I am also pleased by the $10 million in procurement funding for secure terminal equipment for the military services and defense agencies. This versatile equipments is the cornerstone of our multi-media secure digital communication. The new generation of secure terminal equipment, produced by a defense company in my State, is more effective technology and generates significant operations and maintenance cost savings.

Finally, I am extremely pleased by the committee's inclusion of a provision regarding the Economic development conveyance of base closure property. When an installation is recommended for closure, it is imperative that the transfer of property benefit the local community. This provision will accomplish this goal by allowing a more efficient transfer of property to the local re-development authority for job creation and economic development.

I again thank Chairman WARNER, Ranking Member LEVIN and Ranking Member INOUYE for their commitment and attention to these important issues.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the conference report.

The yeas and nays have been ordered. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. GORTON (when his name was called). Present.

Mr. NICKLES. I announce that the Senator from Arizona (Mr. MCCAIN) is necessarily absent.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber who desire to vote?

The result was announced, yeas 93, nays 5, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 284 Leg.]

YEAS—93

Abraham	Edwards	Lugar
Akaka	Enzi	Mack
Allard	Feinstein	McConnell
Ashcroft	Fitzgerald	Mikulski
Baucus	Frist	Moynihan
Bayh	Graham	Murkowski
Bennett	Gramm	Murray
Biden	Grams	Nickles
Bingaman	Grassley	Reed
Bond	Gregg	Reid
Breaux	Hagel	Robb
Brownback	Hatch	Roberts
Bryan	Helms	Rockefeller
Bunning	Hollings	Roth
Burns	Hutchinson	Santorum
Byrd	Hutchison	Sarbanes
Campbell	Inhofe	Schumer
Chafee	Inouye	Sessions
Cleland	Jeffords	Shelby
Cochran	Johnson	Smith (NH)
Collins	Kennedy	Smith (OR)
Conrad	Kerrey	Snowe
Coverdell	Kerry	Specter
Craig	Kyl	Stevens
Crapo	Landrieu	Thomas
Daschle	Lautenberg	Thompson
DeWine	Leahy	Thurmond
Dodd	Levin	Torricelli
Domenici	Lieberman	Voinovich
Dorgan	Lincoln	Warner
Durbin	Lott	Wyden

NAYS—5

Boxer	Harkin	Wellstone
Feingold	Kohl	

ANSWERED ''PRESENT''—1

Gorton

NOT VOTING—1

McCain

The conference report was agreed to.

(Mr. VOINOVICH assumed the chair.)

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, I move to reconsider the vote.

Mr. LEVIN. I move to lay that motion on the table.

The motion to lay on the table was agreed to.

Mr. GORTON. Mr. President, as the RECORD shows, I voted present during the rollcall vote on passage of the FY2000 Defense Authorization Conference Report. My decision to cast this vote was prompted by Section 651 of the Conference Report, which would repeal the reduction in retired pay for U.S. military retirees who are employed by the federal government or hold federal office. As a retired U.S. Air Force Reserve officer, I stand to be benefitted by this provision when it is signed into law by the President. It is for this reason I voted present.

Mr. BOND. Mr. President, what is the pending business?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Chair is anticipating a unanimous consent agreement to move forward with the VA-HUD appropriations.

DEPARTMENTS OF VETERANS AFFAIRS AND HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT, AND INDEPENDENT AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2000

Mr. BOND. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent H.R. 2684 be discharged from the Appropriations Committee and the Senate proceed to its consideration. I further ask that all after page 2, line 9, over to and including line 3 on page 95 be stricken, and the text of S. 1596 be inserted in lieu thereof, that the amendment be considered as original text for the purpose of further amendments, that no points of order be waived, and that any legislative provision added thereby be subject to a point of order under rule XVI.

Again, the Senate is now on the HUD-VA appropriations bill. No call for the regular order with respect to the bankruptcy bill is in order. It is my hope substantial progress can be made, that the leadership can agree to an arrangement where all first-degree amendments be submitted to the desk by a reasonable time. I will discuss this further with my counterpart, the Senator from Maryland.

I make that unanimous consent request.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The clerk will report the bill by title.

The bill clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 2648) making appropriations for the Departments of Veterans Affairs and Housing and Urban Development, and for sundry independent agencies, boards, commissions, corporations, and offices for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2000, and for other purposes.

The Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

Mr. BOND. Mr. President, I am pleased to present the fiscal year 2000 VA-HUD-independent agencies appropriations bill to the Senate. This legislation provides a total of $90.9 billion in budget authority, including $21.3 billion in mandatory budget authority and $82.3 billion in outlays, while covering a variety of Federal interests from veterans, housing, the environment, basic research, to advances in space.

This has been a very tough year, as I believe all our colleagues know. We have waited a long time to bring this bill to the consideration of the full Senate. I express my sincerest thanks to my chairman, Senator STEVENS, the ranking member of the full committee, Senator BYRD, and to my colleague, the ranking member from Maryland, for their hard work and commitment to ensuring that the VA-HUD appropriations subcommittee has enough funding to meet the minimum needs of our many important programs.

However, with 2 weeks before the end of the fiscal year, we are on a forced march to complete Senate action and provide a conference agreement to the Senate for consideration. I believe the bill before the Senate is a good bill under the constraints imposed by budgetary limitations and a fair bill with funds allocated to the most pressing needs we face.

Let me emphasize we balanced our funding decisions away from new programs and focused instead on the core primary programs in our bill on which people depend. We listened very carefully to the priorities of our colleagues in this body. While not everyone is happy, nor could they be, we believe the bill is equitable.

Clearly, we were not able to provide fully what each Member requested. Let me note that we received some 1,400 requests from Members of this body, but we attempted to meet the priority needs. Before describing what is included in this legislation for each agency, I wish to extend my sincerest thanks to Senator MIKULSKI, the ranking member of the VA–HUD appropriations subcommittee, for all her hard work and cooperation in putting this bill together. It is not possible, without the good working relationship that we have, to deal with such a complicated bill.

Let me add at the beginning, and I will repeat it again, my sincere thanks also to Senator MIKULSKI's staff, Paul Carliner, Jeannine Schroeder, Sean Smith, as well as my staff, Jon Kamarck, Carrie Apostolou, Cheh Kim, and Joe Norrell. The contributions of the staff to this process have been invaluable. Anybody who has watched the staff work on a major bill knows how much time, effort, energy, pain and suffering is endured at the staff level to bring a bill to the floor.

The VA–HUD fiscal year 2000 appropriations bill is crafted to meet our

most critical needs for veterans, housing, the environment, basic scientific research, and advances in space. As I noted, total spending in this bill is $69.6 billion in budget authority and $82.3 billion in outlays. This is roughly the same as the President's overall request in the VA–HUD appropriations subcommittee but distributed with some significant differences.

Unlike the President's budget, the highest priority in the recommendations before the Senate is VA medical care. In the bill before the Senate, we have increased this amount by $1.1 billion above the President's request. Many Members have heard from veterans for some time about their concerns about the VA budget. They have been hearing their local VA hospital may terminate critical services, increase waiting times for appointments, maybe even shut down altogether. Members have expressed concerns about the need for additional medical care funding.

The Vice President recently told our Nation's veterans they wished to provide more money, but so-called Priority 7 veterans were not going to get care any more. We asked VA to do an indepth field survey to find out what the President's budget as originally submitted would mean. We found there would be major cutbacks in services, denial of services for some veterans, closing of facilities, reductions in force totaling as many as 13,000 employees and, what is most important, denial of critically needed care to thousands of veterans. We are absolutely not going to let that happen. It is wrong.

Overall, the VA budget totals $43.75 billion, an increase of $1.1 billion more than the President's request. In addition to medical care, funds were added to the veterans State home and State cemetery grant programs to meet the tremendous backlog in these programs and ensure that we meet the needs of our aging veterans, honoring those who are deceased in a dignified and respectful manner.

VA's full request for additional funds for the Veterans Benefits Administration includes ensuring much-needed improvements to the processing and delivery of veterans' benefits. We are, as we speak, working to find additional funding for veterans' medical care, and we expect to be able to present an amendment very shortly on that particular matter that we think will further lighten the burdens and stresses placed on the Veterans' Administration and ensure it can continue to provide top quality medical care to those who have put their lives on the line for the peace and security of all and for the freedom of the United States.

Moving on to the other major elements in this bill, we have funded the Department of Housing and Urban Development at $27.16 billion, which is some $2.35 billion over last year's level and which should allow HUD to be on very solid ground. Because of the priority needs of our veterans, we had to make tough choices. In HUD's case, that meant not funding HUD's requested 19 new programs and initiatives. Instead, we focused on funding HUD's core programs such as public housing, CDBG, home and drug elimination grants, homeless assistance, and section 202 housing for the elderly. These are the key housing and community development programs that make a critical difference in people's lives. They are programs with a proven track record.

Also, unlike last year when we funded 50,000 new incremental vouchers, we do not have the funds to provide incremental section 8 assistance this year. Frankly, against my better judgment, because we do not have funds in our allocation to meet the funding needs of our key programs, I have accepted the administration's budget proposal to defer $4.2 billion of section 8 budget authority for fiscal year 2000 expiring contracts until fiscal year 2001. In other words, the budget authority will be appropriated for the amounts to be expended on section 8 certificates in fiscal year 2001 to the fiscal year 2001 budget. The good news is we were able to continue funding this year. But the bad news means we will have to find $8 billion more in section 8 budget authority in fiscal year 2001 for a total of some $14 billion in budget authority in order to renew all expiring section 8 contracts in fiscal year 2001.

