from Pennsylvania is recognized for 5 minutes.

There was no objection.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chairman, I am certainly sympathetic to the intent of the gentleman's amendment to increase funding for suicide prevention outreach programs. Obviously, we all know this is a very serious problem. These programs already received an 11 percent increase in our bill, for a total of \$164

million. So I do not oppose the amendment, and I urge its adoption.

Mr. Chair, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. GOSAR. Mr. Chair, I yield back the balance of my time.

The CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. GOSAR).

The amendment was agreed to.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MS. MICHELLE LUJAN GRISHAM OF NEW MEXICO

Ms. MICHELLE LUJAN GRISHAM of New Mexico. Mr. Chair, I have an amendment at the desk.

The CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

Page 29, line 6, after the dollar amount, insert "(reduced by \$10,000,000) (increased by \$10,000,000)".

The CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 736, the gentlewoman from New Mexico and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from New Mexico.

Ms. MICHELLE LUJAN GRISHAM of New Mexico. Mr. Chair, we have a provider shortage in this country, and it is only projected to get worse. The Association of American Medical Colleges estimates that the United States could face a shortage of 90,000 physicians by 2025.

One of the most common complaints I hear from veterans in Albuquerque is that even with the flexibility they have to see outside providers through the Veterans Choice Act, there just aren't enough providers—especially behavioral health providers—to treat everyone who needs care.

If trends continue, we will be without the workforce needed to treat an aging population that will increasingly live with chronic health care issues. The provider shortages hit rural, poor, and underserved communities and states like New Mexico particularly hard.

According to the New Mexico Health Care Workforce Committee, every single healthcare profession in New Mexico has a shortage of providers. In fact, Los Alamos, New Mexico, is the only county in the entire State without a shortage of primary health care providers. And primary care physicians are four more times available in urban areas than in rural New Mexico.

The result: longer waits, longer travel, patients not receiving the care they need, and worse health outcomes.

We have to educate and recruit more providers, but that will not be enough to keep up with growing demand. We have to do a better job at leveraging the resources we have to put VA providers in the best situation we can to provide quality and timely care to their patients.

The Department of Veterans Affairs, the largest healthcare system in the United States, should be leading in using telehealth technology to provide care and promote patient wellness.

The VHA's Home Telehealth Program is growing and provided 2.1 mil-

lion consultations to more than 677,000 veterans in 2015. But we can do much more.

In a report last year, the VA Inspector General's office found that the VA missed opportunities to serve additional patients with the Home Telehealth Program, which could have "potentially delayed the need for long-term institutional care for approximately 59,000 additional veterans."

The VA Inspector General also found that "telehealth patients showed the best outcomes in terms of patient admissions and bed days of care."

It also saves money. Using telehealth instead of placing a veterans in a contract nursing home facility saves approximately \$92,000 a year, and the veteran gets to stay independently at home.

The VA should follow models such as the University of New Mexico's Project ECHO and think creatively about sharing expertise among specialists, primary care physicians, and medical centers to ensure patients in underserved communities get the care they need.

□ 2310

Mr. Chairman, the VA should increase its focus on programs that are proven to improve clinical outcomes and expand access to care while reducing treatment costs.

I urge Members to support my amendment to prioritize funding for the VA Home Telehealth Program.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chairman, I claim time in opposition, but I do not oppose the amendment.

The CHAIR. Without objection, the gentleman from Pennsylvania is recognized for 5 minutes.

There was no objection.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chairman, I share the gentlewoman's concern about the importance of telehealth as a way to provide healthcare services remotely to patients. It is especially useful in the treatment of mental health and behavioral health issues.

The VA is a leader in telehealth activities, providing 2.1 million consultations to more than 677,000 veterans in 2015, many of whom were in rural areas. VA funding for telehealth will total almost \$1.2 billion in fiscal year 2017.

I do not oppose the amendment. I urge its adoption.

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Will the gentleman yield?

Mr. DENT. I yield to the gentleman from Georgia.

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. I thank the gentleman for yielding.

Mr. Chairman, I come from a very rural district as well, and I understand the importance of access to quality care.

I agree that we need to train and recruit more health professionals. In the meantime, I agree that telemedicine is a great tool to help deal with the shortage of health professionals.

So I support this amendment, and I urge all of the Members to do so. It will do a great deal toward helping to bring access to care to our veterans in rural communities.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chairman, I yield back the balance of time.

The CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from New Mexico (Ms. MICHELLE LUJAN GRISHAM).

The amendment was agreed to.

The CHAIR. The Clerk will read.

The Clerk read as follows:

MEDICAL COMMUNITY CARE

For necessary expenses for furnishing health care to individuals pursuant to chapter 17 of title 38, United States Code, at non-Department facilities, \$7,246,181,000, plus reimbursements, to be derived from amounts appropriated in title II of division J of Public Law 114-113 under the headings "Medical Services", "Medical Support and Compliance", or "Medical Facilities" which became available on October 1, 2016; and, in addition, \$9,409,118,000 shall become available on October 1, 2017, and shall remain available until September 30, 2018: *Provided*, That, of the amount made available on October 1, 2017, under this heading, \$1,500,000,000 shall remain available until September 30, 2019.

MEDICAL SUPPORT AND COMPLIANCE

For necessary expenses in the administration of the medical, hospital, nursing home, domiciliary, construction, supply, and research activities, as authorized by law; administrative expenses in support of capital policy activities; and administrative and legal expenses of the Department for collecting and recovering amounts owed the Department as authorized under chapter 17 of title 38, United States Code, and the Federal Medical Care Recovery Act (42 U.S.C. 2651 et seq.), \$6,654,480,000, plus reimbursements, shall become available on October 1, 2017, and shall remain available until September 30, 2018: *Provided*, That, of the amount made available on October 1, 2017, under this heading, \$100,000,000 shall remain available until September 30, 2019.

MEDICAL FACILITIES

For necessary expenses for the maintenance and operation of hospitals, nursing homes, domiciliary facilities, and other necessary facilities of the Veterans Health Administration; for administrative expenses in support of planning, design, project management, real property acquisition and disposition, construction, and renovation of any facility under the jurisdiction or for the use of the Department; for oversight, engineering, and architectural activities not charged to project costs; for repairing, altering, improving, or providing facilities in the several hospitals and homes under the jurisdiction of the Department, not otherwise provided for, either by contract or by the hire of temporary employees and purchase of materials; for leases of facilities; and for laundry services, \$5,434,880,000, plus reimbursements, shall become available on October 1, 2017, and shall remain available until September 30, 2018: *Provided*, That, of the amount made available on October 1, 2017, under this heading, \$250,000,000 shall remain available until September 30, 2019.

MEDICAL AND PROSTHETIC RESEARCH

For necessary expenses in carrying out programs of medical and prosthetic research and development as authorized by chapter 73 of title 38, United States Code, \$663,366,000, plus reimbursements, shall remain available until September 30, 2018.

NATIONAL CEMETERY ADMINISTRATION

For necessary expenses of the National Cemetery Administration for operations and

maintenance, not otherwise provided for, including uniforms or allowances therefor; cemetery expenses as authorized by law; purchase of one passenger motor vehicle for use in cemetery operations; hire of passenger motor vehicles; and repair, alteration or improvement of facilities under the jurisdiction of the National Cemetery Administration, \$271,220,000, of which not to exceed \$26,600,000 shall remain available until September 30, 2018.

DEPARTMENTAL ADMINISTRATION

GENERAL ADMINISTRATION

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

For necessary operating expenses of the Department of Veterans Affairs, not otherwise provided for, including administrative expenses in support of Department-wide capital planning, management and policy activities, uniforms, or allowances therefor; not to exceed \$25,000 for official reception and representation expenses; hire of passenger motor vehicles; and reimbursement of the General Services Administration for security guard services, \$336,659,000, of which not to exceed \$10,000,000 shall remain available until September 30, 2018: *Provided*, That funds provided under this heading may be transferred to "General Operating Expenses, Veterans Benefits Administration".

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. KEATING

Mr. KEATING. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk.

The CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

Page 33, line 12, after the first dollar amount, insert "(reduced by \$1,500,000) (increased by \$1,500,000)".

The CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 736, the gentleman from Massachusetts and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Massachusetts.

Mr. KEATING. Mr. Chairman, I thank Chairman DENT and Ranking Member BISHOP for their work on this appropriations bill, and for their cooperation with this amendment.

I rise today to offer an amendment that will support a requirement of VA prescribers to complement a continuing medication course in pain management.

Nationally, about 30 percent of Americans have some form of chronic pain. However, the percentage of veterans who report chronic pain is significantly higher. Over 50 percent of elderly veterans report chronic pain as do almost 60 percent of veterans returning from the conflict in the Middle East.

In fact, chronic pain is the most common medical problem experienced by returning combat veterans in the last decade.

Of course, pain is not a stand-alone problem. Pain is something we see as a consequence of physical injury, and sometimes that physical injury leads to co-occurring mental health ailments.

We are increasingly more aware of the mental health consequences stemming from time in combat. Veterans with brain trauma are more likely to report physical pain and, in turn, are more likely to receive prescriptions for opioids.

Recent VA data shows us that roughly 523,000 veterans are receiving prescriptions for opioids, and the number of veterans with opioid use disorders has grown 55 percent over the past 5 years. Veterans are twice as likely to overdose on prescription opioids as the general population.

We are very fortunate to live in a time where quality care can be offered to our military personnel, and it is unparalleled. Now we need to do our part to help these heroes manage their chronic pain in the safest manner possible.

Last month I introduced the Safe Prescribing for Veterans Act, which will help those who provide healthcare services to veterans learn the latest pain management techniques, understand safe prescribing practices, and spot the signs of potential substance use disorders. This act works by directing healthcare providers from the VA to take continuing education courses specific to pain management, opioids, and substance abuse.

VA healthcare providers already need continuing education to maintain their State-issued professional licenses, and my bill makes sure they spend some of the already-required time learning about safe opioid prescribing practices.

The bill does not add to the total number of credits that prescribers already have to take, it just insists that they spend their time on this important issue.

Only 14 States require their physicians to take pain management education credits. My constituents are fortunate in Massachusetts because we are 1 of the 14 States that ask its doctors to complete pain management training.

However, even our neighboring States do not have the mandatory pain management requirements. Veterans in my district, especially those in the South Coast, often find it easy to receive their health care at VA hospitals in Rhode Island. As of now, there is no guarantee that the doctors they see in Providence have taken the same pain management education courses.

I rise before you today in an effort to give our veterans that guarantee.

I urge my colleagues to join me in support of this amendment to ensure our veterans receive the care they deserve.

Mr. Chairman, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chairman, I claim the time in opposition, but I am not opposed to the amendment.

The CHAIR. Without objection, the gentleman from Pennsylvania is recognized for 5 minutes.

There was no objection.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chairman, the gentleman is addressing a problem that many Members have contacted us about, the long delays that community practitioners are experiencing in being paid by VA for their care for veterans.

Our report requires VA to provide comprehensive information detailing

the reimbursements owed to providers in each State and the amounts of invoices that are more than 6 months overdue.

GAO just released a report with alarming data about VA's significant problems in managing prompt payment to outside providers. I am sure that we will revisit this issue in conference, and we will welcome any suggestions the gentleman has for us.

I have no objection to this amendment and urge its adoption.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. KEATING. Mr. Chairman, I yield back the balance of my time.

The CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. KEATING).

The amendment was agreed to.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. CLAWSON OF FLORIDA

Mr. CLAWSON of Florida. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk.

The CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

Page 33, line 12, after the first dollar amount, insert "(reduced by \$5,000,000)".

Page 35, line 1, after the dollar amount, insert "(increased by \$5,000,000)".

Page 35, line 8, after the dollar amount, insert "(increased by \$5,000,000)".

The CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 736, the gentleman from Florida and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Florida.

Mr. CLAWSON of Florida. Mr. Chairman, I thank Chairman DENT; full respect for what he does and, more importantly, how he does it. Agree or disagree, the gentleman does it the right way, and I appreciate his leadership style.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to offer my amendment to the Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill.

May 30 is Memorial Day, a day we set aside to recognize the tremendous debt of gratitude for those who have selflessly sacrificed for our liberties.

From constituent discussions in my district, I am acutely aware that customer service for our vets often falls short of the mark. Far too many of our vets, I am told, simply do not receive timely responses to their healthcare questions. We can do better.

My amendment, which I am proposing, is directed at improving customer service problems by improving the information technology at VA facilities.

My amendment would enhance veterans' customer service experiences by funding improved, service-based, commoditized technology and telecommunications.

□ 2320

For this, my amendment would add \$5 million to the information technology systems account, specifically

the funding directed at the development, modernization, and enhancement of the current IT infrastructure.

In the proposed budget, this account is currently funded at \$4.23 billion, \$50 million short of the President's budget request of \$4.28 billion in this area. My amendment would offset this \$5 million by reducing the general administration account, currently funded at \$336 million. The redirected \$5 million would be used in acquiring new technologies to provide more acceptable customer satisfaction and delivery measures.

I am the proud son of a veteran who served overseas. In my role in Congress, it is a great honor and privilege to serve over 100,000 veterans who call my district home. We all know vets—friends, neighbors, family, and, in my case, a nephew just returning from Afghanistan and a father who served a long time ago. Let's do right by these brave folks by improving their customer service and response.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chairman, I claim the time in opposition, but I do not oppose the amendment.

The CHAIR. Without objection, the gentleman from Pennsylvania is recognized for 5 minutes.

There was no objection.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chairman, I certainly know the gentleman from Florida is very committed to improving veterans' experiences when they deal with the VA, and modernizing infrastructure is certainly an important part of that. I have no objection to the amendment, and I certainly appreciate the gentleman's deep commitment given his own father's experience in our Armed Forces. We thank him for that service.

Again, I have no objection to this amendment, and I urge its adoption.

I yield back the balance of my time.

The CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Florida (Mr. CLAWSON).

The amendment was agreed to.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. KEATING

Mr. KEATING. Mr. Chair, I have an amendment at the desk.

The CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

Page 33, line 12, after the first dollar amount, insert "(reduced by \$1,000,000) (increased by \$1,000,000)".

The CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 736, the gentleman from Massachusetts and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Massachusetts.

Mr. KEATING. Mr. Chairman, again I would like to thank Chairman DENT and Ranking Member BISHOP for their work on this bill and their cooperation on this amendment.

I rise today to offer a straightforward amendment that will improve our understanding of the causes of delays within the Veterans Choice Program. The Veterans Choice Program was implemented to address delays in patient

care at the Veterans Administration. However, as of April of this year, data from the VA showed that the number of veterans waiting more than 30 days for an appointment was actually higher than when the Veterans Choice Program was initiated.

The well-intentioned and necessary program was initiated and acknowledged. The fact is the Veterans Choice Program was cobbled together very quickly given the time constraints. This led to excessive privatization and contracting through third parties, which has contributed to frequent delays, and we are seeing these delays even today.

In my district alone, I have spoken with numerous veterans who live a great distance from VA medical facilities, such as the islands of Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket. My constituents rely heavily on accessibility to non-VA doctors the Veterans Choice is intended to provide.

Further, an oft cited problem with Veterans Choice is the lack of clear communications regarding the eligibility requirements of the program to both veterans and non-VA providers. Understanding the obstacles around efficient scheduling of appointments of veterans and swift reimbursement for providers would serve as a crucial first step in resolving some of the issues that the Choice Program faces. Without this understanding, the program itself really isn't beneficial.

That is why I am offering this amendment, to advocate for redirected funding toward finding a solution to the delays and the communication errors plaguing implementation of Veterans Choice.

I have no doubt whatsoever that every Member of Congress here agrees that our veterans deserve the very best possible care in a timely manner. Ultimately, this amendment is meant to assist the VA in identifying why these delays are occurring and to help recommend solutions.

I want to thank the chairman again.

Mr. Chairman, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Mr. Chairman, I move to strike the last word.

The CHAIR. The gentleman is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Mr. Chairman, I agree with the gentleman from Massachusetts that we need to take a serious look at the Choice Program. VA's most recent data show, compared to the last year, there are now 70,000 more appointments that kept a veteran waiting at least a month to get care. Furthermore, a March General Accounting Office report showed that the Choice Program had little impact on getting veterans to see a primary care physician in 30 days.

Thousands of veterans referred to the program are returning to the VA for care, sometimes because the program could not find a doctor for them and because the private doctor they were told to see was too far away according

to VA data. In fact, VA's own inspector general found that in Colorado, veterans were waiting longer than 30 days for care because staff at the local VA hospital was not adding them to the list of patients eligible for the Choice Program, let alone slow reimbursements.

Two years ago, Congress was hearing about the VA concealing wait times at VA hospitals and clinics and about the veterans who were suffering as a result. We were forced to act quickly in this crisis. I believe that Congress will have to revamp the Choice Program to make sure that it is doing what Congress intended for it to do. We are going to need an honest assessment from the VA.

Mr. Chairman, I urge all Members to support this amendment.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chairman, I claim the time in opposition to the amendment, but I do not oppose the amendment.

The CHAIR. Without objection, the gentleman from Pennsylvania is recognized for 5 minutes.

There was no objection.

Mr. DENT. I will just say very briefly, Mr. Chairman, I know the gentleman is very interested, as we all are, in finding ways to ensure that the VA healthcare providers receive up-to-date and comprehensive training in the proper use of pain management medications. So many of our veterans struggle with chronic pain, and we have seen the tragic consequences of over-prescription of opioids as a method of treatment.

I appreciate the gentleman's interest and his advocacy. I have no objections to gentleman's amendment, and I urge adoption.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. KEATING. Again, Mr. Chairman, I thank the chairman and ranking member.

I yield back the balance of my time.

The CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. KEATING).

The amendment was agreed to.

The CHAIR. The Clerk will read.

The Clerk read as follows:

BOARD OF VETERANS APPEALS

For necessary operating expenses of the Board of Veterans Appeals, \$156,096,000, of which not to exceed \$15,610,000 shall remain available until September 30, 2018.

GENERAL OPERATING EXPENSES, VETERANS BENEFITS ADMINISTRATION

For necessary operating expenses of the Veterans Benefits Administration, not otherwise provided for, including hire of passenger motor vehicles, reimbursement of the General Services Administration for security guard services, and reimbursement of the Department of Defense for the cost of overseas employee mail, \$2,826,160,000: *Provided*, That expenses for services and assistance authorized under paragraphs (1), (2), (5), and (11) of section 3104(a) of title 38, United States Code, that the Secretary of Veterans Affairs determines are necessary to enable entitled veterans: (1) to the maximum extent feasible, to become employable and to obtain and maintain suitable employment; or (2) to achieve maximum independence in daily liv-

ing, shall be charged to this account: *Provided further*, That, of the funds made available under this heading, not to exceed \$141,000,000 shall remain available until September 30, 2018.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. RUIZ

Mr. RUIZ. Mr. Chair, I have an amendment at the desk.

The CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

Page 34, line 5, after the dollar amount, insert "(reduced by \$5,000,000) (increased by \$5,000,000)".

The CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 736, the gentleman from California and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California.

Mr. RUIZ. Mr. Chairman, I rise today to offer an amendment to H.R. 4974, the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies Appropriations Act for 2017.

My amendment will help reduce the VA's claims backlog and help improve the lives of our veterans. California is home to 2 million veterans, and I am proud to represent more than 54,000 veterans in my district alone.

There are 40,000 veterans expected to return to California every year for the next several years, including the fastest growing group of returning veterans—women.

We must ensure that our veterans have timely access to the critical benefits they have earned and deserve. Unconscionably, thousands of veterans who have sacrificed for our country are struggling to access benefits they have already earned.

Due to the lingering claims backlog at the Veterans Affairs Administration, veterans across our Nation are waiting for pensions, prescription drugs, and even lifesaving medical care.

Veterans are still waiting for the VA to process 351,676 benefit claims, and 74,589 of those veterans have been waiting longer than 125 days for a decision.

□ 2330

We owe it to our courageous men and women to clear this harmful backlog as soon as possible. Reduced to a claim number in a seemingly endless line, our veterans experience pain, frustration, hopelessness, and despair. Although the backlog has shrunk since Congress last passed a similar appropriations bill, we must not lose sight of the importance of getting veterans their hard-earned benefits as soon as possible.

That is why I am offering this amendment to advocate for an additional \$5 million to fund the digital scanning of health and benefits files to reduce the backlog by redirecting funding within the General Operating Expenses account of the Veterans Benefits Administration. This amendment simply directs funds towards the digital scanning of health and benefits files that will reduce the claims backlog without any new spending.

As an emergency medicine physician, I understand the importance of efficiency in health care, and I know how dangerous continued bureaucratic rejection can be for a person with PTSD or depression. By committing resources to digitizing health and benefits files, we will further increase VA's capacity to tackle the claims backlog, ultimately ensuring veterans receive the benefits they have earned in a timely manner. We must serve our veterans by making certain that Congress focuses on eliminating the claims backlog for good.

I encourage my colleagues to stand up for veterans and support my pragmatic amendment to reduce the veterans' claims processing time.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chairman, I claim the time in opposition, although I do not oppose the amendment.

The CHAIR. Without objection, the gentleman from Pennsylvania is recognized for 5 minutes.

There was no objection.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chairman, on the VA claims backlog, we have fully funded the President's request.

I have no objection to the amendment, and I am prepared to support it.

I yield back the balance of my time.

The CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. RUIZ).

The amendment was agreed to.

The Clerk will read.

The Clerk read as follows:

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SYSTEMS (INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

For necessary expenses for information technology systems and telecommunications support, including developmental information systems and operational information systems; for pay and associated costs; and for the capital asset acquisition of information technology systems, including management and related contractual costs of said acquisitions, including contractual costs associated with operations authorized by section 3109 of title 5, United States Code, \$4,220,869,000, plus reimbursements: *Provided*, That \$1,247,548,000 shall be for pay and associated costs, of which not to exceed \$36,300,000 shall remain available until September 30, 2018: *Provided further*, That \$2,502,052,000 shall be for operations and maintenance, of which not to exceed \$177,900,000 shall remain available until September 30, 2018: *Provided further*, That \$471,269,000 shall be for information technology systems development, modernization, and enhancement, and shall remain available until September 30, 2018: *Provided further*, That amounts made available for information technology systems development, modernization, and enhancement may not be obligated or expended until the Secretary of Veterans Affairs or the Chief Information Officer of the Department of Veterans Affairs submits to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress a certification of the amounts, in parts or in full, to be obligated and expended for each development project: *Provided further*, That amounts made available for salaries and expenses, operations and maintenance, and information technology systems development, modernization, and enhancement may be transferred among the three subaccounts

after the Secretary of Veterans Affairs requests from the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress the authority to make the transfer and an approval is issued: *Provided further*, That amounts made available for the “Information Technology Systems” account for development, modernization, and enhancement may be transferred among projects or to newly defined projects: *Provided further*, That no project may be increased or decreased by more than \$1,000,000 of cost prior to submitting a request to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress to make the transfer and an approval is issued, or absent a response, a period of 30 days has elapsed: *Provided further*, That funds under this heading may be used by the Interagency Program Office through the Department of Veterans Affairs to define data standards, code sets, and value sets used to enable interoperability: *Provided further*, That of the amounts made available under this heading for operations and maintenance and information technology systems development, modernization, and enhancement, not more than a total amount of \$168,113,000 shall be available for VistA Evolution or any successor: *Provided further*, That none of the funds made available by the preceding proviso may be obligated or expended for such program or any successor until the Secretary of Veterans Affairs: (1) certifies to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress that the Department of Veterans Affairs has deployed modernized electronic health record software supporting clinicians of the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Defense no later than December 31, 2016, while ensuring continued support and compatibility with the interoperability platform and full standards-based interoperability, as stipulated by the National Defense Authorization Act of Fiscal Year 2014 (Public Law 113-66); (2) submits to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress the VistA Evolution Business Case and supporting documents regarding continuation of VistA Evolution or alternatives to VistA Evolution, including an analysis of necessary or desired capabilities, technical and security requirements, the plan for modernizing the platform framework, and all associated costs; and (3) submits to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress, and such Committees approve, the following: a report that describes a strategic plan for VistA Evolution, or any successor, and the associated implementation plan including metrics and timelines; a master schedule and lifecycle cost estimate for VistA Evolution or any successor; and an implementation plan for the transition from the Project Management Accountability System (PMAS) to the new project delivery framework (the Veteran-focused Integration Process (VIP)) that includes the methodology by which projects will be tracked, progress measured, and deliverables evaluated: *Provided further*, That the funds made available under this heading for information technology systems development, modernization, and enhancement, shall be for the projects, and in the amounts, specified under this heading in the report accompanying this Act.

OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

For necessary expenses of the Office of Inspector General, to include information technology, in carrying out the provisions of the Inspector General Act of 1978 (5 U.S.C. App.), \$160,106,000, of which not to exceed \$14,800,000 shall remain available until September 30, 2018.

CONSTRUCTION, MAJOR PROJECTS

For constructing, altering, extending, and improving any of the facilities, including

parking projects, under the jurisdiction or for the use of the Department of Veterans Affairs, or for any of the purposes set forth in sections 316, 2404, 2406 and chapter 81 of title 38, United States Code, not otherwise provided for, including planning, architectural and engineering services, construction management services, maintenance or guarantee period services costs associated with equipment guarantees provided under the project, services of claims analysts, offsite utility and storm drainage system construction costs, and site acquisition, where the estimated cost of a project is more than the amount set forth in section 8104(a)(3)(A) of title 38, United States Code, or where funds for a project were made available in a previous major project appropriation, \$528,110,000, of which \$494,310,000 shall remain available until September 30, 2021, and of which \$33,800,000 shall remain available until expended: *Provided*, That except for advance planning activities, including needs assessments which may or may not lead to capital investments, and other capital asset management related activities, including portfolio development and management activities, and investment strategy studies funded through the advance planning fund and the planning and design activities funded through the design fund, including needs assessments which may or may not lead to capital investments, and salaries and associated costs of the resident engineers who oversee those capital investments funded through this account and contracting officers who manage specific major construction projects, and funds provided for the purchase of land, security, and maintenance for the National Cemetery Administration through the land acquisition line item, none of the funds made available under this heading shall be used for any project which has not been approved by the Congress in the budgetary process: *Provided further*, That funds made available under this heading for fiscal year 2017, for each approved project shall be obligated: (1) by the awarding of a construction documents contract by September 30, 2017; and (2) by the awarding of a construction contract by September 30, 2018: *Provided further*, That the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall promptly submit to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress a written report on any approved major construction project for which obligations are not incurred within the time limitations established above: *Provided further*, That, of the amount made available under this heading, \$222,620,000 for Veterans Health Administration major construction projects shall not be available until the Department of Veterans Affairs—

(1) enters into an agreement with an appropriate non-Department of Veterans Affairs Federal entity to serve as the design and/or construction agent for any Veterans Health Administration major construction project with a Total Estimated Cost of \$100,000,000 or above by providing full project management services, including management of the project design, acquisition, construction, and contract changes, consistent with section 502 of Public Law 114-58; and

(2) certifies in writing that such an agreement is executed and intended to minimize or prevent subsequent major construction project cost overruns and provides a copy of the agreement entered into and any required supplementary information to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress.

CONSTRUCTION, MINOR PROJECTS

For constructing, altering, extending, and improving any of the facilities, including parking projects, under the jurisdiction or for the use of the Department of Veterans

Affairs, including planning and assessments of needs which may lead to capital investments, architectural and engineering services, maintenance or guarantee period services costs associated with equipment guarantees provided under the project, services of claims analysts, offsite utility and storm drainage system construction costs, and site acquisition, or for any of the purposes set forth in sections 316, 2404, 2406 and chapter 81 of title 38, United States Code, not otherwise provided for, where the estimated cost of a project is equal to or less than the amount set forth in section 8104(a)(3)(A) of title 38, United States Code, \$372,069,000, to remain available until September 30, 2021, along with unobligated balances of previous “Construction, Minor Projects” appropriations which are hereby made available for any project where the estimated cost is equal to or less than the amount set forth in such section: *Provided*, That funds made available under this heading shall be for: (1) repairs to any of the nonmedical facilities under the jurisdiction or for the use of the Department which are necessary because of loss or damage caused by any natural disaster or catastrophe; and (2) temporary measures necessary to prevent or to minimize further loss by such causes.

GRANTS FOR CONSTRUCTION OF STATE EXTENDED CARE FACILITIES

For grants to assist States to acquire or construct State nursing home and domiciliary facilities and to remodel, modify, or alter existing hospital, nursing home, and domiciliary facilities in State homes, for furnishing care to veterans as authorized by sections 8131 through 8137 of title 38, United States Code, \$80,000,000, to remain available until expended.

GRANTS FOR CONSTRUCTION OF VETERANS CEMETERIES

For grants to assist States and tribal organizations in establishing, expanding, or improving veterans cemeteries as authorized by section 2408 of title 38, United States Code, \$45,000,000, to remain available until expended.

ADMINISTRATIVE PROVISIONS (INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 201. Any appropriation for fiscal year 2017 for “Compensation and Pensions”, “Readjustment Benefits”, and “Veterans Insurance and Indemnities” may be transferred as necessary to any other of the mentioned appropriations: *Provided*, That, before a transfer may take place, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall request from the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress the authority to make the transfer and such Committees issue an approval, or absent a response, a period of 30 days has elapsed.

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 202. Amounts made available for the Department of Veterans Affairs for fiscal year 2017, in this or any other Act, under the “Medical Services”, “Medical Community Care”, “Medical Support and Compliance”, and “Medical Facilities” accounts may be transferred among the accounts: *Provided*, That any transfers among the “Medical Services”, “Medical Community Care”, and “Medical Support and Compliance” accounts of 1 percent or less of the total amount appropriated to the account in this or any other Act may take place subject to notification from the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress of the amount and purpose of the transfer: *Provided further*, That any transfers among the “Medical Services”, “Medical Community Care”, and “Medical Support and Compliance” accounts in excess

of 1 percent, or exceeding the cumulative 1 percent for the fiscal year, may take place only after the Secretary requests from the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress the authority to make the transfer and an approval is issued: *Provided further*, That any transfers to or from the "Medical Facilities" account may take place only after the Secretary requests from the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress the authority to make the transfer and an approval is issued.

SEC. 203. Appropriations available in this title for salaries and expenses shall be available for services authorized by section 3109 of title 5, United States Code; hire of passenger motor vehicles; lease of a facility or land or both; and uniforms or allowances therefore, as authorized by sections 5901 through 5902 of title 5, United States Code.

SEC. 204. No appropriations in this title (except the appropriations for "Construction, Major Projects", and "Construction, Minor Projects") shall be available for the purchase of any site for or toward the construction of any new hospital or home.

SEC. 205. No appropriations in this title shall be available for hospitalization or examination of any persons (except beneficiaries entitled to such hospitalization or examination under the laws providing such benefits to veterans, and persons receiving such treatment under sections 7901 through 7904 of title 5, United States Code, or the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5121 et seq.)), unless reimbursement of the cost of such hospitalization or examination is made to the "Medical Services" account at such rates as may be fixed by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

SEC. 206. Appropriations available in this title for "Compensation and Pensions", "Readjustment Benefits", and "Veterans Insurance and Indemnities" shall be available for payment of prior year accrued obligations required to be recorded by law against the corresponding prior year accounts within the last quarter of fiscal year 2016.

SEC. 207. Appropriations available in this title shall be available to pay prior year obligations of corresponding prior year appropriations accounts resulting from sections 3328(a), 3334, and 3712(a) of title 31, United States Code, except that if such obligations are from trust fund accounts they shall be payable only from "Compensation and Pensions".

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 208. Notwithstanding any other provision of law, during fiscal year 2017, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall, from the National Service Life Insurance Fund under section 1920 of title 38, United States Code, the Veterans' Special Life Insurance Fund under section 1923 of title 38, United States Code, and the United States Government Life Insurance Fund under section 1955 of title 38, United States Code, reimburse the "General Operating Expenses, Veterans Benefits Administration" and "Information Technology Systems" accounts for the cost of administration of the insurance programs financed through those accounts: *Provided*, That reimbursement shall be made only from the surplus earnings accumulated in such an insurance program during fiscal year 2017 that are available for dividends in that program after claims have been paid and actuarially determined reserves have been set aside: *Provided further*, That if the cost of administration of such an insurance program exceeds the amount of surplus earnings accumulated in that program, reimbursement shall be made only to the extent of such surplus earnings: *Provided further*, That the Secretary shall determine the cost of adminis-

tration for fiscal year 2017 which is properly allocable to the provision of each such insurance program and to the provision of any total disability income insurance included in that insurance program.

SEC. 209. Amounts deducted from enhanced-use lease proceeds to reimburse an account for expenses incurred by that account during a prior fiscal year for providing enhanced-use lease services, may be obligated during the fiscal year in which the proceeds are received.

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 210. Funds available in this title or funds for salaries and other administrative expenses shall also be available to reimburse the Office of Resolution Management of the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Office of Employment Discrimination Complaint Adjudication under section 319 of title 38, United States Code, for all services provided at rates which will recover actual costs but not to exceed \$47,668,000 for the Office of Resolution Management and \$3,532,000 for the Office of Employment Discrimination Complaint Adjudication: *Provided*, That payments may be made in advance for services to be furnished based on estimated costs: *Provided further*, That amounts received shall be credited to the "General Administration" and "Information Technology Systems" accounts for use by the office that provided the service.

SEC. 211. No funds of the Department of Veterans Affairs shall be available for hospital care, nursing home care, or medical services provided to any person under chapter 17 of title 38, United States Code, for a non-service-connected disability described in section 1729(a)(2) of such title, unless that person has disclosed to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, in such form as the Secretary may require, current, accurate third-party reimbursement information for purposes of section 1729 of such title: *Provided*, That the Secretary may recover, in the same manner as any other debt due the United States, the reasonable charges for such care or services from any person who does not make such disclosure as required: *Provided further*, That any amounts so recovered for care or services provided in a prior fiscal year may be obligated by the Secretary during the fiscal year in which amounts are received.

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 212. Notwithstanding any other provision of law, proceeds or revenues derived from enhanced-use leasing activities (including disposal) may be deposited into the "Construction, Major Projects" and "Construction, Minor Projects" accounts and be used for construction (including site acquisition and disposition), alterations, and improvements of any medical facility under the jurisdiction or for the use of the Department of Veterans Affairs. Such sums as realized are in addition to the amount provided for in "Construction, Major Projects" and "Construction, Minor Projects".

SEC. 213. Amounts made available under "Medical Services" are available—

(1) for furnishing recreational facilities, supplies, and equipment; and

(2) for funeral expenses, burial expenses, and other expenses incidental to funerals and burials for beneficiaries receiving care in the Department.

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 214. Such sums as may be deposited to the Medical Care Collections Fund pursuant to section 1729A of title 38, United States Code, may be transferred to the "Medical Services" and "Medical Community Care" accounts to remain available until expended for the purposes of these accounts.

SEC. 215. The Secretary of Veterans Affairs may enter into agreements with Indian

tribes and tribal organizations which are party to the Alaska Native Health Compact with the Indian Health Service, and Indian tribes and tribal organizations serving rural Alaska which have entered into contracts with the Indian Health Service under the Indian Self Determination and Educational Assistance Act, to provide healthcare, including behavioral health and dental care. The Secretary shall require participating veterans and facilities to comply with all appropriate rules and regulations, as established by the Secretary. The term "rural Alaska" shall mean those lands sited within the external boundaries of the Alaska Native regions specified in sections 7(a)(1)–(4) and (7)–(12) of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, as amended (43 U.S.C. 1606), and those lands within the Alaska Native regions specified in sections 7(a)(5) and 7(a)(6) of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, as amended (43 U.S.C. 1606), which are not within the boundaries of the municipality of Anchorage, the Fairbanks North Star Borough, the Kenai Peninsula Borough or the Matanuska Susitna Borough.

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 216. Such sums as may be deposited to the Department of Veterans Affairs Capital Asset Fund pursuant to section 8118 of title 38, United States Code, may be transferred to the "Construction, Major Projects" and "Construction, Minor Projects" accounts, to remain available until expended for the purposes of these accounts.

SEC. 217. None of the funds made available in this title may be used to implement any policy prohibiting the Directors of the Veterans Integrated Services Networks from conducting outreach or marketing to enroll new veterans within their respective Networks.

SEC. 218. Not later than 30 days after the end of each fiscal quarter, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress a report on the financial status of the Department of Veterans Affairs for the preceding quarter: *Provided*, That, at a minimum, the report shall include the direction contained in the explanatory statement described in section 4 in the matter preceding division A of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2016, P. L. 114-113 in title II of Division J of the consolidated Act in the paragraph entitled "Quarterly Report", under the heading "General Administration".