Permit me to emphasize and call to your attention several issues of particular importance in this bill.

First, I introduced the Save My Home Act of 1999 earlier this year to require HUD to renew expiring below market section 8 contracts at a market rate for elderly and disabled projects, and in circumstances where housing is located in a low-vacancy area such as rural areas or high-cost areas.

We have heard from too many States around this country where tenants in section 8 projects have been thrown out because the landlord in a tight market thought higher rents could be obtained at market rate. While this is certainly an understandable move, it deprives the citizens who have depended upon section 8 of the vitally needed services that they must have. So, despite our request, there has not been effective action to deal with those expiring section 8, or the so-called opt-out programs where landlords leave the section 8 program.

This bill provides new authority for section 8 enhanced, or sticky vouchers, to ensure that families and housing for which owners do not renew their section 8 contracts will be able to continue to live in their homes with the Federal Government picking up the additional rental cost of the units.

We think it is essential to preserve this housing, and we have therefore included $100 million in new section 8 assistance to ensure that there is adequate funding for renewing these section 8 contracts. We believe this strong direction to HUD will ensure that the appropriate steps—and there are other steps that are preferable to sticky vouchers, but we have given them a wide range of tools to use in ensuring those who live in opt-out housing are not deprived of housing.

We are disappointed about some of the reactions we have heard to this budget. We believe we are doing our job and doing it responsibly. We have heard objections from HUD. But we are funding HUD's program in a responsible, no-nonsense way.

Under this appropriations bill, unlike the course that the administration is on, no one will lose their housing, and in many cases the funding will ensure new low-income housing and home ownership opportunities.

We are concerned more and more about HUD's capacity to administer its programs. As I said, HUD has raised a red flag on many issues. We funded the primary programs mostly at the President's level—and a number above that level. I also do not believe that new programs at HUD should be a priority in part because of funding pressures but also because HUD does not have the capacity to administer effectively its programs. And we do not wish to bring in new programs without the benefit of the authorizing committee's approval on it.

HUD remains a high-risk agency, as designated by the General Accounting Office—the only agency ever designated on a department-wide basis. I do not believe it needs additional responsibility until it corrects its significant problems.

I hope every single Member understands what I am saying because people have reported to me concerns they have had with HUD. We have not been able to approve HUD's request. They need to understand that it is only one of eight major agencies that depend on the VA–HUD subcommittee allocation for their funds, and we have attempted to do our best to assure adequate funding for the core programs that are vitally important.

Moving on to other agencies, for EPA, we included a total of $7.3 billion, an increase of about $100 million over the request of the administration. We thought we needed to restore the President's $550 million cut to the clean water State revolving fund. The Clean Water Program and the Safe Drinking Water Program are critical to assure success in restoring and protecting our Nation's water bodies. It is a matter of the environment. It is also a vital matter of public health.

As we see problems in this country brought about by hurricanes and floods, everybody realizes that contaminated water supplies is one of the greatest health problems we face. This clean water State revolving fund allows States day in and day out to move forward in assisting local communities to clean up their wastewater to make sure we are not polluting the environment and endangering the health of our citizens. There is still a great deal

to do in this area. We have provided as much assistance as we can.

EPA has been revising its estimate of the nationwide need for water infrastructure financing upward. It is now about $200 billion. That is why I find it a little difficult to understand why the proposal was to cut this program by 40 percent. We think that is the wrong choice. We reverse the cut.

The highest priorities, in my view, in EPA must include State grant programs and those activities geared to addressing the biggest environmental risk we face. We had to cut out some new programs—some critical programs—to protect fully EPA's core programs. In addition, we added funding for grants to States to enhance their environmental data system. That is a critical need and should help improve the integrity of EPA's data system.

Moving on to the other agencies, FEMA funding totals $85 million of which $300 million is for disaster relief. While we were unable to accommodate the full budget request, there are additional funds we believe are high priorities added for important initiatives such as antiterrorism training, enhancing the fire training program, and emergency food and shelter grants. Despite the damage caused by Hurricane Floyd, FEMA has adequate reserves on hand—approximately $1 billion at this time—to meet their anticipated obligations in the near future. We are going to be monitoring these needs closely, of course, and we will take whatever steps are necessary to ensure adequate funds are on hand to respond as needed to this and other disasters that inevitably occur.

We commend FEMA's efforts in hurricane-ravaged areas. Our hearts and prayers go out to the victims of these natural disasters, and our thanks go to the very strong response that the people of FEMA, and all of the related emergency agencies—both government and private sector agencies—have been able to provide.

Next, moving on to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, this bill fully funds NASA at the President's request of $13.6 billion, including full funding for the international space station and the shuttle. I know NASA was a huge concern for many members of the committee and the Congress as a whole because the House, due to its shortened allocation, was forced to reduce funding by some $900 million.

This bill makes a major structural change to the NASA accounts by providing separate funding for the international space station and the space shuttle. We believe this account change is necessary because of NASA's continuing problems in controlling spending on the space station, especially enhanced by Russia's unreliability in meeting its obligations as an international partner to the space station. We have, however, provided transfer authority to allow space station funds to be used to meet any needed safety upgrades for the shuttle.

The only other major change in NASA funding is we have reduced the funding for space by $120 million from the President's budget request in part to fund new launch and space transportation technologies designed to reduce the cost of space transportation and to open up commercial opportunities in our universe.

Many Members have been interested in this program, and these funds are authorized in both the House and Senate NASA authorization bills. I know the occupant of the Chair has been a very strong advocate for this kind of research and development.

For the National Science Foundation, the bill includes over $3.9 billion, which matches the administration's request. The NSF allocation is over $250 million more than last year's enacted level, about a 7-percent increase. The increase in funding continues our commitment and support for our Nation's basic research and education needs.

On a personal note, I was very pleased we were able to meet the President's request for NSF because of the tremendous amount of exciting and potentially beneficial work that is being funded through the National Science Foundation. Truly, this is a national priority. I only wish more funds were available to add because this is our scientific future. This is the future for our economy, for the well-being of the people of the United States, and for our continued progress.

Some of the major highlights of this allocation include $126 million in additional funds for computer and information science and engineering activities, some $60 million for the important Plant Genome Program, and $50 million for the administration's ''Biocomplexity'' initiative. The bill also includes $423 million for the incorporation for national and community service. This is near last year's level.

Let me be clear, funds totaling $80 million were rescinded from the prior year's appropriations for the program which are currently sitting in reserve. The inspector general tells us they are not needed. It is our understanding this rescission will have no programmatic impact, but it is necessary for us to meet the other priorities in our budget. We intend to assure the Corporation continues at the level from last year, and we believe this budget allocation allows us to do so.

Mr. President, I am pleased to yield the floor to my colleague and good friend, the Senator from Maryland.

Ms. MIKULSKI. Good morning, Mr. President.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maryland.

PRIVILEGE OF THE FLOOR

Ms. MIKULSKI. I ask unanimous consent that Ms. Jeannine Schroeder, a detailee from HUD working in my office on this bill, be able to come to the floor and have floor privileges, limited only to the VA-HUD consideration.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Ms. MIKULSKI. Mr. President, once again we come to the floor of the Senate to discuss the appropriations for the VA-HUD appropriations bill. This is a very exciting time because this appropriation is really the bridge between the old century and the new century. I think our bill does reflect, in its funding levels, that we intend for it to be a bridge between the old century and the new century.

First of all, a word about the old century. We know that our American veterans, because of their bravery, their gallantry, and their self-sacrifice, saved America and saved Western civilization. That is why this subcommittee fought so hard to save their health care—a bridge from the old century, but a bridge to the new century.

We also, during this century, realized that in addition to the ravages of war, there were terrible ravages to our environment. Once again, in our legislation, we make a significant commitment to the protection of not only the environment of the American people but also of the whole world—again, a bridge from the old century to the new century.

It was in this century that America moved forward economically, first in its industrial age, and now toward the information age. But in the course of this century, we not only made a commitment to the progress of a few, we made a commitment to the progress of many. Through programs such as housing and urban development, we have continued to work to create a real opportunity structure for our American citizens.

What is the hallmark of the American opportunity structure? One is home ownership. Through the VA mortgage program, the FHA program, and other key programs, we create a wider opportunity for people to be able to own a home in the United States of America.

The other hallmark of the bridge from the old century to the new century is our passion for education. It was we, in the United States of America, whose continual social inventions created opportunities for people to pursue higher education.

When my great grandmother came from Poland, she certainly could read, but she wanted us to be able to do more than to be able to read the newspaper or read our scriptures. She wanted us to have a real education. It was out of the American people inventing night school, a community college, a GI bill of rights, that we were able to make sure ordinary people had access to higher education. This is why we continue to be so enthusiastic about AmeriCorps. Right this very minute, there are young people working in communities all over the United States of America, in public education, public safety, and other areas, to ensure that we help our communities. But they are earning a voucher that they can use to pay for their higher education. Once again, a bridge from the desires of the old century to the new century.

What, too, is the hallmark of the genius of the American people? It is our resourcefulness, our ingenuity, and our innovation. America is the nation of science and technology. It was in our great Federal laboratories that some of the greatest advances were made in the old century. We want to be sure we position them for the new century. Therefore, this appropriation continues to stay the course in science and technology, particularly in the environment, in NASA—our national space agency—and also in the National Science Foundation.

That is really what this bill is all about. When we rise on the floor and talk to our colleagues about numbers and data, we sometimes sound like an annual report. But when we talk about what we want the Senators to vote on, we have to remember what our mission is. I believe the mission of the VA-HUD bill is to honor the old century, make sure we deal with the ravages and problems of the old century, and continue to position our country and our people for the new century.

This takes me, then, to some of the specifics of the bill. I really thank Senator KIT BOND, the chairman of the subcommittee, and his staff, for all of the collegial consultation we had during the preparation of this bill.

I say to my colleague from Missouri and to all Senators listening, that we know this is not a perfect bill, but it is a very good bill. We had the will but we did not have the wallet to be able to do what we wanted to do for the various agencies and programs. Hopefully, as we move through conference and as the issues around spending caps are resolved, new opportunities might occur that would allow us to meet funding levels that we think are appropriate. This bill is a work in progress, but the bill we bring here today is one that I feel satisfied to bring to the Senate.

A special thanks to Senators STEVENS and BYRD, who really foraged to find another $7.2 billion in budget authority and another $5 billion in outlays to be able to move this bill, with bipartisan support, to the Senate floor today.

The timing of this bill is noteworthy. Right now, a significant approach that we have with this bill is to make sure we fund the Federal Emergency Management Program. From Maine to Florida, and particularly with key residents in North Carolina, New Jersey, and in my own State of Maryland, we worry right now about the ravages of Hurricane Floyd. But in this bill, we continue our commitment to FEMA, and we include an additional $300 million for disaster relief funding. This means that FEMA is ready to help those communities recover from this devastating storm. Should the administration request additional funding for disaster relief, we will also be ready.

Let's go to VA. First of all, our obligation to our veterans is this: promises made need to be promises kept. What does the American veterans community want? They want to make sure that for the older veteran and the Vietnam and Korean war veteran, we continue to provide them with quality health care. But we need to make sure that VA, as it always has, continues to be a door of opportunity, particularly through the GI bill, for home ownership and education. I would hope that one day the VA benefit would be a tool for lifetime learning and the subject of a new century discussion.

We have increased funding for VA by over $1 billion to a total of $18 billion for veterans' health care. This was really the recommended level that came from the Government Accounting Office. We know that the VA medical care could always be funded additionally, but right now that is what we bring, and we are now looking at an amendment with proper other resources to fund it.

Also, another significant part of the VA budget is that we maintain the funding for VA medical research at $316 million. The Veterans' Administration continues to play a very important role in medical research for the special needs of our veterans, including areas such as geriatrics, Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, and orthopedic research. The benefits of VA medical research are not limited to veterans. The entire Nation benefits because of VA medical research.

We continue to provide funding to treat something called Hepatitis C, a growing problem among the veteran population, particularly our Vietnam vets. We want to be sure that we help them with their problem and also do all we can to ensure that it is not spread in the wider population.

In addition, we have increased the funding for State veterans homes by $50 million over the President's request to $90 million. This is the same as last year. Why are the State homes so important? We know that long-term care is a growing issue, particularly with our World War II vets and our Korean vets. We believe in Federal and State partnerships.

No one jurisdiction of Government can carry the burden of long-term care by itself; and therefore, the additional funding for State veterans homes enables that wonderful partnership to occur between the Feds and the States and the veterans themselves.

We also come to a discussion on HUD.

The whole point of the Housing and Urban Development Agency is to be able to help communities in terms of being able to have economic development and for individuals to have economic empowerment. That is it. It is to fund primarily self-help initiatives or to reward self-help initiatives. Therefore, what we wanted to do in HUD was to stay the course for the community development block grant money, which goes directly to local communities with local decisionmaking. With this funding, mayors, county executives, or commissioners can decide for themselves what the best way to revitalize their communities is, and not have cookie-cutter solutions coming out of Washington.

At the same time, we wanted to be sure the poor have a way to a new life, particularly with the significant success of our Welfare-to-Work Program. This is why we have a program called HOPE VI where we took down the high rises, which were ZIP Codes of poverty, to really create a new opportunity. We want to do the same thing for section 8 so we do not continue to have the concentrations of poverty that we have.

This year, working together with the authorizers, we were able to be sure that everyone who has a section 8 contract—meaning a Government subsidy for housing—will continue to get their subsidy. This is no small matter. We have a lot of section 8's that are expiring. We wanted to be sure that if you had a section 8, and you were living in a neighborhood, moving from welfare to work, trying to get job training, you would not lose your subsidy. This was indeed a significant accomplishment in this bill.

Last year, working with the authorizers, we also added 50,000 new vouchers. The administration would like to add 100,000 new vouchers. I personally would like very much to do that. But right now, as I said, we do not have the wallet. I am working with the administration to find an appropriate offset not only to pay for new vouchers now, but to insist that anything new has to have a sustainable revenue stream in the future. This is important because we are concerned that though we have started, we want to be able to continue it. That is a big yellow flashing light for me, and we need to be aware of that.

Another area that is very special to me is housing for the elderly. Once again, working on a bipartisan basis, we have been able to increase the funding for the elderly and disabled by $50 million. This will be very important as we also look at new ways to help the population as they age in place.

I am particularly appreciative of cooperation on developing some new concepts on assisted living and service coordinators to help aging seniors with their unique housing needs.

We also help increase the funding for the homeless and do other important things, which I want to discuss later.

With regard to NASA, I was extremely troubled by the House version of the bill. I was troubled because they cut NASA by $1 billion.

At the same time, I was also troubled that the House seemed to focus a lot of those cuts in my own home State. I do not take it personally, but it certainly was convenient for them, knowing I am the ranking member, to know that I would also mount a rescue mission for the programs in my State.

But it is in that State that we have mounted the rescue missions on Hubbell and in other areas. I really appreciate the collegial support of Senator

BOND to look at where we need to put our resources for a national purpose. This isn't about Maryland.

We have the great Federal laboratories in Maryland. I do not count NIH as only a Maryland Federal laboratory. It is a national Federal laboratory, and so is Goddard. The Goddard Space Flight Center is the flagship NASA center for Earth and science research. We want to make sure it continues to be able to do that. With the help of this subcommittee, we know we will continue to have those jobs. They will continue to fix Hubbell, have the next generation space telescope, and provide us with new opportunities in terms of protecting the environment.

I would like to also go on to National Service, which is funded at $423 million—a reduction from last year. I hope this funding can be increased as the bill moves forward. National Service has been a success. It has enrolled over 100,000 volunteers in a wide array of community programs.

I know the management and oversight is less than what is desired. I thank the Senator from Missouri for his limited patience; my patience is also limited. But we have to remember that the mission is working, even though the management and oversight could certainly be improved.

I also want to comment on the National Science Foundation. We are so proud of the National Science Foundation. We really do appreciate it, and it is funded at $3.9 billion in the bill, which is an addition of $250 million.

What is important about the National Science Foundation is that it was created to respond to be sure that America did not fall behind Russia in science and technology. America continues to lead the world in science and technology, particularly in information technology that has revolutionized the world. This is truly the information age. I appreciate the fact that, working together, we have increased the funding, particularly in those areas that will enhance research and development in the field of information technology.

Let me conclude by saying that I will talk more about this bill as we go on. That is the thumbnail sketch. But I do want to just say a couple more things in closing about this bill.

First of all, I am very appreciative that we have had the bipartisan support to continue the funding for the Chesapeake Bay Research Program. This was started by my very dear predecessor Senator Mac Mathias, and we all worked together on it. In fact, I was in the House when he started it.

But we had the support of four Presidents: Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, George Bush, and Bill Clinton. That is exactly what we need—bipartisan support to come up with solutions.

But the other thing I am really proud of in this bill is how we help our country continue to cross the digital divide. Bill Gates says we are at the digital divide. We will either be on one side or the other—whether you are a nation, whether you are a community, or whether you are a citizen.

I want to be one of the Senators who helps America and all of its citizens, particularly paying attention to rural communities and constituencies that have been left out and left behind, cross that digital divide.

In this bill we are doing it. Our funding for NASA helps us do this. The funding we have for the National Science Foundation puts the money in the Federal checkbook to make sure that we come up with the new ideas for the new products that will be part of continuing to cross the digital divide.

The Senate knows that one of my greatest passions in public life is to enable the poor to move out of poverty and into self-sufficiency. In this bill, through HUD, we fund something called the Neighborhood Networks Initiative—it has already been in operation; 500 residential computing centers have been established. These Neighborhoods Networks bring together local businesses, community organizations, and other partners. Right this minute in public housing, where we want to make sure people move from welfare to work and children have opportunities for a different way of life, we are creating little e-villages. In these communities, if you work hard, through either structured school activities or daytime use for adults, you can learn to use the computers. This newfound computer knowledge will help residents find good jobs at living wages well into the future.

Again, there are many things I could say about this bill and I will say them as we move along. I think we have a very good bill. We are working very closely with Senator BOND, with the leadership of our two parties in the Senate and with our administration. Hopefully, we will pass this bill sometime today, move to conference, and then move forward with the bridge from the old century to the new century.