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 219. Amounts made available under the "Medical Services", "Medical Community Care", "Medical Support and Compliance", "Medical Facilities", "General Operating Expenses, Veterans Benefits Administration", "General Administration", and "National Cemetery Administration" accounts for fiscal year 2017 may be transferred to or from the "Information Technology Systems" account: *Provided*, That such transfers may not result in a more than 10 percent aggregate increase in the total amount made available by this Act for the "Information Technology Systems" account: *Provided further*, That, before a transfer may take place, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall request from the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress the authority to make the transfer and an approval is issued.

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 220. Of the amounts appropriated to the Department of Veterans Affairs for fiscal year 2017 for "Medical Services", "Medical Support and Compliance", "Medical Facilities", "Construction, Minor Projects", and "Information Technology Systems", up to \$274,731,000, plus reimbursements, may be

transferred to the Joint Department of Defense-Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Facility Demonstration Fund, established by section 1704 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2010 (Public Law 111-84; 123 Stat. 3571) and may be used for operation of the facilities designated as combined Federal medical facilities as described by section 706 of the Duncan Hunter National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2009 (Public Law 110-417; 122 Stat. 4500): *Provided*, That additional funds may be transferred from accounts designated in this section to the Joint Department of Defense-Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Facility Demonstration Fund upon written notification by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress: *Provided further*, That section 223 of title II of Division J of Public Law 114-113 is repealed.

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 221. Of the amounts appropriated to the Department of Veterans Affairs which become available on October 1, 2017, for “Medical Services”, “Medical Community Care”, “Medical Support and Compliance”, and “Medical Facilities”, up to \$280,802,000, plus reimbursements, may be transferred to the Joint Department of Defense-Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Facility Demonstration Fund, established by section 1704 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2010 (Public Law 111-84; 123 Stat. 3571) and may be used for operation of the facilities designated as combined Federal medical facilities as described by section 706 of the Duncan Hunter National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2009 (Public Law 110-417; 122 Stat. 4500): *Provided*, That additional funds may be transferred from accounts designated in this section to the Joint Department of Defense-Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Facility Demonstration Fund upon written notification by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress.

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 222. Such sums as may be deposited to the Medical Care Collections Fund pursuant to section 1729A of title 38, United States Code, for healthcare provided at facilities designated as combined Federal medical facilities as described by section 706 of the Duncan Hunter National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2009 (Public Law 110-417; 122 Stat. 4500) shall also be available: (1) for transfer to the Joint Department of Defense-Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Facility Demonstration Fund, established by section 1704 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2010 (Public Law 111-84; 123 Stat. 3571); and (2) for operations of the facilities designated as combined Federal medical facilities as described by section 706 of the Duncan Hunter National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2009 (Public Law 110-417; 122 Stat. 4500).

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 223. Of the amounts available in this title for “Medical Services”, “Medical Community Care”, “Medical Support and Compliance”, and “Medical Facilities”, a minimum of \$15,000,000 shall be transferred to the DOD-VA Health Care Sharing Incentive Fund, as authorized by section 8111(d) of title 38, United States Code, to remain available until expended, for any purpose authorized by section 8111 of title 38, United States Code.

SEC. 224. The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall notify the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress of all bid savings in a major construction project that

total at least \$5,000,000, or 5 percent of the programmed amount of the project, whichever is less: *Provided*, That such notification shall occur within 14 days of a contract identifying the programmed amount: *Provided further*, That the Secretary shall notify the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress 14 days prior to the obligation of such bid savings and shall describe the anticipated use of such savings.

SEC. 225. None of the funds made available for “Construction, Major Projects” may be used for a project in excess of the scope specified for that project in the original justification data provided to the Congress as part of the request for appropriations unless the Secretary of Veterans Affairs receives approval from the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress.

SEC. 226. Of the funds provided to the Department of Veterans Affairs for fiscal year 2017 for “Medical Support and Compliance”, a maximum of \$40,000,000 may be obligated from the “Medical Support and Compliance” account for the VistA Evolution and electronic health record interoperability projects: *Provided*, That funds in addition to these amounts may be obligated for the VistA Evolution and electronic health record interoperability projects upon written notification by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress.

SEC. 227. The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall provide written notification to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress 15 days prior to organizational changes which result in the transfer of 25 or more full-time equivalents from one organizational unit of the Department of Veterans Affairs to another.

SEC. 228. The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall provide on a quarterly basis to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress notification of any single national outreach and awareness marketing campaign in which obligations exceed \$2,000,000.

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 229. The Secretary of Veterans Affairs, upon determination that such action is necessary to address needs of the Veterans Health Administration, may transfer to the “Medical Services” account any discretionary appropriations made available for fiscal year 2017 in this title (except appropriations made to the “General Operating Expenses, Veterans Benefits Administration” account) or any discretionary unobligated balances within the Department of Veterans Affairs, including those appropriated for fiscal year 2017, that were provided in advance by appropriations Acts: *Provided*, That transfers shall be made only with the approval of the Office of Management and Budget: *Provided further*, That the transfer authority provided in this section is in addition to any other transfer authority provided by law: *Provided further*, That no amounts may be transferred from amounts that were designated by Congress as an emergency requirement pursuant to a concurrent resolution on the budget or the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985: *Provided further*, That such authority to transfer may not be used unless for higher priority items, based on emergent healthcare requirements, than those for which originally appropriated and in no case where the item for which funds are requested has been denied by Congress: *Provided further*, That, upon determination that all or part of the funds transferred from an appropriation are not necessary, such amounts may be transferred back to that appropriation and shall be available for the same purposes as originally appropriated: *Provided*

further, That before a transfer may take place, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall request from the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress the authority to make the transfer and receive approval of that request.

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 230. Amounts made available for the Department of Veterans Affairs for fiscal year 2017, under the “Board of Veterans Appeals” and the “General Operating Expenses, Veterans Benefits Administration” accounts may be transferred between such accounts: *Provided*, That before a transfer may take place, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall request from the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress the authority to make the transfer and receive approval from such Committees for such request.

SEC. 231. The Secretary of Veterans Affairs may not reprogram funds among major construction projects or programs if such instance of reprogramming will exceed \$5,000,000, unless such reprogramming is approved by the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress.

(RESCISSION OF FUNDS)

SEC. 232. Of the unobligated balances available within the “DOD-VA Health Care Sharing Incentive Fund”, \$30,000,000 are hereby rescinded.

(RESCISSIONS OF FUNDS)

SEC. 233. Of the discretionary funds made available in Public Law 114-113 for the Department of Veterans Affairs for fiscal year 2017, \$266,760,000 are rescinded from “Medical Services”, \$52,031,000 are rescinded from “Medical Support and Compliance”, and \$18,591,000 are rescinded from “Medical Facilities”.

SEC. 234. The amounts otherwise made available by this Act for the following accounts of the Department of Veterans Affairs are hereby reduced by the following amounts:

- (1) “Veterans Health Administration—Medical and Prosthetic Research”, \$4,004,000.
- (2) “National Cemetery Administration”, \$1,464,000.
- (3) “Departmental Administration—General Administration”, \$1,250,000.
- (4) “Departmental Administration—Board of Veterans Appeals”, \$1,214,000.
- (5) “Departmental Administration—General Operating Expenses, Veterans Benefits Administration”, \$24,849,000.
- (6) “Departmental Administration—Information Technology Systems”, \$12,535,000.
- (7) “Departmental Administration—Office of Inspector General”, \$1,302,000.

SEC. 235. The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall ensure that the toll-free suicide hotline under section 1720F(h) of title 38, United States Code—

- (1) provides to individuals who contact the hotline immediate assistance from a trained professional; and
- (2) adheres to all requirements of the American Association of Suicidology.

SEC. 236. (a) The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall treat a marriage and family therapist described in subsection (b) as qualified to serve as a marriage and family therapist in the Department of Veterans Affairs, regardless of any requirements established by the Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education.

(b) A marriage and family therapist described in this subsection is a therapist who meets each of the following criteria:

- (1) Has a masters or higher degree in marriage and family therapy, or a related field, from a regionally accredited program.
- (2) Is licensed as a marriage and family therapist in a State (as defined in section

101(20) of title 38, United States Code) and possesses the highest level of licensure offered from the State.

(3) Has passed the Association of Marital and Family Therapy Regulatory Board Examination in Marital and Family Therapy.

SEC. 237. None of the funds made available by this Act may be used by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to pay a performance award under section 5384 of title 5, United States Code.

SEC. 238. None of the funds made available by this Act may be used to end, suspend, or relocate hospital-based services with respect to a health care facility of the Department of Veterans Affairs that is—

(1) the subject of an environmental impact statement in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.);

(2) designated as a National Historic Landmark by the National Park Service; and

(3) located in a highly rural area.

TITLE III

RELATED AGENCIES

AMERICAN BATTLE MONUMENTS COMMISSION SALARIES AND EXPENSES

For necessary expenses, not otherwise provided for, of the American Battle Monuments Commission, including the acquisition of land or interest in land in foreign countries; purchases and repair of uniforms for caretakers of national cemeteries and monuments outside of the United States and its territories and possessions; rent of office and garage space in foreign countries; purchase (one-for-one replacement basis only) and hire of passenger motor vehicles; not to exceed \$7,500 for official reception and representation expenses; and insurance of official motor vehicles in foreign countries, when required by law of such countries, \$75,100,000, to remain available until expended.

FOREIGN CURRENCY FLUCTUATIONS ACCOUNT

For necessary expenses, not otherwise provided for, of the American Battle Monuments Commission, such sums as may be necessary, to remain available until expended, for purposes authorized by section 2109 of title 36, United States Code.

UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS FOR VETERANS CLAIMS

SALARIES AND EXPENSES

For necessary expenses for the operation of the United States Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims as authorized by sections 7251 through 7298 of title 38, United States Code, \$30,945,000: *Provided*, That \$2,500,000 shall be available for the purpose of providing financial assistance as described, and in accordance with the process and reporting procedures set forth, under this heading in Public Law 102-229.

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE—CIVIL

CEMETERIAL EXPENSES, ARMY

SALARIES AND EXPENSES

For necessary expenses for maintenance, operation, and improvement of Arlington National Cemetery and Soldiers' and Airmen's Home National Cemetery, including the purchase or lease of passenger motor vehicles for replacement on a one-for-one basis only, and not to exceed \$1,000 for official reception and representation expenses, \$70,800,000, of which not to exceed \$15,000,000 shall remain available until September 30, 2019. In addition, such sums as may be necessary for parking maintenance, repairs and replacement, to be derived from the "Lease of Department of Defense Real Property for Defense Agencies" account.

ARMED FORCES RETIREMENT HOME TRUST FUND

For expenses necessary for the Armed Forces Retirement Home to operate and

maintain the Armed Forces Retirement Home—Washington, District of Columbia, and the Armed Forces Retirement Home—Gulfport, Mississippi, to be paid from funds available in the Armed Forces Retirement Home Trust Fund, \$64,300,000, of which \$1,000,000 shall remain available until expended for construction and renovation of the physical plants at the Armed Forces Retirement Home—Washington, District of Columbia, and the Armed Forces Retirement Home—Gulfport, Mississippi: *Provided*, That of the amounts made available under this heading from funds available in the Armed Forces Retirement Home Trust Fund, \$22,000,000 shall be paid from the general fund of the Treasury to the Trust Fund.

ADMINISTRATIVE PROVISIONS

SEC. 301. Funds appropriated in this Act under the heading "Department of Defense—Civil, Cemeterial Expenses, Army", may be provided to Arlington County, Virginia, for the relocation of the federally owned water main at Arlington National Cemetery, making additional land available for ground burials.

SEC. 302. Amounts deposited into the special account established under 10 U.S.C. 4727 are appropriated and shall be available until expended to support activities at the Army National Military Cemeteries.

TITLE IV

OVERSEAS CONTINGENCY OPERATIONS

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, ARMY

For an additional amount for "Military Construction, Army", \$18,900,000, to remain available until September 30, 2021, for projects outside of the United States: *Provided*, That such amount is designated by the Congress for Overseas Contingency Operations/Global War on Terrorism pursuant to section 251(b)(2)(A)(ii) of the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985.

□ 2340

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY

Mr. MULVANEY of South Carolina. Mr. Chair, parliamentary inquiry.

The CHAIR. The gentleman will state his parliamentary inquiry.

Mr. MULVANEY of South Carolina. Where are we?

The CHAIR. The bill has been read through page 65, line 1.

Mr. MULVANEY of South Carolina. Mr. Chair, that was the quickest 25 pages I have heard in a long time.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. MULVANEY

Mr. MULVANEY. Mr. Chair, I have an amendment at the desk. Actually, I have four consecutive amendments at the desk.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chair, I reserve a point of order on the gentleman's amendment.