Mr. President, I believe the VA/HUD bill is about four things: meeting our obligations to our veterans; serving our core constituencies; creating real opportunities for people, and advancing science and technology.

The VA/HUD bill takes care of national interests and national needs. This has been a tough year for the VA–HUD Subcommittee. Due to the budget caps, our original 602(b) allocation was billions of dollars below what we needed. Senator BOND and I agreed that we would not move a bill until we had a sufficient allocation. But thanks to Senators STEVENS and BYRD, we now have an additional $7.2 billion in discretionary budget authority and nearly $5 billion in outlays. This has allowed us to move this bill with bipartisan support to the Senate floor today.

Mr. President, the timing of this bill is noteworthy. Just last week, residents along the Eastern U.S. experienced the wrath of Hurricane Floyd. Everyone from Maine to Florida was affected by this storm, including my own State of Maryland. Many people, including the residents of North Carolina and New Jersey, are still without power and flooded from their homes.

Mr. President, the Federal Emergency Management Agency has $1 billion in the disaster relief fund to help state and local governments recover from this storm. The bill we present to the Senate today includes an additional $300 million for the disaster relief fund. That means FEMA is ready to help those communities recover from this devastating storm. Should the administration request additional funding for disaster relief, we will provide whatever is necessary to help those in need.

Mr. President, our first obligation is to keep the promises we have made to our Nation's veterans. I am proud to say that in this bill, we have kept those promises to the veterans and the VA employees. I am proud of the men and women who serve our veterans. From the in-patient hospitals to the out-patient clinics, the employees of the VA work long hours and sometimes under difficult conditions. We have increased funding for veterans healthcare by $1.1 billion over the President's request to a total of $18.4 billion for veterans healthcare. Some have argued that we should spend more on veterans healthcare. I consider the $18.4 billion we have provided in this bill to be a funding floor, rather than a funding ceiling. The General Accounting Office generally agreed with this approach as a starting point.

In a recent analysis of the VA healthcare budget for our subcommittee, the GAO concluded that a $1.1 billion increase over the President's request should be sufficient—assuming the VA's cost cutting program is successful. Nonetheless, I will continue to work with my colleagues to ensure VA has more than sufficient funding for our veterans healthcare needs. In addition, we have maintained funding for VA medical research at $316 million, the same as fiscal year 1999.

The VA plays a very important role in medical research for the special needs of our veterans such as geriatrics, Alzheimers, Parkinson's, and orthopedic research. The benefits of VA medical research are not limited to veterans. The entire nation benefits from VA medical research—particularly as our population continues to age. We also provide full funding to treat Hepatitis C, a growing problem among the veterans population, particularly for our Vietnam veterans.

We have increased funding for the State veterans homes by $50 million over the President's request to $90 million, the same as last year. The State homes serve as our long term care and

rehabilitation facilities for our veterans. They represents a uniquely successful partnership between the Federal and State governments. By increasing funding in this area, we keeping our promises to our veterans and meeting a compelling human need.

We have also made sure that we take care of our working families—by funding housing programs that millions depend upon. Our bill provides $10.8 billion to renew all existing section 8 housing vouchers. That means those who have vouchers, will continue to receive them. Unfortunately, we were unable to provide additional funding to add 100,000 new vouchers at this time. We simply could not find an additional $600 million in budget authority to cover the cost of 100,000 new vouchers. Many of my colleagues will remember that we added 50,000 new vouchers last year. But a tight allocation simply did not give us enough room to add more vouchers at this time. We maintained level funding for other critical core HUD programs.

Funding for housing for the elderly has been increased over last year. Funding for the elderly and disabled is $904 million, a $50 million increase over last year. We have including additional funding for assisted living and service coordinators within the section 202 program. This has always been a top priority of mine and Senator BOND. We will always make sure that the housing needs of our elderly are met. We also must recognize that the housing needs of the elderly are changing—the elderly are aging in place. That's why we included additional funding for assisted living and service coordinators to help our aging seniors with their unique housing needs.

Homeless assistance grants are funded at the Presidents's request. In a time of prosperity, we will not forget those who are truly in need. In addition, we have funded drug elimination grants and Youthbuild at least year's level.

The Community Development Block Grant Program is funded at $4.8 billion. This is an increase of $50 million from last year and $25 million over the President's request. The CDBG program has been a very successful program targeting federal funds for economic development—with local control. In addition, I have included report language that directs HUD to continue its efforts to bridge the information technology gap in communities through its ''Neighborhood Networks Initiative.'' The Neighborhood Networks Initiative brings computers and internet access to HUD assisted housing projects in low income communities. This will help us to ensure that every American has the ability to cross what Bill Gates has called the ''digital divide.''

With regard to NASA funding, I was extremely troubled by the House version of the bill. The House bill included devastating funding cuts to America's space agency. The Goddard Space Flight Center in my home state of Maryland, and the Wallops Flight Facility on Virginia's Eastern Shore both took a significant hit in the House bill. The House funding levels would mean the loss of over 2,000 jobs at Goddard and Wallops. The bill before the Senate today will save 2000 jobs at Goddard and Wallops.

NASA if fully funding in this bill, at $13.5 billion, which is the President's request. Funding for shuttle, space station, and the critical science programs are funded at the President's request. This will allow us to maintain this country's or science and technology leadership and reflects the Senate's commitment to science and technology as we enter the next millennium.

National Service is funded at $423 million, a slight reduction from last year. I hope this funding can be increased as the bill moves forward. National Service has been a success, enrolling over 100,000 volunteers in a wide array of community services.

With regard to the EPA, the subcommittee has provided $7.3 billion in total funding, an increase of $115 million over the President's request. The subcommittee has increased funding for most of EPA's major environmental programs: the bill provides $825 million for the drinking water state revolving fund; and $1.3 billion for the clean water revolving fund. Taking care of local communities infrastructure needs has always been a priority for this committee.

Superfund is funded at $1.4 billion, down slightly from last year, but brownfields is funded at $90 million, the same as last year. I know there is some concern over EPA's salary and expense account, and I hope we can address these concerns as the bill moves forward.

The subcommittee has also provided funding at or above the President's budget request for important FEMA programs: Emergency Management and Planning, Anti-Terrorism Programs, and the Disaster Fund. We will await any further administration request for disaster assistance in light of Hurricane Floyd.

The National Science Foundation is funded at $3.9 billion, which is $250 million more than fiscal year 1999. This funding level will allow us to make critical investments in science and technology into the next century. The funding increases for NSF is an important step for maintaining our science and technology base.

With regard to the Selective Service, we have restored funding for Selective Service at the President's request. The House eliminated funding for the Selective Service.

Mr. President, I recognize that there may be certain provisions that members may disagree with or oppose. I acknowledge the validity of their concerns, but I hope we can move the bill forward and resolve these differences along the way. I believe the VA/HUD bill that we present to the Senate today, keeps the promises to our veterans, helps our core constituencies, creates real opportunities and makes investments in science and technology. I urge my colleagues to support this bill.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Missouri.

Mr. BOND. Mr. President, I think we have seen the legislative equivalent of Newton's second law: For every action, there is a necessary reaction. When our colleagues in the House cut the earth sciences program, it was predictable that with the leadership of Senator MIKULSKI, that money would be restored. The law works, and I commend Senator MIKULSKI for being a very effective and persuasive advocate for earth science.

I am prepared to offer a committee leadership amendment, but the distinguished chairman of the authorizing committee for housing has other commitments, and I now defer to him to make a statement on the bill, after which I expect the leaders of the committee to join us in offering an important committee amendment.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Colorado.

Mr. ALLARD. I thank the chairman for granting me time to make a few comments on the bill. As the relatively new chairman of the Subcommittee on Housing and Transportation of the Banking Committee, I view my relationship with the authorizing committee as a very good relationship, and I know the chairman of the Appropriations Committee has made sure there have been staff at our hearings. I really do appreciate that. I have made a very special effort to make sure I have staff at his hearings, not only his hearings but hearings on the House side. I come to my new responsibilities as chairman of the Subcommittee on HUD to look for change. I think change needs to occur in that agency. I think working together in a bipartisan manner, as well as working between authorization and appropriations, is the way to bring about that change.

Mr. President, I thank Senator BOND for giving me the opportunity to make a statement on the VA-HUD Appropriations bill.

I appreciate this chance to share my thoughts as chairman of the authorizing subcommittee for the Department of Housing and Urban Development. I look forward to continuing to work with Senator BOND in our joint effort to closely monitor and improve the operations of HUD.

This is particularly important when we are dealing with a Federal agency that has repeatedly been designated ''high risk'' by the General Accounting Office. The Department of Housing and Urban Development is the only cabinet level agency that is ''high risk.'' This means that the management deficiencies of the Department pose a significant risk to both taxpayers and the individuals served by HUD programs.

The GAO is not alone in its assessment of HUD. The Department's own

inspector general has repeatedly reported on management deficiencies at HUD. There are two positive provisions in this bill concerning the General Accounting Office and the inspector general and I want to commend the chairman for including them. The first requires the GAO to certify quarterly on the cost of time attributable to the failure of HUD to cooperate with any GAO investigation and to reimburse GAO for these costs.

The General Accounting Office is the investigative arm of the Congress, and we expect HUD and other agencies to cooperate fully in the investigations that the Congress requests. The second provision is an increase in funding for the Office of Inspector General. The IG is an independent voice within HUD. The present IG is a tremendous watchdog over HUD programs and a valuable resource to the Congress and to the taxpayers. This is clearly an agency that needs a strong and well funded inspector general's office.

Let me comment on several other important provisions in the bill. The first terminates a portion of the Community Builders program. In my view, the Community Builders program is a misallocation of the Department's resources. Nearly 10 percent of the Department's personnel are now Community Builders. As best we can tell these positions are largely public relations positions. The Community Builders are among the highest paid employees at HUD, with the program consuming a disproportionate share of travel and training resources.

At a time when HUD is considered ''high risk'' the focus should not be on public relations, it should be on ensuring adequate personnel to police HUD programs. As a result of our concerns with the Community Builders program, the Housing Subcommittee will hold an oversight hearing of this program in early October. The hearing will focus on the upcoming inspector general's audit of the program and the views of career HUD employees on the merits of the program.

I also want to comment on the section 8 ''opt-out'' issue. This legislation once again grants HUD the authority to renegotiate section 8 contracts and where necessary adjust the contracts up to market rents. This is essentially the same authority given to HUD 2 years ago. Earlier this year, the Housing Subcommittee held a hearing on this very issue. We found that HUD has moved very slowly in utilizing this authority. Hopefully, the language in this bill will once again make clear that HUD has the authority to work with section 8 owners who want to remain in the program and adjust the contracts to the local market rents.

Finally, I want to reiterate a point made by the Appropriations Committee in the committee report regarding unauthorized programs. This year HUD requested funding for a number of new programs that have never been authorized by the Congress. The GAO identified 19 new programs with total funding of over $700 million. The administration continues to propose funding for new programs that have little or no relationship to affordable housing. This diverts precious resources from those most in need. If the administration wants new programs, it should make its case before the authorizing committee, not the Appropriations Committee, and I appreciate Senator BOND's recognitiion of this fact.

In recent years the Congress has enacted a great deal of housing legislation—including both a major restructuring of public housing and the section 8 program. It has been my view that the Congress should refrain from passing more housing laws until we can determine whether the laws that we have already passed are being properly implemented and whether the Department is being properly managed.

Mr. President, I thank my colleagues. In closing, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD an outline of some of the findings from the oversight hearings conducted by the Senate Housing and Transportation Subcommittee this year.

There being no objection, the outline was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

1999 OVERSIGHT FINDINGS OF THE SENATE SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND TRANSPORTATION

The Subcommittee's first hearing of the year explored the fact that the General Accounting Office once again determined in 1999 that HUD is a ''high risk'' agency. The ''high risk'' designation means that HUD's programs and management systems are failing to adequately carry out the Department's mission and that there is significant risk to taxpayer dollars. The GAO has placed HUD on the ''high risk'' list since 1994 and it is presently the only full Cabinet level agency on the ''high risk'' list. The Subcommittee found that the HUD Inspector General shares the GAO view that HUD is ''high risk.'' The IG has issued a number of reports that are highly critical of HUD management. The IG has alleged that she has been the victim of continued efforts by HUD management to undermine her office and authority. The GAO is currently investigating allegations of efforts to undermine the IG and the Subcommittee will continue to explore this topic.

The Subcommittee conducted a hearing to explore in detail HUD's grants management system. This is one example of HUD's alleged mismanagement. This computerized system (IDIS) is supposed to track the expenditure of $6 billion of HUD grants each year. These are grants distributed to cities and states through the Community Development Block Grant program and similar programs. Unfortunately, the Subcommittee heard testimony from GAO and several local government officials that the IDIS computer system does not work. The system uses outdated and cumbersome computer technology and at this point cannot be used to effectively monitor the performance of communities receiving HUD grants.

The Federal Housing Administration is an important part of HUD, and the Subcommittee finds that it is critical that the Congress keep a close eye on the solvency of the FHA fund. The FHA provides a federal insurance guarantee on hundreds of billions of dollars worth of housing. The Subcommittee conducted a hearing to review the rise in the level of delinquency on FHA insured loan payments. This is of particular concern at a time when the economy is so healthy, and at a time when the delinquency rate on non-FHA insured loans is not rising. Recently, it was announced that the delinquency rate on adjustable rate mortgages is now 10 percent, an historic high.

The Subcommittee conducted a hearing on the Low Income Housing Tax Credit and how it is utilized to develop affordable housing in a number of states. This program appears to be successful in developing affordable housing. The program is strong because it leverages tax credits to involve the private sector in the development of affordable housing. The program is administered by the states (which allocate the credits) and has little to do with HUD.

The Subcommittee conducted two hearings concerning the Section 8 program. The Subcommittee found that HUD has been particularly slow in dealing with the Section 8 opt-out crisis. Section 8 property owners are developers who have entered in to 20 year contracts with HUD to provide affordable housing. At the end of the contract term, these owners may opt-out of the system and take their properties to the private market. Many property owners are exercising this option and many more contracts will come up for renewal in the next several years. In an attempt to keep owners in the program, Congress granted HUD the authority to mark up Section 8 rents in areas where the contracts were clearly below market. HUD was given this authority in the Fall of 1998 and is just now issuing the notice to field staff that will implement the program (nearly two years after the authority is granted). HUD has responded slowly to the crisis and as a result many properties may be lost to the Section 8 program. The Subcommittee's second hearing addressed the Section 8 mark-to-market program enacted by Congress nearly two years ago. The legislation enacted made clear that HUD was to give state housing finance authorities priority in the restructuring of Section 8 contracts in their states. While some progress has been made in signing up the states, much more needs to be done. HUD must resist the temptation to continue federal control of the restructuring where states are willing and able to do the job.

Mr. ALLARD. Mr. President, that concludes my comments. I thank the chairman, again, for working with my committee. I look forward to a very positive relationship with him in the future.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Missouri.

Mr. BOND. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Colorado. His active involvement, through his committee and with his staff in helping us deal with these problems, has been of significant benefit. We truly appreciate the close working relationship we have with members on both sides of the authorizing committee. As I indicated before, this is a very difficult set of questions that deal with HUD. They do involve and require the participation and guidance of the authorizing committee. We are most grateful to the Senator from Colorado for all his assistance.

AMENDMENT NO. 1744

(Purpose: To provide an additional $600,000,000 for the Veterans Health Administration for medical care and to designate such amount as an emergency requirement)

Mr. BOND. Mr. President, I send an amendment to the desk and ask for its immediate consideration.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The legislative assistant clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Missouri [Mr. BOND], for Mr. BYRD, for himself, Mr. BOND, Mr. DOMENICI, Mr. STEVENS, Ms. MIKULSKI, Mr. GRASSLEY, Mr. BINGAMAN, Mr. ROCKEFELLER, Mr. AKAKA, Mr. JOHNSON, Mr. SPECTER, Mr. MURKOWSKI, Mr. WELLSTONE, Mr. SMITH of New Hampshire, and Mr. HOLLINGS, proposes an amendment numbered 1744.

Mr. BOND. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that reading of the amendment be dispensed with.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The amendment is as follows:

On page 7, beginning on line 23, strike ''$18,406,000,000'' and all that follows through ''*Provided*,'' and insert ''$19,006,000,000, plus reimbursements: *Provided*, That of the funds made available under this heading, $600,000,000 is designated by Congress as an emergency requirement pursuant to section 251(b)(2)(A) of the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985 and shall be available only to the extent that an official budget request that includes designation of the entire amount of the request as an emergency requirement (as defined in the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985) is transmitted by the President to Congress: *Provided further*,''.

Mr. BOND. Mr. President, I am very pleased to offer this amendment with the leadership of the committee on both sides. Senator MIKULSKI and I are very pleased to have the support of Senator STEVENS, Senator BYRD, and also chairman of the Budget Committee, Senator DOMENICI, to add $600 million for VA medical care. In addition to the committee-reported bill, there will be a total of $1.7 billion above the President's request for veterans' health care; in other words, $19 billion for veterans' health.

These funds will enable VA to ensure full care to all 3.5 million veterans being currently cared for by the VA. They will also allow VA to provide care to thousands of additional veterans, significantly reduce waiting times for appointments, and initiate new activities to improve veterans' health. They will also enable the VA, upon enactment of authorizing legislation, to fund emergency care treatment in non-VA facilities for veterans. We do need authorizing assistance for that.

According to the GAO, there are still many opportunities to make VA health care more cost effective. These include improved procurement practices, consolidation of certain services, eliminating excess management layers and administration, and shifting more care to outpatient settings. We cannot afford to maintain the status quo at the VA. The GAO recently testified that the VA is wasting $1 million a day on operations and maintenance of buildings and monuments that could better be used on health care for veterans, and 25 percent of the medical care budget is spent on maintaining VA infrastructure, including 4,700 buildings on 22,000 acres.

The VA has been moving to community-based care, outpatient-based care. That has been dictated by the needs of the veterans. We are in a position where we must provide the care the veterans need. We have to support the VA in restructuring the entire system, consistent with the health care needs of veterans, rather than devoting ourselves to maintaining buildings in the old regime. Monuments are not what the veterans need in health care; they need good health care.