The CHAIR. A point of order is reserved.

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY

Mr. MULVANEY. Mr. Chair, parliamentary inquiry.

The CHAIR. The gentleman will state his parliamentary inquiry.

Mr. MULVANEY. Is it possible, with the approval of the gentleman who is controlling the time for the majority, to combine amendment Nos. 1, 2, 3, and 4 into a single amendment?

The CHAIR. The amendments could be considered together by unanimous consent.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chair, I respectfully object. We haven't seen any of the amendments yet; so I think we should just proceed in the regular order.

The CHAIR. Objection is heard.

The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

Strike page 65, lines 1–11.

The CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 736, the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. MULVANEY) and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Mr. Chair, parliamentary inquiry.

The CHAIR. The gentleman will state his parliamentary inquiry.

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Do we have the text of the amendment?

The CHAIR. Copies will be made available. They are being distributed now.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chair, I reserve a point of order until we get the amendments.

The CHAIR. A point of order is reserved.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from South Carolina.

Mr. MULVANEY of South Carolina. Mr. Chair, I have four consecutive amendments that are all very closely intertwined. There are actually four simply for procedural matters that I offered originally as one. I am going to argue all of them together essentially at one time because this is what they do: they get rid of the OCO budget. That is it. They get rid of the OCO budget. Title IV of this bill is the OCO budget, and my amendments seek to simply be done with this thing.

Mr. Chair, it has turned into a slush fund. That is not me saying that, by the way. That is folks from both Republican and Democrat administrations, together, saying that is what this is. It may have started with the best of intentions. It may have started out of absolute necessity. It may have been a good thing when it started, but we all know what it is now, which is a place to hide money and a way to get around spending caps. That is it.

Mr. Chair, I hope I get a chance over the course of the next couple of appropriations bills to talk more about the OCO and more about specific examples of how it is abused. We actually now admit that we abuse it. We admit that there is money in the OCO budget that has nothing to do with overseas contingency operations. We admit that there is money in the OCO budget right now that has nothing to do with waging war overseas.

We admit that we abuse this particular account. Why? Because we can and because it is very difficult to vote against the troops. That is not the right way to appropriate money.

JOHN MCCAIN, a man with whom I usually disagree on many, many things, has actually said this is not the way to appropriate money for

MILCON-VA, for the DOD. For anything that has to do with defense, this is not the proper way to do it. Mr. Chair, in fact, as we look at the individual sections, it gets even worse.

In this first section that deals with the Army, we are appropriating \$18.9 million for no one knows what. There is no indication whatsoever as to what we are spending this money on. The language is very straightforward. It reads that we are going to go and appropriate \$18.9 million to remain available until September 30, 2021, for projects outside the United States. Period. That is it. \$19 million with absolutely no indication of where it is being spent. In fact, we don't even have to spend it next year. We can spend it anytime we want to over the next 5 years. As long as it is outside of the United States, we are approving its expenditure.

By the way, you can go down to the next line where the same is true of the \$59.8 million for the Marine Corps construction, of the \$88.2 million for the Air Force construction, and then of the \$5 million for military construction defensewide.

There is no indication of how this money is being spent. There is no limitation on when it is spent other than we have to spend it in 5 years, and there is no indication on where it is going to be spent other than it has to be outside of the United States. That is it. It is hard for me to imagine an example of a less accountable, a less transparent way for us to spend money in this country.

I have been spending some time on this for the last couple of years. I have always thought that this was a bad way for us to operate. I know that, every single year, we gather a couple more in adherence to that belief. We get a couple more votes every single year—folks who are finally waking up to the fact that, listen, we need to spend money on the military, that we need to spend money on the defense of this Nation. It is one of the few things we are affirmatively charged with in our Constitution, but this is not the way to do it.

We can't lie to people back home about how much money we are spending. We can't lie to people back home about what the deficit is going to be. We certainly can't lie to them about where they are spending their money. Let's stop doing it this way and start doing it properly.

Mr. Chair, for that reason, I encourage the support for this amendment.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chair, I rise in opposition to the gentleman's amendment.

The CHAIR. The gentleman from Pennsylvania is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chair, I rise in opposition to the gentleman's amendment for a few reasons.

The OCO money in this bill totals \$172 million. He is correct, it is about \$18.9 million for the Army.

Much of this money is going to support counterterrorism efforts and the European Reassurance Initiative. We are going to be using this money for, obviously, infrastructure and for the prepositioning of assets. Given the real threats we are facing in Europe from Vladimir Putin, we need to make sure that we are reassuring our allies in Eastern Europe.

This subcommittee recently visited Eastern Europe—Poland, Lithuania, Germany—where we heard from General Breedlove, the Supreme Allied Commander of NATO, talk about the need for this initiative. I think it is imperative that we reassure our allies in Eastern Europe, who are staring down—who are facing a very real threat—from Vladimir Putin's aggression in Ukraine, and we are deeply concerned that his expansionist ambitions may move into the Baltic.

This is extremely important, this OCO funding. I urge my colleagues to reject any reduction in the OCO funding for the men and women of the American Army.

I withdraw my reservation of a point of order, and I reserve the balance of my time.

□ 2350

The CHAIR. The reservation of the point of order is withdrawn.

Mr. MULVANEY. Mr. Chair, how much time do I have remaining?

The CHAIR. The gentleman from South Carolina has 1 minute remaining.

Mr. MULVANEY. Mr. Chair, it is hard to argue with that. This money is going for counterterrorism. It is going for the preposition of assets. It is going for reassuring our allies. It is going to combat Mr. Putin or constrain him in Ukraine. I am a little hard pressed as to how \$178-odd-million is going to do all of those things.

Face it, we have to take the gentleman's word for it. And as much as I trust the gentleman, why isn't that in the document? Why doesn't it say \$18.9 million for this counterterrorism program or that repositioning of assets? It doesn't say that. We have no idea what this money is for. None whatsoever.

Mr. Chairman, I thank the gentleman from Pennsylvania, and I appreciate the opportunity to have my say.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chairman, I would like to point out that where this money is going to be expended is in the report, and it is also online in many of the budget documents. So the information is available where the money is actually going to be spent. I just wanted to share that.

I yield back the balance of my time.

The CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. MULVANEY).

The question was taken; and the Chair announced that the noes appeared to have it.

Mr. MULVANEY. Mr. Chair, I demand a recorded vote.

The CHAIR. Pursuant to clause 6 of rule XVIII, further proceedings on the amendment offered by the gentleman from South Carolina will be postponed.

The Clerk will read.

The Clerk read as follows:

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, NAVY AND MARINE CORPS

For an additional amount for "Military Construction, Navy and Marine Corps", \$59,809,000, to remain available until September 30, 2021, for projects outside of the United States: *Provided*, That such amount is designated by the Congress for Overseas Contingency Operations/Global War on Terrorism pursuant to section 251(b)(2)(A)(ii) of the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. MULVANEY

Mr. MULVANEY. Mr. Chair, I have an amendment at the desk. I indicated before, I have had my say. We are going to go through the motions on the next three.

The CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

Strike page 65, lines 12–20.

The CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 736, the gentleman from South Carolina and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from South Carolina.

Mr. MULVANEY. Mr. Chairman, I have had my say. I move approval.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chairman, I claim the time in opposition to the amendment.

The CHAIR. The gentleman from Pennsylvania is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chair, this money, I guess, would strike the OCO funding for the Navy. The money for the Navy is going to be used in Djibouti, I believe, for a runway and also for a medical and dental facility for our troops.

So I, again, respectfully oppose the gentleman's amendment.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. MULVANEY. Mr. Chair, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chair, I yield to the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. BISHOP).

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Mr. Chair, I want to associate myself with the gentleman from Pennsylvania in opposition to the amendment.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chair, I yield back the balance of my time.

The CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. MULVANEY).

The question was taken; and the Chair announced that the noes appeared to have it.

Mr. MULVANEY. Mr. Chair, I demand a recorded vote.

The CHAIR. Pursuant to clause 6 of rule XVIII, further proceedings on the amendment offered by the gentleman from South Carolina will be postponed.

The Clerk will read.

The Clerk read as follows:

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, AIR FORCE

For an additional amount for "Military Construction, Air Force" \$88,291,000, to remain available until September 30, 2021, for

projects outside of the United States: *Provided*, That such amount is designated by the Congress for Overseas Contingency Operations/Global War on Terrorism pursuant to section 251(b)(2)(A)(ii) of the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. MULVANEY

Mr. MULVANEY. Mr. Chair, I have an amendment at the desk.

The CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

Strike page 65, line 21 through page 66, line 3.

The CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 736, the gentleman from South Carolina and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from South Carolina.

Mr. MULVANEY. Mr. Chair, I move approval.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chairman, I claim the time in opposition to the amendment.

Mr. CHAIR. The gentleman from Pennsylvania is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chair, this funding, I believe, for the Air Force, this is going to be directed toward Bulgaria, Spangdahlem, Iceland, Poland, Lithuania, and Estonia.

Again, I oppose the amendment. It is very important to our allies, particularly as it relates to the European Reassurance Initiative.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. MULVANEY. Mr. Chair, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chair, I yield back the balance of my time.

The CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. MULVANEY).

The question was taken; and the Chair announced that the noes appeared to have it.

Mr. MULVANEY. Mr. Chair, I demand a recorded vote.

The CHAIR. Pursuant to clause 6 of rule XVIII, further proceedings on the amendment offered by the gentleman from South Carolina will be postponed.

The Clerk will read.

The Clerk read as follows:

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, DEFENSE-WIDE

For an additional amount for "Military Construction, Defense-Wide", \$5,000,000, to remain available until September 30, 2021, for projects outside of the United States: *Provided*, That such amount is designated by the Congress for Overseas Contingency Operations/Global War on Terrorism pursuant to section 251(b)(2)(A)(ii) of the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. MULVANEY

Mr. MULVANEY. Mr. Chair, I have an amendment at the desk, No. 4.

The CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

Strike page 66, line 4-11.

The CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 736, the gentleman from South Carolina and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from South Carolina.

Mr. MULVANEY. Mr. Chair, I move approval.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chairman, I rise in opposition to the amendment.

The CHAIR. The gentleman from Pennsylvania is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chair, I oppose the amendment.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. MULVANEY. Mr. Chair, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chair, I yield back the balance of my time.

The CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. MULVANEY).

The question was taken; and the Chair announced that the noes appeared to have it.

Mr. MULVANEY. Mr. Chair, I demand a recorded vote.

The CHAIR. Pursuant to clause 6 of rule XVIII, further proceedings on the amendment offered by the gentleman from South Carolina will be postponed.

The Clerk will read.

The Clerk read as follows:

TITLE V

GENERAL PROVISIONS

SEC. 501. No part of any appropriation contained in this Act shall remain available for obligation beyond the current fiscal year unless expressly so provided herein.

SEC. 502. None of the funds made available in this Act may be used for any program, project, or activity, when it is made known to the Federal entity or official to which the funds are made available that the program, project, or activity is not in compliance with any Federal law relating to risk assessment, the protection of private property rights, or unfunded mandates.

SEC. 503. All departments and agencies funded under this Act are encouraged, within the limits of the existing statutory authorities and funding, to expand their use of "E-Commerce" technologies and procedures in the conduct of their business practices and public service activities.

SEC. 504. Unless stated otherwise, all reports and notifications required by this Act shall be submitted to the Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies of the Committee on Appropriations of the House of Representatives and the Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies of the Committee on Appropriations of the Senate.

SEC. 505. None of the funds made available in this Act may be transferred to any department, agency, or instrumentality of the United States Government except pursuant to a transfer made by, or transfer authority provided in, this or any other appropriations Act.

SEC. 506. None of the funds made available in this Act may be used for a project or program named for an individual serving as a Member, Delegate, or Resident Commissioner of the United States House of Representatives.

SEC. 507. (a) Any agency receiving funds made available in this Act, shall, subject to subsections (b) and (c), post on the public Web site of that agency any report required to be submitted by the Congress in this or any other Act, upon the determination by the head of the agency that it shall serve the national interest.

(b) Subsection (a) shall not apply to a report if—

(1) the public posting of the report compromises national security; or

(2) the report contains confidential or proprietary information.

(c) The head of the agency posting such report shall do so only after such report has been made available to the requesting Committee or Committees of Congress for no less than 45 days.

SEC. 508. (a) None of the funds made available in this Act may be used to maintain or establish a computer network unless such network blocks the viewing, downloading, and exchanging of pornography.