Not only is it the trend in general medicine outpatient-based care, but the veterans population is declining. The VA projects a 36-percent decline by 2020. By adding funds to the VA's budget, we in no way suggest that the VA has done all it can to improve its use of health care dollars.

I have been and continue to be a very strong supporter of VA transformation. When the Veterans' Administration started the process, one of the first surgical centers they shut down was in my State. It was tough to explain, but it is, I believe, clear that the veterans get better care when we have appropriate facilities—not keeping open a surgical center, for example, where they do not perform enough surgeries to maintain the proficiency they need to provide top-quality care. The funds we are adding today are for veterans' health, not maintaining buildings, not maintaining excessive management layers.

Over the past 5 years, the VA has made dramatic and much-needed changes. We congratulate them on these difficult processes. We want to work with them and continue to assure sound oversight. The system has begun a major transformation that has resulted in more of VA's appropriations going to health care. Today, VA is serving more veterans and the quality of care has improved. In the past 3 years, VA has served an additional one-half million veterans, in part by opening almost 200 new community-based clinics.

It is my strong hope that the transformation will continue to go forward and additional funds will improve the quality of VA health care. I might note that Senator GRASSLEY has asked to be a cosponsor of this amendment.

I yield to the Senator from Maryland.

Ms. MIKULSKI. I thank the chairman. I note that Senator BINGAMAN also wants to be added as a cosponsor of the pending veterans amendment.

I am pleased to join with several of my colleagues to cosponsor this amendment to increase funding for VA medical care by $600 million. I appreciate especially Senator BYRD's continued, steadfast support for our veterans. We could not be offering this amendment without Senator BYRD and Senator STEVENS. Earlier, I talked about how pleased I was with the bill—promises made, promises kept. But we wanted to do more. We had the will, but we didn't have the wallet. This is exactly an example of what I was talking about. We had the will to be able to provide a safety net for veterans' medical health care.

We know that the cost of health care continues to be rising. We know that the discussion on how to reform Medicare is a work in progress within this institution and our colleagues in the House. It will have a tremendous impact on our veterans. We also know that the need for prescription medication among our veterans is escalating. Those wonderful breakthroughs we have are expensive. We want to make sure that if you have arthritis or if you are facing prostate cancer, you have the medical resources that are needed. So, yes, the amount we currently have in the bill meets minimum, spartan levels.

This $600 million will help us tremendously. It will benefit our veterans to assure that there will be no need to close VA clinics around the country. They will be sure that no inpatient facilities will close and ensure that veterans continue to get access to the quality health care they deserve.

First of all, I know that all over America the Veterans' Administration is analyzing what they should keep open, what they should close, and what should go to part time. The fact is, we can't have uncertainty. Why? We want continuity of care for the vets and the ability to retain good and excellent staff. If you don't know today that your VA medical center might be gone tomorrow, those nurses, technicians, lab people, facility managers, who now have great opportunities in the private sector, are being attracted and recruited to leave. We have to show certainty in terms of being able to provide care and give assurance to the personnel that we value them and we want to be able to fund them at the appropriate level.

So I really thank Senator BYRD and Senator STEVENS for identifying a way we could assure that inpatient and outpatient needs are met. I support this amendment. I am going to support it here and in conference. Once again, I thank the Chair.

I yield the floor.

Mr. ROCKEFELLER addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from West Virginia.

Mr. ROCKEFELLER. Mr. President, I have come to the floor to make a simpler amendment. It is an amendment in the number of dollars, $600 million, bringing it up to $1.7 billion, as 51 Senators agreed to earlier in a letter. But I have not been given a copy of the amendment itself. I don't know what the offset is and I don't know, therefore, whether the offsets affect other

programs within this appropriations matter that would be harmful. I ask either the ranking member or the leader if I could have a copy of the amendment so I could simply see what it says. The numbers we agree on, but where is the offset coming from, et cetera?

Mr. BOND. Mr. President, if I may answer my colleague, that is a good question. The committee leadership and the Budget Committee have agreed we should provide this as an emergency authorization now. The allocation will be handled in the conference committee. So we are asking to include this as an emergency. There is no offset in this bill. There will have to be funds provided in the conference. The House had already provided the $1.7 billion additional. They took it out of NASA. We are not going to take it out of NASA. We have the assurance of the bipartisan committee leadership that we will be able to handle this allocation in the conference.

So the simple answer at this point is there is no offset.

Mr. ROCKEFELLER. I appreciate what the Senator from Missouri said. But I would further ask, I notice in the amendment it says it is an emergency requirement but it requires a transmittal by the President to the Congress, which would clearly say if the President doesn't—at least I would interpret it—ask for that, then it might not happen. Am I nit-picking at words or is that a fact which is of concern?

Mr. BOND. Mr. President, we do not believe that the emergency designation will have to be continued past the conference. We believe we can deal with the allocation questions and provide additional moneys so we will be able to drop the emergency designation. It is our hope we can do so should it be necessary. I believe there is sufficient bipartisan support in both bodies to prevail upon the President should we be required to obtain an emergency designation.

Mr. STEVENS. Mr. President, will the Senator yield?

Let me assure the Senator from West Virginia that this is sort of a current emergency in terms of the allocation process under 302(b). We are working this out. The House has the $1.7 billion. We believe because of the reaction from the veterans community we ought to assure that this wasn't intentional all the time to meet the House level in the conference. But by the time this got to conference we believed we would have the 302(b) situation straightened out so we would know where the emergency decision should be made and whether there would be advance appropriations.

This is a temporary emergency concept. We are asking the Senate to help us get this bill to conference with the emergency designation on the $600 million, and we assure the Senate that this will not be an emergency coming out for this item unless it is absolutely necessary, which I don't see right now. But we would like it in the bill in conference. When we made the 302(b) allocation to this bill by, in effect, borrowing money from the Health and Human Services bill, we thought it was best to try to have some negotiating stance with the House on some items in the bill. But we never intended to negotiate this item. I conveyed that to the managers of the bill this morning and asked that we take this issue out of contingency in the conference.

But this is the best way to do it. I hope the Senate will agree with us. It is an emergency designation that is necessary under the circumstances, but it is not a permanent emergency designation.

Mr. ROCKEFELLER. I appreciate very much and have enormous respect for the chairman of the full committee. Then it is my understanding it will come back after the bidding point from the conference.

Mr. STEVENS. If I may respond, Mr. President, I have to say the managers of the bill wanted the $1.7 billion to start with. Senator BYRD wanted $1.7 billion. As chairman I found it impossible to make that allocation at the time. But we are saying right now it was always our intention to accommodate the decision made by the managers of the bill that it should be $1.7 billion. This $600 million will meet that objective, and I hope the Senate will adopt it as we suggested.

Mr. ROCKEFELLER. And any new request by the President of the United States would not be necessary? This simply would be the workings of the Congress.

Mr. STEVENS. That is correct. If we come back to conference with an emergency designation, it will be subject to the President's approval. We would, in effect, be making a request to the President that it be declared an emergency. I do not think this has reached the emergency stage. The House has it without an emergency, and I think we can accommodate that position.

Mr. ROCKEFELLER. I am very appreciative and grateful to the chairman of the full committee, and the ranking member and minority member of the subcommittee, for this.

I am, therefore, very happy with the permission of the Chair, to add myself as a cosponsor to the amendment, as well as Senators CONRAD, AKAKA, KERREY, BIDEN, BINGAMAN, LEAHY, BOXER, HAGEL, and MURRAY.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. ROCKEFELLER. Mr. President, I would like to make a few comments, if I might, on this legislation. I cannot tell you how happy I am that Senator BOND and Senator MIKULSKI, under the leadership of Senator STEVENS and Senator BYRD, made this adjustment, because I came down here with a 17-page speech ready to raise all kinds of trouble. Now I don't have to because the appropriators have understood very clearly what was wrong with the GAO reform which was asked for. The appropriators at one point asked for a GAO report, and we went and looked at that report very carefully. We tried to find out what we could about it. We discovered the GAO report, which was recommending the $600 million cut, was based upon the question that had been asked: What would happen if the veterans budget was flatlined? So it wasn't. Where are there efficiencies that can be achieved? It was the presumption that there would be the $600 million shortfall, and, assuming that, how would the VA make the cuts? That is different than asking where might there be efficiencies? This was saying, what are you going to do, assuming you get this cut?

They came back with this list based upon a flatlined budget. The VA managers, in fact, were told to hit a dollar target. The simple fact is that most of the cuts they suggested would reduce access to care would reduce everything that is useful in the veterans budget.

The GAO really had no basis to reach the conclusion they reached. They didn't review any of the items on the list to determine what impact they would have on patient care—not one single item. It is extraordinary. You would assume the GAO is going to do that kind of thing. They simply didn't. They reacted as automatons—having been given the figure they have to cut to, they would go ahead and do it. The cuts would have been absolutely extraordinary.

We knew Members wanted to have $1.7 billion added, and 51 Senators, as I indicated, have already gone ahead and proposed this. The GAO with sort of an ax went through what they were going to close: the dialysis unit in Salem, VA; they were going to close all in-patient beds at the Beckley, WV, hospital—something those people there have been living in fear of for years because there have always been rumbles and rumors, and all of that. That was going to happen up until a few moments ago, until the two Senators made this amendment. That was going to happen. All in-patient care at Beckley was going to be closed. That would be something obviously this Senator and others could not go ahead with.

Salem, VA, was going to lose its PTSD, along with a lot of other things.

There were going to be a lot of abolishments.

All psychiatric beds in the entire New Jersey VA health care system were going to be closed. That is beyond my comprehension. If we have to get down to a certain number, we tend to do that kind of thing. This has nothing to do with a national understanding of how to save money when we need $3 billion to make the health care system. The $1.7 billion is what I was going to make my amendment for; it has been made already, and I am happy to join as a cosponsor.

I am very grateful this amendment was made by the two people who can do the most with the full committee

chairman answering questions and asserting his insistence on this. I am happy about that.

I point out, in closing, it may surprise some to learn that over the last 20 years while VA health care costs have risen 269 percent—which is a lot—the comparable rise for non-VA health care is almost 800 percent. I think that is interesting for my colleagues to think about: a 270-percent increase in the VA health system for health care; in the non-VA health care, an 800-percent increase. That says a lot about efficiencies being practiced within the VA system.

I thank the Senator from Missouri and the Senator from Maryland, both stalwarts in their efforts to protect our veterans. I am happy to add my name as a cosponsor, along with a number of others who are going to join in my amendment which I now do not need to make.

I yield the floor.

Ms. MIKULSKI. Mr. President, I thank the ranking member of the veterans authorizing committee for his support for this amendment. Most of all, I thank him for his advocacy. He has continued to speak up on what are the contemporary needs of the Veterans' Administration, particularly in health care. The Senator has been very clear in the need to recruit and retain new personnel, to move to new methods of service delivery, how we can be both high tech and high touch. I thank the Senator for his support for this amendment and also thank the Senator for his advocacy. I look forward to working with the Senator not only in moving the bill but moving our agenda to help veterans and doing it together.

Mr. BOND. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from West Virginia for his strong words in support of the VA. He has been a champion of the veterans affairs activities and his role in the authorizing committee is very important.

I have been asked by the chairman of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Senator SPECTER, to be added as a cosponsor. I also ask unanimous consent Senator MURKOWSKI be added as a cosponsor. I ask consent that Senator MIKULSKI and I be permitted to add cosponsors to this amendment after it is adopted. We sense there is a strong feeling of interest and support for this issue.

Before I conclude, let me say we have worked very closely with the General Accounting Office in this area. The GAO has been to every one of the VA's 22 networks over the last few years. They have been closely involved in the VA's transformation. I strongly support continued improvements in the use of VA health care funds. These funds need to be spent on veterans' care, not on monuments.

I believe we are ready to accept this amendment on voice vote.

Mr. WELLSTONE. Very quickly, I ask to have my name included as a cosponsor. I say to my colleagues, I appreciate this effort. I have done a lot of work with this around the country. I believe we can do better. I will have an amendment I will introduce shortly to deal with that question.

I thank my colleague from Missouri.

Mr. ROCKEFELLER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD a summary of the initiatives that GAO said would make for efficiencies. I think that ought to be in the RECORD. As my colleagues see these efficiencies, they are going to be rather stunned.

Second, the head of the health part of the VA, Dr. Thomas Garthwaite, has written a letter in which he says many of the proposals are inconsistent with law and VA policies—that is, the GAO suggestions—and could not be implemented. He said he was personally concerned some would result in a negative impact on quality of care and level of services.

I ask unanimous consent to have both of these printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS,
UNDER SECRETARY FOR HEALTH,
Washington, DC, September 22, 1999.

Hon. JOHN D. ROCKEFELLER IV,
Ranking Minority Member, Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, U.S. Senate, Washington, DC.

DEAR SENATOR ROCKEFELLER: As requested by your staff, we have reviewed the list of efficiencies reported by GAO in their September 14, 1999 report on Veterans Health Care: Fiscal Year 2000. GAO obtained the information in their report from preliminary network scenarios prepared in May 1999. Many of these proposals are inconsistent with law and VA policies; therefore, could not be implemented. Further, I am personally concerned that some would result in negative impact on quality of care or level of service.

The list does not represent VA plans.

Sincerely,

M. L. MURPHY,
(For Thomas L. Garthwaite, M.D.)

SUMMARY OF VA MANAGEMENT INITIATIVES [1] INCLUDED IN GAO ESTIMATE OF POTENTIAL EFFICIENCY SAVINGS

Count	VISN		(In thousands)
1	12	Share Transcription Srvcs/Med.Media/Electronic Library/Switchboard	($225)
2	6	VAMC Asheville reduce Rx cost	($1,100)
3	15	Clinical Pharmacy Savings—example polypharmacy	($4,000)
4	17	Consolidate Wards	($748)
5	17	Reduce usage of Medical Physician Contracts	($875)
6	3	Eliminate lab at FDR	($215)
7	8	Close acute care beds	($17,500)
8	22	Long Beach—Inc CMOP activity	($1,000)
9	11	Implement network wide Care Management Program	($1,100)
10	17	Refer vascular, neurosurgery and neurology to other VAMCs	($500)
11	16	Blanket Purchase Agreements/Consolidated Contracts	($950)
12	9	Improve Prescribing Patterns	($3,000)
13	15	Consolidation of Mental Health Management	($500)
14	17	Usage of other sources of employment (contract, CWT, IT, etc.)	($1,350)
15	6	VAMC Hampton Reduce 2 Librarians	($117)
16	12	Further Integration VAMC Chicago	($3,000)
17	9	Convert Capital Accounts to .01	($9,214)
18	2	Commodity Standardization & Other All Other Cost Savings	($600)
19	6	Restructure Dental Services	($100)
20	17	Establish Polypharmacy procedures	($310)
21	3	Centralize Pharmacy	($300)
22	9	Revise Huntington Dietetics/food prod processes/incr. prepared food use.	($194)
23	8	Inpatient to outpatient cost avoidance	($5,900)
24	14	Tele pathology/radiology—Nebraska	($250)
25	3	Reduce Radiology	($2,237)
26	1	Restrict Pharmacy formulary/polypharmacy	($1,350)
27	9	Restructure Murfreesboro Prosthetics/Orthotic Service	($200)
28	15	Maximize Telemedicine	($300)
29	15	Consolidation of selected laboratory functions	($2,000)
30	14	Adjust RN, LPN, NA mix @ Iowa City	($375)
31	2	Standardize Chemistry Equipment resulting in "All Other" cost savings	($250)

SUMMARY OF VA MANAGEMENT INITIATIVES [1] INCLUDED IN GAO ESTIMATE OF POTENTIAL EFFICIENCY SAVINGS—Continued

Count	VISN		(In thousands)
32	9	Close/Contract for Memphis Inpatient Neurosurgery	($1,093)
33	6	Hampton Replace 2 Podiatrists with Fee Basis	($100)
34	22	Loma Linda—Decrease Medical Media capabilities	($500)
35	6	VAMC Durham close Cardiac Cath Laboratory	($1,915)
36	11	Close unused buildings at Battle Creek, NIHCS and Danville	($900)
37	6	VAMC Hampton REDUCE 1 PATHOLOGIST	($183)
38	3	Close Int Care(Lyons)	($7,555)
39	6	VAMC Fayetteville Administrative staff reductions	($413)
40	9	Close Leestown Division of Lexington VAMC	($2,500)
41	16	Consolidation of Imaging Services	($1,100)
42	8	Convert capital to operating funds	($6,273)
43	6	VAMC Salem eliminate ENT contract	($80)
44	9	Move Veterans Community Care Center to VA space at Murfreesboro	($61)
45	7	Renovation of Ambulatory Care	($235)
46	3	Merge two Long Term Care Psych Wards	($1,500)
47	20	Equipment funding conversion	($5,000)
48	20	Standardization	($2,000)
49	21	Enhance referrals of Contract Dialysis patients to community resources	($587)
50	6	VAMC Fayetteville Close Orthopedics—surgery and clinic	($300)
51	9	Implement Centralized Controls over Fee Basis Expenditures	($250)
52	22	VISN-wide: reduce acute inpatient census	($1,219)
53	20	Consolidated Contracting	($2,000)
54	3	Convert EMS to VI workers	($702)
55	22	Long Beach—Ward closure	($1,250)
56	11	Standardize and consolidate procurement of medical supplies	($1,000)
57	14	Adjust indirect/direct Fte mix @ central Iowa	($400)
58	6	VAMC Fayetteville Close Intermediate Care Ward	($1,479)
59	10	Administrative Program Integration between Medical Centers	($3,129)
60	4	Reduce Management Layers (Overhead)	($9,000)
61	17	Advance Tray Delivery System	($850)
62	16	Laboratory Standardization	($1,000)
63	17	Eliminate Intermediate Beds	($534)
64	10	Consolidate Fee Basis Program Administration to central location	($450)
65	6	VAMC Salem reduce Administrative Services	($530)
66	22	Network Business Center—consolidated contracting/purchasing	($3,000)
67	3	Reduce respiratory therapist	($220)
68	22	VISN-wide: reduce .01 expenditures on NRM & station projects	($3,000)
69	6	VAMC Salisbury convert PTSD to residential care	($600)
70	19	Cheyenne-Denver Integration, eliminate Cheyenne Management Triad	($350)
71	18	VISN Contracts (bulk purchases)	($1,000)
72	1	Exchange 80% of anticipated Equipment and NRN funding	($28,748)
73	17	Reduce usage of Fee Basis Salary Account	($1,000)
74	9	VISN Negotiations to Control Cost of State Nursing Home medications	($349)
75	15	Tele-radiology coverage sharing	($500)
76	18	Conversion of NRM and Equipment multi-year funds	($3,000)
77	10	Considate Contracting Functional Responsibility	($506)
78	14	Pharmacy cost avoidance	($3,000)
79	12	Expand BioMedical Equip. Risk pool (Reduce equip. maint. contracts)	($150)
80	14	Consolidate Nuc Med @ Iowa City	($48)
81	9	Dietetics Efficiency Improvements at Memphis	($577)
82	3	Reduce "excessive" bed days of care	($12,000)
83	9	Adjust provider mix for more efficient ratio of physicians to support staff	($5,000)
84	3	Close Med Ward	($1,762)
85	3	Close Medicine (Lyons)	($1,850)
86	4	Restructure Depart. and Wrk Routines (Cont'd Input to Altern. Care)	($17,000)
87	6	VAMC Durham close Dialysis	($1,504)
88	18	Limit Station Level Projects	($300)
89	3	Convert long term Psych ward to residential	($1,000)
90	17	Eliminate Surgery Service at a tertiary care facility	($2,500)
91	6	VAMC Durham close Emergency Room	($849)
92	3	Limit Non-Formulary request for drugs	($250)
93	1	Boston Healthcare System	($10,000)
94	8	Energy Savings contract	($500)
95	19	Eliminate heart transplant program (SLC)	($512)
96	3	Network-Wide Home Health Contract	($500)
97	19	Eliminate fire department—City coverage (Sheridan)	($346)
98	21	Pharmacuetical pre-buys	($1,500)
99	7	Improve C&P Efficiencies	($500)
100	17	Reduce the usage of temporary positions	($450)
101	17	Contract out Misc Services	($4,410)
102	3	Close Psych Ward	($1,500)
103	15	Adj Staffing mix	($2,000)
104	22	Long Beach—Consolidate dietetics w/GLA	($1,500)
105	19	Eliminate cardiothorasic surgery (SLC)	($600)
106	7	Reduction of BDOCs	($1,441)
107	3	Transfer Acute Psych (Lyons) to Medical School	($4,277)