(b) Nothing in subsection (a) shall limit the use of funds necessary for any Federal, State, tribal, or local law enforcement agency or any other entity carrying out criminal investigations, prosecution, or adjudication activities.

SEC. 509. None of the funds made available in this Act may be used by an agency of the executive branch to pay for first-class travel by an employee of the agency in contravention of sections 301-10.122 through 301-10.124 of title 41, Code of Federal Regulations.

SEC. 510. None of the funds made available in this Act may be used to execute a contract for goods or services, including construction services, where the contractor has not complied with Executive Order No. 12989.

SEC. 511. None of the funds made available by this Act may be used by the Department of Defense or the Department of Veterans Affairs to lease or purchase new light duty vehicles for any executive fleet, or for an agency's fleet inventory, except in accordance with Presidential Memorandum—Federal Fleet Performance, dated May 24, 2011.

SEC. 512. (a) IN GENERAL.—None of the funds appropriated or otherwise made available to the Department of Defense in this Act may be used to construct, renovate, or expand any facility in the United States, its territories, or possessions to house any individual detained at United States Naval Station, Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, for the purposes of detention or imprisonment in the custody or under the control of the Department of Defense.

(b) The prohibition in subsection (a) shall not apply to any modification of facilities at United States Naval Station, Guantánamo Bay, Cuba.

(c) An individual described in this subsection is any individual who, as of June 24, 2009, is located at United States Naval Station, Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, and who—

(1) is not a citizen of the United States or a member of the Armed Forces of the United States; and

(2) is—

(A) in the custody or under the effective control of the Department of Defense; or

(B) otherwise under detention at United States Naval Station, Guantánamo Bay, Cuba.

SEC. 513. Unobligated balances of amounts appropriated under title VI of the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2015 (division G of Public Law 113-235) and title IX of the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2015 (division J of Public Law 113-235) shall also be available for necessary expenses to prevent, prepare for, and respond to Zika virus, domestically and internationally: *Provided*, That such amounts are designated by the Congress as an emergency requirement pursuant to section 251(b)(2)(A)(i) of the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985, except that such amounts shall be available only if the President subsequently so designates such amounts and transmits such designation to the Congress.

SPENDING REDUCTION ACCOUNT

SEC. 514. The amount by which the applicable allocation of new budget authority made by the Committee on Appropriations of the House of Representatives under section 302(b) of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974 exceeds the amount of proposed new budget authority is \$0.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chair, I move to strike the last word.

The CHAIR. The gentleman from Pennsylvania is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chair, I yield to the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. WENSTRUP).

Mr. WENSTRUP. Mr. Chairman, I would like to raise some concerns I have about VA's efforts to streamline the catalog of surgical tools that are available to VA Medical Centers.

I share the VA's goals of increasing efficiency and purchasing power. However, I am concerned that there is a reliance on single-source contracts, and here is why: I believe single-award contracts are too limited and will reduce choice for surgeons.

As a surgeon myself, I know practitioners have specific preferences and a comfort for what tools work best in their hands. Surgical residents learn when they have more options, more techniques in front of them and innovations.

Often, when surgeons are restricted, they practice elsewhere. I am concerned that limiting surgeons' options will have an effect on the morale and retention of surgeons in the VA, and I think the last thing the VA needs right now is to lose more providers.

I also know that patients have different needs. Every surgery case is unique due to the individual patient anatomy, comorbidities, et cetera.

So I would just like to be assured that surgeons will have flexibility, which means more choice and better care for veterans and for our patients. Unfortunately, in my efforts to get this assurance, I get conflicting information from various sources within the VA.

Multiyear, single-award contracts are irreparable if we get them wrong. I would like to work with the chairman and the authorizing committee to conduct oversight on this issue to ensure that we do get this right because we can't lose more surgeons and we can't compromise care for our veterans.

□ 0000

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chair, reclaiming my time, I certainly understand the gentleman's sincere desire to provide better care to our veterans. As it relates to the single-source issue, single-source contracts, obviously he has a great deal of expertise. I would like to work with the gentleman to get more information about the issue and work with him, but also, again, I also commend him to the authorizers, who will have a great deal of say on this matter as well. I pledge to him my commitment to work with him to try to get to a better place on this matter.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back the balance of my time.

AMENDMENT NO. 2 OFFERED BY MR. RATCLIFFE

Mr. RATCLIFFE. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk.

The CHAIR. The Clerk will designate the amendment.

The text of the amendment is as follows:

At the end of the bill (before the short title) insert the following:

SEC. _____. None of the funds made available by this Act may be used to propose, plan for, or execute a new or additional Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) round.

The CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 736, the gentleman from Texas and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas.

Mr. RATCLIFFE. Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank Chairman DENT and Ranking Member BISHOP for their hard work on behalf of servicemembers and veterans all across the country.

The Ratcliffe-MacArthur-Bost amendment that I am offering today with my colleagues, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. MACARTHUR) and the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. BOST), will prohibit any funds made available in this act from being used to propose, plan for, or execute a new or additional round of base realignment and closure, or BRAC.

My congressional district in northeast Texas is home to the Red River Army Depot, which has maintained a steadfast commitment to supporting America's Armed Forces since 1941. While the depot has endured many challenges over the years, it has remained dedicated to fulfilling its motto: "We build it as if our lives depend on it. Theirs do."

Not only is the depot a vital job creator, employing more than 5,000 people in northeast Texas and southern Arkansas, it is a critical component of our national defense. The depot acts as an insurance policy for America's security, one capable of bolstering production in a manner that simply can't be duplicated by civilian industries. So the need for this amendment is clear.

In a fiscal environment where every penny is carefully scrutinized, we have to ensure that taxpayer dollars truly address our national security needs, and another round of BRAC certainly won't help us achieve this important goal. In addition to jeopardizing our defense readiness, BRAC has proven to be incredibly expensive. According to the Government Accountability Office, the last round of BRAC in 2005 cost the American taxpayers a whopping \$35.1 billion. At the same time, the expected savings from the last round of BRAC haven't materialized, and those promised savings have since been revised downward by 73 percent.

Mr. Chairman, at a time when the terror threat level hovers at an all-time high, it is especially important that we do everything possible to ensure that our military is prepared for the call of duty. The amendment that I have introduced today does just that. I

urge my colleagues to support it on behalf of the safety of our Armed Forces and the American people.

I yield to the chairman.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chairman, I just want to say I have no objection to the gentleman's amendment, and I am prepared to accept it.

Mr. RATCLIFFE. Mr. Chairman, I yield back the balance of my time.

The CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Texas (Mr. RATCLIFFE).

The amendment was agreed to.

AMENDMENT NO. 3 OFFERED BY MR. BLUMENAUER

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk.

The CHAIR. The Clerk will designate the amendment.

The text of the amendment is as follows:

At the end of the bill (before the short title), insert the following:

SEC. _____. None of the funds made available by this Act may be used to implement, administer, or enforce Veterans Health Administration directive 2011-004 (or directive of the same substance) with respect to the prohibition on "VA providers from completing forms seeking recommendations or opinions regarding a Veteran's participation in a State marijuana program".

The CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 736, the gentleman from Oregon and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Oregon.

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Chairman, I yield myself 3 minutes.

Mr. Chairman, one of the great concerns we have is how the 2 million young Americans who were sent to Iraq and Afghanistan reintegrate back into society. Many of them return with wounds visible and invisible. We find that more than 20 percent of those 2.8 million American veterans suffer from PTSD and depression. A recent survey revealed that suicide rates among veterans are roughly 50 percent higher than among civilians. Another study found that the death rate for opioid overdoses among VA patients is nearly double the national average.

What I hear from veterans that I talk to is that an overwhelming number of them say that medical marijuana has helped them deal with PTSD, pain, and other conditions, particularly as an alternative to opioids, and I would argue that it is essential that veterans be allowed access to this as a treatment if it is legal in their State.

Twenty-four States, the District of Columbia, and Guam have passed laws that provide for legal access to medical marijuana at the recommendation of a physician to treat such conditions, ranging from seizures to glaucoma, anxiety, chronic pain, traumatic brain injury, and the symptoms associated with chemotherapy. Fourteen of these States specifically allow physicians to recommend medical marijuana for the symptoms of post-traumatic stress, PTSD.

As a result of these medical marijuana laws, more than 2 million patients across the country, including

many of our veterans, now use medical marijuana. Unfortunately, the Department of Veterans Affairs specifically prohibits its medical providers from completing forms brought by their patients seeking recommendations regarding a veteran's participation in a State medical marijuana program. What this means is that those patients who want to pursue medical marijuana have to go ahead and hire a physician out of their own pocket, not dealing with the medical professional of their choice, the medical professional, their VA doctor, who knows them the best. I think that is unfortunate.

I have an amendment cosponsored by Dr. JOE HECK, SAM FARR, DANA ROHR-ABACHER, DINA TITUS, TOM REED, and others that would prohibit funds from being made available to the VA to implement this prohibition. I think it is the right thing to do for our veterans, to be able to treat them equitably, to enable them to have access to the doctor who knows them the best, giving them better treatment, and saving them money. I would respectfully request that we approve this amendment to eliminate this unjustified prohibition.

Mr. Chairman, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chairman, I rise up somewhat reluctantly to my friend in opposition.

The CHAIR. The gentleman from Pennsylvania is recognized.

Mr. DENT. Mr. BLUMENAUER is a very genuine and sincere, very thoughtful Member of this body. I understand that the country is evolving on this issue, as many States, including my own, have moved forward on medical marijuana.

As a Member of this House, I am a bit uncomfortable, however, in trying to dictate policy on marijuana without guidance from the Food and Drug Administration, National Institutes of Health, and other medical professionals. That said, I reluctantly rise in opposition.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Chairman, I am prepared to close. I am going to close when you have exhausted your speakers.

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Mr. Chairman, I move to strike the last word.

The CHAIR. The gentleman is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Mr. Chairman, I support the amendment that is offered by Mr. BLUMENAUER. Last year in Georgia, the general assembly passed and Governor Deal signed legislation that immediately legalized the use of medical marijuana to treat serious medical conditions. Georgia became the 36th State plus Washington, D.C., to legalize marijuana extracts to treat illnesses.

I believe that we should not limit the Veterans Health Administration from providing optimal pain care for our veterans. If medical marijuana is legal in a State, then the VA should be able

to discuss that treatment option and allow the veteran to make his or her own choice.

I believe that the VA's published policy guidance related to the use of medical marijuana by our veteran patients, VHA Directive 2010-035, Medical Marijuana, has become outdated. I believe that supporting a veteran's right to use alternative methods to deal with pain is the right thing to do.

Mr. Chairman, I support the amendment, and I urge its adoption.

I yield back the balance of my time.

□ 0010

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chairman, as I said, I reluctantly oppose the amendment, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Chairman, there is nobody who I have more respect for than my friend, the chairman of the subcommittee. But I take modest exception.

This amendment does not dictate treatment options. It is not interfering, it is not superimposing anybody's judgment about the merits of marijuana. It simply enables VA doctors and patients to interact with State legal marijuana systems—systems that this Congress has repeatedly supported through amendment votes, just like everybody else.

We should not be limiting the treatment options available to our veterans. I fail to understand what the basis is to force veterans in the State of Pennsylvania who feel that they need to avail themselves of medical marijuana, like any other citizen in Pennsylvania or in Oregon has a right to do, but force them to not use the doctor that knows them best; instead, go to somebody else, hire them out of their own pocket, and be engaging with somebody who doesn't know their full range of activity.

This doesn't engage the Veterans Administration. There is no marijuana on premises. It simply allows the doctor to be able to deal with the veteran, as a patient, to be able to counsel and potentially prescribe them, like any other person in any other State where it is legal.

Bear in mind that these people are suffering from PTSD, chronic pain, depression, conditions that medical marijuana is legally entitled to treat and which veterans, who I have met with literally from coast-to-coast, say has transformed their lives.

What we are doing now, they are dying at a higher rate than the average member of the population. Their suicide rate is high. Their opioid addiction rate is almost twice as high as the average citizen. I think that is unconscionable. We should have this amendment to try and help address it.

Mr. Chair, I yield back the balance of my time.

The CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. BLUMENAUER).

The question was taken; and the Chair announced that the yeas appeared to have it.

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Chairman, I demand a recorded vote.

The CHAIR. Pursuant to clause 6 of rule XVIII, further proceedings on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Oregon will be postponed.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. FLEMING

Mr. FLEMING. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk.

The CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

At the end of the bill (before the short title), add the following new section:

SEC. _____. None of the funds made available by this Act may be used to modify a military installation in the United States, including construction or modification of a facility on a military installation, to provide temporary housing for unaccompanied alien children.

The CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 736, the gentleman from Louisiana and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Louisiana.

Mr. FLEMING. Mr. Chairman, my amendment would prohibit funds from being used to modify a military installation for the purpose of housing unaccompanied alien children.

Our military installations are for training and equipping soldiers to fight our Nation's wars. The use of DOD facilities to house unaccompanied alien children undermines the readiness of our Armed Forces, which we know to be in extremis at this point.

This amendment follows on from a provision included in the National Defense Authorization Act, passed out of the House Armed Services Committee, that prohibits unaccompanied alien children from being hosted on military installations. A similar standalone bill has also been introduced by Judge JOHN CARTER of Texas and has 61 cosponsors.

Under recent agreements made by the Department of Health and Human Services, the DOD has provided housing to unaccompanied alien children with certain requirements and preferences being requested by HHS that facilities be able to provide space for security fencing, service trailers, and potential soft-sided outdoor housing.

It is inappropriate for scarce defense dollars, meant to go for the readiness of our soldiers, to be used for non-defense purposes, especially at this time in our Nation's history when our readiness is so low.

Take, for example, the Army Air Defense and Artillery training site at Fort Sill, where unaccompanied minors were housed in 2014. These barracks were used by HHS, and resources had to be expended to ensure HHS contractors and the minors being hosted did not gain access to sensitive areas and live-fire training ranges.

Fort Hood was also on the short list for hosting unaccompanied minors in 2015. Because of this, the Texas National Guard was unable to stand up a training facility because the base was being considered to host these unaccompanied minors.

Our military infrastructure is in serious need of upgrading and construction dollars are scarce. Mr. Chairman, the slightest use of resources to modify an installation to meet nondefense missions jeopardizes the readiness of our Armed Forces.

Following on the prohibition placed in this year's House NDAA, I ask my colleagues to support my amendment.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chairman, I rise in opposition to the gentleman's amendment.

The CHAIR. The gentleman from Pennsylvania is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chairman, there are no projects in the FY 17 request for this purpose in the United States. There is \$33 million in funds to support the naval station at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, at the request of SOCOM, Southern Command, to deal with various issues of people, obviously, who were interdicting on the seas or arriving in Cuba.

But the point is, I don't want to preclude the Department of Defense from dealing with an emergency situation, should one arise in the U.S. So that is why I must oppose my friend's amendment.

I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. BISHOP), my distinguished colleague and ranking member.

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. I thank the gentleman for yielding.

Mr. Chair, we have an opportunity and an obligation to help migrant children who have come across the border to escape the problems with their homeland. The challenges of poverty and violence continue to grow, and it is a moral obligation and one that I support.

To not allow the use of military installations for temporary housing for migrants only exacerbates the problem. This is temporary. Why would we prohibit the use of bases only until the adjudication of a migrant's case, for example? Is my colleague suggesting that we immediately send migrant children back to the countries they fled without due process? Should we send them back to violence?

That is not what the United States stands for. It is not what the United States should stand for. It is not consistent with our country's Christian values.

I urge a "no" vote on this amendment, and I agree with the chairman.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chairman, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. FLEMING. Mr. Chairman, may I inquire how much time I have?

The CHAIR. The gentleman from Louisiana has 2½ minutes remaining. The gentleman from Pennsylvania has 3 minutes remaining.

Mr. FLEMING. Mr. Chair, I thank my friends and colleagues for their comments and statements, but I simply have to disagree. Again, this is about military readiness, which we are at a low, low point.

We are getting all sorts of reports. We are having hearings from generals, commanders in the field, and generals at the Pentagon, telling us that they are scratching for every little penny they can find for readiness.

In fact, just the other night on FOX News, they talked about a Marine Corps F-18. They had to go to a museum just to find a part to put on that in order for it to go into service.

Look, if it is important to provide facilities for unaccompanied alien children, then the Appropriations Committee should appropriate those dollars. But they should not take them from the vital military facilities. They shouldn't take scarce dollars away from our readiness. As a result of that, again, I urge my colleagues to support the amendment.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chair, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. FLEMING. Mr. Chair, again, I just ask my colleagues to support this. This is common sense. We need to protect our soldiers, sailors, airmen, as well as marines. We need to make sure that they are safe out there, that every dollar is put into readiness to protect them, and it should not be diverted in this way. Again, I urge support of this amendment.

I yield back the balance of my time.

The CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. FLEMING).

The question was taken; and the Chair announced that the yeas appeared to have it.

Mr. FLEMING. Mr. Chair, I demand a recorded vote.

The CHAIR. Pursuant to clause 6 of rule XVIII, further proceedings on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Louisiana will be postponed.

□ 0020

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. HUFFMAN

Mr. HUFFMAN. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk.

The CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

At the end of the bill (before the short title) insert the following:

SEC. ____ None of the funds made available by this Act may be used to implement section 8(d)(2) of the Department of Veterans Affairs National Cemetery Administration Directive 3220 of November 22, 2005.

The CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 736, the gentleman from California and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California.

Mr. HUFFMAN. Mr. Chairman, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I am pleased to offer this amendment to the 2017 MILCON-VA spending bill, and to stand today with my colleague, the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. GALLEGOS), who has offered a stand-alone bill on this same subject, along with our colleague from Minnesota (Mr. ELLISON).

Last year, we all remember the tragic shooting at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, and how it reopened a painful but necessary national conversation about symbols like the Confederate battle flag that represent racism, slavery, and division.

Rightfully, leaders in South Carolina and other Southern States, Democrats and Republicans alike, joined together to call on their States to end the display of the Confederate battle flag on government property.

The Confederate battle flag, a symbol of hate and opposition to the United States of America, has no place, no place on government property, especially not at VA cemeteries, a place where families and loved ones go to pay respect to our Nation's veterans.

Over 150 years ago, slavery was abolished. Why in the year 2016 are we still condoning displays of this hateful symbol on our sacred national cemeteries?

Symbols like the Confederate battle flag have meaning. They are not just neutral, historical symbols of pride. They represent slavery, oppression, lynching, and hate.

To continue to allow national policy condoning the display of this symbol on Federal property is wrong, and it is disrespectful to what our country stands for and what our veterans fight for.

Mr. Chairman, it is past time to end the public promotion of this cruel, racist legacy of the Confederacy. So let us move forward in a direction of reconciliation, unity, and justice.

Symbols matter. Even General Robert E. Lee recognized that symbols of the Confederacy are symbols of treason, which is why he asked that they not appear at his funeral.

The United States House of Representatives, in 2016, should be at least as forward-looking as Robert E. Lee was in 1869.

Mr. MULVANEY. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment to the amendment.

The CHAIR. The gentleman from California is under recognition.

Mr. HUFFMAN. I reserve a point of order.

The CHAIR. The gentleman from California is recognized on his pending amendment.

Mr. HUFFMAN. On the point of order?

The CHAIR. On his amendment.

Mr. HUFFMAN. Mr. Speaker, my point is that the House of Representatives, in 2016, should be at least as forward-looking as General Robert E. Lee was in 1869.

Let us do the right thing tonight in this House, and let's do it together, on a bipartisan basis.

Mr. Chairman, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. MULVANEY. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment to the amendment.

Mr. HUFFMAN. Mr. Chairman, I reserve a point of order.

The CHAIR. Will the gentleman send his amendment to the desk?

Mr. MULVANEY. Yes, sir.

Mr. Chairman, I withdraw my amendment.

Mr. HUFFMAN. Mr. Chairman, I reserve the balance of my time.

The CHAIR. Does any Member seek time in opposition to the amendment offered by the gentleman from California?

The gentleman from California may proceed on his amendment.

Mr. HUFFMAN. Mr. Chairman, I request an "aye" vote, and I respectfully yield back the balance of my time.

The CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. HUFFMAN).

The question was taken; and the Chair announced that the noes appeared to have it.

Mr. HUFFMAN. Mr. Chair, I demand a recorded vote.

The CHAIR. Pursuant to clause 6 of rule XVIII, further proceedings on the amendment offered by the gentleman from California will be postponed.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. FITZPATRICK

Mr. FITZPATRICK. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk.

The CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

At the end of the bill (before the short title) insert the following:

SEC. _____. None of the funds made available in this Act may be used to procure the birth control known as Essure.

The CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 736, the gentleman from Pennsylvania and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Pennsylvania.

Mr. FITZPATRICK. Mr. Speaker, I want to start by recognizing my colleague from Pennsylvania (Mr. DENT), the chairman of the subcommittee, for his diligence and his hard work in bringing this important bill to the floor and, more importantly, for his work on the bill, and listening to ideas coming from both sides of the aisle, and his fairness in considering all ideas as part of this bill. So I thank the gentleman for that.

□ 0030

I rise this evening in support of an amendment that is common sense. It is a no-brainer. What this amendment would do is say, if a medical device is under review by the FDA over concerns of its harmful impacts on women, the Federal Government shouldn't be spending taxpayer dollars to offer it to our Nation's veterans.

The medical device I am referring to is the permanent sterilization device, Essure. Essure is a permanent sterilization device that was approved by the FDA in 2002. However, since it was first approved, this device has caused irreparable harm to tens of thousands of women and their families.

FDA data shows that Essure has caused the death of at least four women and nearly 300 fetal deaths. Additionally, tens of thousands of women

have reported other symptoms which are debilitating.

Over 25,000 women have joined together on Facebook to share their stories of how the Essure device has ruined their lives. They call themselves the Essure Sisters. They came together as a group because nobody believed them—for many, not even their doctors. They were told that this device was safe and there was no way the device caused their pain and other symptoms. But that proved to be wrong. We don't need another study. Their pain is real. Their stories are real. They have been ignored by their doctors, by the device manufacturer, and by the Food and Drug Administration.

I rise today as a voice for these women, to tell this Chamber that their stories are real, that their pain is real, and that their fight is real. Working with them over the last year, we have been able to force the FDA to call for yet another review of this flawed device, and this request was made by Democrats and Republicans in this Chamber.

Yet the product remains available, sometimes aggressively pushed. And, as it relates to this appropriations bill, Essure remains on the list of federally purchased devices. We know that this device has already harmed female veterans.

I want to give a direct quote from an Essure Sister and Operation Enduring Freedom veteran: "I still live in massive chronic pain, and I'm on pain meds every day of my life. I cannot do the things I used to do with my children and my husband. Each day that I live with this newfound pain and suffering, I grow more and more disgusted at the fact that both he and I traveled to the war multiple times and made it home, only to have a device forced upon us that would ruin our lives and my health."

Mr. Chairman, this amendment is not about women's reproductive decisions or a debate about contraceptives. It is about protecting our female veterans from being harmed by a device that we know has ruined the lives of thousands across this Nation. All I am saying is we should not allow the Department of Veterans Affairs to purchase and implant this dangerous device in our Nation's veterans.

Mr. Chairman, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chairman, I rise in opposition of this amendment.

The CHAIR. The gentleman from Pennsylvania is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. DENT. I do want to commend Mr. FITZPATRICK for his diligence and his attentiveness to his constituency. I know he feels very sincerely about this particular amendment. It is, of course, disturbing to hear adverse consequences of any drug or device, but we rely on the FDA to be the safety arbiter in these cases.

The VA simply follows FDA's approval of drugs and devices. If anyone

wants to go to the source on this, then that individual should work through the Agriculture Subcommittee, which has jurisdiction over the Food and Drug Administration. But I believe it is not the proper role for Congress to act as doctors in this case, substituting what appears to be anecdotal evidence for the considered judgment of teams of independent doctors and physicians. We also shouldn't influence the marketing of birth control drugs and devices by targeting one particular manufacturer.

Again, I do understand my very good friend and colleague's sincere desire based on his conversations with constituents, but at the same time, I do think that we should let the medical experts determine the efficacy or the safety of a particular device in this case. So, again, I have to rise in opposition.

Mr. Chairman, I yield to the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. BISHOP).

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Mr. Chairman, I thank the gentleman for yielding.

I join my chairman in opposing this amendment. Why has my colleague again started the war on women's rights? Why is the gentleman getting involved in the contraception choices of women veterans?

Under VA Directive 1331, it is the policy of the VA to provide elective sterilization, for example, salpingectomy, tubal occlusion procedures, vasectomy, and surgery to reverse elective sterilization to eligible veterans as part of contraceptive and infertility services.

I don't see my colleague from Pennsylvania calling for a ban of funding vasectomies or even a tubal ligation, getting tubes tied. Both of these are procedures currently allowed. If a woman has decided that she is seeking permanent birth control, why is Congress going to mandate that she undergo a surgical procedure?

It is important to recognize that family planning is the most effective way to prevent abortion and unwanted pregnancies. Study after study show that when women have access to contraceptives, the incidence of abortion decreases. Family planning programs are an extremely effective way to support women in improving their own health and that of their families. Why would anyone insist on government interference in providing health care to women?

This amendment also demonstrates the deeply troubling and partisan approach on issues affecting women and families.

Mr. Chairman, I urge my colleagues to vote "no" on this amendment.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chairman, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. FITZPATRICK. In closing, Mr. Chairman, I would say, with all due respect, this is about a dangerous medical device, and there are men and women on both sides of the aisle here in the House of Representatives that have called on the FDA to withdraw

the device from the market. There are other options.

Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the time on the floor tonight.

I yield back the balance of my time.

The CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. FITZPATRICK).

The amendment was rejected.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. GRAYSON

Mr. GRAYSON. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk, Grayson No. 1.

The CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

At the end of the bill (before the short title), insert the following:

SEC. _____. None of the funds made available by this Act may be used to enter into a contract with any offeror or any of its principals if the offeror certifies, as required by Federal Acquisition Regulation, that the offeror or any of its principals:

(A) within a three-year period preceding this offer has been convicted of or had a civil judgment rendered against it for: commission of fraud or a criminal offense in connection with obtaining, attempting to obtain, or performing a public (Federal, State, or local) contract or subcontract; violation of Federal or State antitrust statutes relating to the submission of offers; or commission of embezzlement, theft, forgery, bribery, falsification or destruction of records, making false statements, tax evasion, violating Federal criminal tax laws, or receiving stolen property; or

(B) are presently indicted for, or otherwise criminally or civilly charged by a governmental entity with, commission of any of the offenses enumerated above in subsection (A); or

(C) within a three-year period preceding this offer, has been notified of any delinquent Federal taxes in an amount that exceeds \$3,000 for which the liability remains unsatisfied.

Mr. GRAYSON (during the reading). Mr. Chair, I ask unanimous consent that the reading be waived.

The CHAIR. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Florida?

There was no objection.

The CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 736, the gentleman from Florida and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Florida.

Mr. GRAYSON. Mr. Chairman, this amendment is identical to other amendments that have been inserted by voice vote into every appropriations bill considered under an open rule during the 113th and 114th Congresses.

My amendment expands the list of parties with whom the Federal Government is prohibited from contracting due to serious misconduct on the part of the contractors. I hope that this amendment will remain noncontroversial and be passed unanimously again by the House.

Mr. Chairman, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chairman, I rise in opposition, although I have no objection.

The CHAIR. Without objection, the gentleman from Pennsylvania is recognized for 5 minutes.

There was no objection.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chairman, again, I have no objection to the gentleman's amendment. He offered the same amendment last year, and it passed by voice vote. So I certainly urge adoption of the amendment.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. GRAYSON. Mr. Chairman, I yield back the balance of my time.

The CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Florida (Mr. GRAYSON).

The amendment was agreed to.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. BOUSTANY

Mr. BOUSTANY. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk.

The CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

At the end of the bill (before the short title), insert the following:

SEC. _____. (a) None of the funds made available by this Act may be used to pay any bonus or monetary award under chapter 45 or 53 of title 5, United States Code, to an employee of the Chief Business Office of the Department of Veterans Affairs who is responsible for processing emergency medical care claims until the percentage of emergency medical care claims processed within 30 days reaches 90 percent.

(b) The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit quarterly data to Congress on the following:

(1) The total number of emergency medical claims and the total number of billed charges for such claims.

(2) The total number of emergency medical claims and billed charges for such claims pending for more than 30 days.

(3) The number of veterans with unpaid claims under consideration in each Veterans Integrated Service Network.

(4) The percent of clean claims processed within 30 days.

□ 0040

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chairman, I reserve a point of order on the gentleman's amendment.

The CHAIR. A point of order is reserved.

Pursuant to House Resolution 736, the gentleman from Louisiana and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Louisiana.

Mr. BOUSTANY. Mr. Chairman, our veterans have put their lives on the line to protect this country. The very least we can do is keep our promise to take care of them when they return home.

But since the passage of the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014, the VA has demonstrated little progress in addressing the emergency medical claims processing backlog hurting our veterans.

When I pressured the VA for statistics on this issue last year, the VA was processing only 14 percent of the claims within 30 days in my home region—14 percent. Since that time, the VA has conveniently loosened their timely processing goal from 30 days to 45 days, making it impossible to measure real progress.

Despite this change in internal procedure, not a single VISN has reached a satisfactory timely processing rate. When these claims are not paid on time by the VA, the bill often gets passed onto the veteran—in many cases, threatening their personal credit rating. This is just unacceptable.

While the VA wants to claim it is making progress by changing internal metrics to cook the numbers, it has taken constant pressure from my office, providers, and veterans groups just to get this agency to pay attention and try to do their job.

American veterans should never have to worry about calling an ambulance or taking a trip to the emergency room and wondering whether this will hurt their finances. They should be focused on their health and their recovery.

My amendment is very simple. It prevents the VA from granting bonuses to its emergency medical care claims processing staff until the percentage of claims processed within 30 days reaches 90 percent.

Mr. Chairman, no business in my home State of Louisiana, or anywhere in this country, would ever think about rewarding its employees for such a poor performance. It has to change. We must demand the highest standard for America's veterans. I encourage my colleagues to hold the VA accountable and support this amendment.

I reserve the balance of my time.

POINT OF ORDER

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chairman, I insist on my point of order.

The CHAIR. The gentleman will state his point of order.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chair, I make a point of order against the amendment because it proposes to change existing law and constitutes legislation in an appropriation bill and, accordingly, violates clause 2 of rule XXI.

The rule states in pertinent part: "An amendment to a general appropriation bill shall not be in order if changing existing law."

The amendment gives affirmative direction in effect.

So I would ask for a ruling from the Chair.

The CHAIR. Does the gentleman from Louisiana wish to be heard on the point of order?

Mr. BOUSTANY. Mr. Chairman, I respect the gentleman's call on this with regard to the rules. I would just hope that the members of the subcommittee, as well as my colleagues in the House, would work with us to solve this problem once and for all. This is unacceptable.

Veterans are getting hurt day in and day out. Their credit ratings are suffering. This is one more egregious example—

The CHAIR. The gentleman's remarks must be confined to the point of order.

Mr. BOUSTANY. I am not going to defy the point of order. I understand the rule.

The CHAIR. Does the gentleman wish to withdraw his amendment?

Mr. BOUSTANY. No.

The CHAIR. Or would the gentleman like a ruling on the point of order?

Mr. BOUSTANY. I would like a ruling on the point of order.

The CHAIR. The Chair is prepared to rule.

The Chair finds this amendment includes language imparting direction; namely, by requiring the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to submit quarterly data to Congress.

The amendment, therefore, constitutes legislation in violation of clause 2 of rule XXI.

The point of order is sustained, and the amendment is not in order.

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY

Mr. BOUSTANY. Mr. Chairman, I have a parliamentary inquiry.

The CHAIR. The gentleman will state his parliamentary inquiry.

Mr. BOUSTANY. Right here it says "waives all points of order against consideration of the bill."

Can I seek a clarification on this?

Clause 2(e) of rule XXI.

The CHAIR. The point of order was sustained under clause 2.

Mr. BOUSTANY. The base bill, right?

The CHAIR. 2(c) of rule XXI.

Mr. BOUSTANY. Thank you.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. GOHMERT

Mr. GOHMERT. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk.

The CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

At the end of the bill (before the short title), insert the following:

SEC. ____ None of the funds made available in this act may be used to establish, maintain, employ, or enter into any contract or agreement with any organization, including a political party, that endorsed, embraced, or encouraged any form of slavery, nor to display the name of such organization nor to have its name displayed in any facility in which or for which funds made available in this act are used.

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Mr. Chairman, I reserve a point of order on the gentleman's amendment.

The CHAIR. A point of order is reserved.

Pursuant to House Resolution 736, the gentleman from Texas and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas.

Mr. GOHMERT. Mr. Chairman, it should be pretty straightforward. My friends on the other side of the aisle continue to push forward amendments that seem to want to leave the appearance that the Republican Party still wants to retain some fight that it has never had. The Republican Party opposed slavery. The Republican Party and everybody that I know of in this Chamber on this side of the aisle has never supported slavery, has never supported anything that wreaks of slavery.

Daniel Webster, John Quincy Adams, all of those early leaders in this country, had it very right—it is an abomi-

nation. It kept God from blessing this country.

I am surprised that anyone would wish to reserve a point of order to try to prevent this amendment from going forward. Anything, as my friends across the aisle have repeatedly pointed out, that reminds people of slavery is repugnant and is abhorrent, and I would think that that is something that we could all agree on.

If it is an organization that supported slavery, then why would we want to give that organization any more credence and cause those who may have lived through the vestiges of the civil rights problems that lasted after slavery?

It is time to put this to an end and let the dream of Dr. King finally come to fruition.

I reserve the balance of my time.

POINT OF ORDER

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Mr. Chairman, I must insist on my point of order.

The CHAIR. The gentleman will state his point of order.

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Mr. Chairman, I make a point of order against the amendment because it proposes to change existing law and constitutes legislation in an appropriation bill and, therefore, violates clause 2 of rule XXI.

The rule states in pertinent part: "An amendment to a general appropriation bill shall not be in order if changing existing law."

The amendment requires a new determination.

I ask for a ruling from the Chair.

The CHAIR. Does any other Member wish to speak to the point of order?

□ 0050

Mr. GOHMERT. I would address the point of order in that it really doesn't require any new act or law or activity. The thing should speak for itself unless my friend across the aisle has some concerns that some organization he wants to protect has supported slavery, and he is seeking to protect that. Otherwise, the law will speak for itself as does this amendment.

The CHAIR. The Chair is prepared to rule.

The Chair finds that this amendment includes language requiring a new determination of whether an organization had "embraced" any form of slavery.

The amendment, therefore, constitutes legislation in violation of clause 2 of rule XXI.

The point of order is sustained, and the amendment is not in order.

Mr. GOHMERT. Mr. Speaker, I appeal the ruling of the Chair, but given the hour, the fact that there aren't that many of us here on the floor at this time, that it would require a quorum and would require under the rules an immediate vote, what I will do is withdraw my amendment at this time. I am assured that we will still be taking up limitation amendments in the morning, and I can offer it at that

time without dragging all of our friends out of their places of repose at this time.

The CHAIR. The amendment has been ruled out of order. The appeal is withdrawn.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chair, I move that the Committee do now rise.

The motion was agreed to.

Accordingly, the Committee rose; and the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. PERRY) having assumed the chair, Mr. COLLINS of Georgia, Chair of the Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union, reported that that Committee, having had under consideration the bill (H.R. 4974) making appropriations for military construction, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2017, and for other purposes, had come to no resolution thereon.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

By unanimous consent, leave of absence was granted to:

Mr. SWALWELL of California (at the request of Ms. PELOSI) for today and the balance of the week on account of a family health emergency.

SENATE BILL REFERRED

A bill of the Senate of the following title was taken from the Speaker's table and, under the rule, referred as follows:

S. 2840. An act to amend the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968 to authorize COPS grantees to use grant funds for active shooter training, and for other purposes; to the Committee on the Judiciary.

ENROLLED BILLS SIGNED

Karen L. Haas, Clerk of the House, reported and found truly enrolled bills of the House of the following titles, which were thereupon signed by the Speaker:

H.R. 4923. An Act to establish a process for the submission and consideration of petitions for temporary duty suspensions and reductions, and for other purposes.

H.R. 4957. An Act to designate the Federal building located at 99 New York Avenue, N.E., in the District of Columbia as the "Ariel Rios Federal Building".

SENATE ENROLLED BILLS SIGNED

The Speaker announced his signature to enrolled bills of the Senate of the following titles:

S. 1492. An act to direct the Administrator of General Services, on behalf of the Archivist of the United States, to convey certain Federal property located in the State of Alaska to the Municipality of Anchorage, Alaska.

S. 2143. An act to provide for the authority for the successors and assigns of the Starr-Camargo Bridge Company to maintain and operate a toll bridge across the Rio Grande near Rio Grande City, Texas, and for other purposes.