SUMMARY OF VA MANAGEMENT INITIATIVES [1] INCLUDED IN GAO ESTIMATE OF POTENTIAL EFFICIENCY SAVINGS—Continued

Count	VISN		(In thousands)
108	15	Energy Savings	($100)
109	5	Shift to Outpatient Care—hlth maint. residential care & community clinics	($2,334)
110	18	Energy Savings	($600)
111	9	Close Nashville Sleep Lab	($100)
112	20	Consolidate Laboratory Services	($3,000)
113	15	Closure of selected inpatient beds	($9,000)
114	22	VISN-wide: PACS/Teleradiology Implementation	($1,000)
115	19	Title 38 Adjustment, RN staff reduced, backfill with LPNs	($300)
116	3	Reduce Station projects	($1,250)
117	9	Reduce Huntington Research Support by Facility and Plant Management	($66)
118	17	Eliminate Psychogeriatric Nursing Units	($1,282)
119	15	Integrate Eastern Kansas-Topeka & Leavernworth	($11,000)
120	1	Integrate Sub Region 2, White River Jct. and Manchester	($2,000)
121	11	Standardize lab Cost per test agreement across network	($1,500)
122	11	ESPC—NIHCS	($750)
123	16	Pharmacy Benefits Management	($2,000)
124	6	VAMC Durham reduce Clinical Service Supervisors	($116)
125	17	Close small VAMCs except for Outpatient Care	($12,745)
126	7	Management initiatives to improve prosthetic services	($234)
127	20	Consolidate Fee Payments/Reduce Variation in Payment	($1,000)
128	1	Ntwrk Consolidated Lab transportation contract savings	($425)
129	10	Close 3 Wards converting to O/P P/S	($3,759)
130	11	Convert Equipment and NRM funding	($20,600)
131	7	Automation Of Pharmacy	($235)
132	4	Implement Clinical Guidelines	($2,520)
133	9	Integrate Murfreesboro Inpatient Surgery w/ Nashville	($2,886)
134	22	VISN-wide: Implement posthetics service line	($1,000)
135	2	Bio-Med Maintenance Contract Risk Pool	($1,500)
136	10	Energy Savings Performance Contract	($100)
137	6	VAMC Hampton REDUCE 2 SURGEONS	($338)
138	18	Convert MOD coverage from contract to VA MD (rotate coverage)	($500)
139	17	Close psychiatry care at a tertiary care facility	($2,200)
140	7	Improve Pharmacy by actively reviewing prescriptions (polypharmacy)	($335)
141	8	Advanced Food Prep	($1,000)
142	11	Standardize and consolidate procurement of prosthetic supplies	($1,500)
143	8	Integration opportunity (services & functions)	($2,200)
144	20	Close Inpatient Beds (including dorm) through centralization of services	($8,000)
145	19	VISN 19 Network Acquisition Service Center (NASC)—Contract Savings	($3,750)
146	14	A–76 Knoxville laundry	($500)
147	5	Reduction in Average Length of Stay	($5,090)
148	18	Discontinue Women's Clinic and merge with Primary Care	($360)
149	12	Implement Advance Food Prep and Delivery System	($1,200)
150	3	Network Home Oxygen Contract	($100)
151	3	Reduce Interior Design Budget	($300)
152	19	Close Inpatient Beds (Cheyenne)	($3,003)
153	6	VAMC Durham close Open Heart (DRG 104–107)	($4,259)
154	12	Maximize laundry production via reducing purchase of disposible items	($200)
155	19	Eliminate admitting office, emerge room contract (SLC)	($600)
156	6	VAMC Asheville eliminate Cancer/Oncology Program	($1,800)
157	19	Eliminate Lab contract provide in-house (SOCO HCS)	($150)
158	22	VISN-wide: Increase Bio-med. M&R risk pool for equip	($250)
159	1	Med/Surg Prime Vendor contract	($550)
160	8	Consolidate/streamline staffing	($4,000)
161	6	VAMC Salisbury close Med/Surg ICU	($200)
162	9	Prosthetics Centralized Purchasing on Mandated Contracts	($4,747)
163	14	equip/nrm funding conversion	($5,053)
164	14	(Integrate all Iowa sites	($250)
165	3	Reduce Pathology & Lab	($4,541)
166	9	Restructure Memphis Rehabilitation Service	($1,705)
167	1	Exchange CASCA Funds anticipated to be $8,500	($8,500)
168	16	In-house Radiation Therapy Referral	($900)
169	1	Establish Prosthetic Service Line (10% Savings)	($2,000)
170	21	Consolidate wards	($1,400)
171	7	Reorganization	($234)
172	9	VISN Protocols in Management or Reproductive Care	($1,774)
173	18	Consolidate services (e.g., IRM, mental health/primary/specialty care)	($375)
174	8	Bio Med Risk Pool	($1,000)
175	6	VAMC Hampton REDUCE 1 NURSE ANSTHETIST	($126)
176	8	Consolidate contracts	($2,400)
177	3	Close Lt Psych—NOHCS & Northport Transfer to HVHCS & Case Mgmt	($24,323)
178	6	VAMC Salem eliminate Medical Media Service	($259)
179	3	Consolidation of ICUs	($459)
180	17	Reduce usage of Fee Dental	($600)
181	9	Fee out remaining Memphis BPC program	($478)
182	9	Restructure Psych Pgms/Regionalize Inpatient/More Community Care	($4,500)
183	6	VAMC Becidey close all acute care inpatient beds	($3,557)
184	6	VAMC Salem FTSD inpatient to outpatient	($268)
185	6	VAMC Salem eliminate Cancer/Oncology	($233)
186	10	All Other costs associated with ward closures	($3,956)
187	7	Improve Cost Efficiencies	($19,491)
188	6	VAMC Hampton administrative efficiencies	($668)
189	11	Reductions of FTEE from program reallocations and integrations	($9,800)
190	7	Renovation of NHCU Efficiencies	($796)
191	2	Change in Provider Mix RN to LPN	($1,000)
192	9	Contract Murfreesboro Fire Fighter Services to city of Murfreesboro	($122)
193	9	Close/Contract for Memphis Inpatient Neurology	($418)
194	14	Implement multi sidebed workers—Nebraska	($50)
195	21	Prosthetic adjustment (bring contract prosthetic in-house)	($1,738)
196	3	Re-Org SCI Program—HVHCS	($2,000)
197	16	Conversion from IDCU to VISN-wide WAN PR	($1,100)
198	10	Laboratory Svc. Consolidation	($1,000)
199	14	Efficiencies in COJ—Nebraska	($150)
200	19	Energy Savings Performance Contract (ESPC)	($75)
201	7	Increase Occupancy Rates	($934)
202	11	Implement Pharmacy Benefits Management Initiatives across network	($1,600)
203	17	Consolidate Admin Services	($502)
204	22	VISN-wide: Reduce utility costs, ESPC and deregylation	($750)
205	9	Integrate Nashville Inpatient Psychiatry w/ Murfreesboro	($1,800)
206	1	Convert Inpatient Psych to Outpatient Psych Residential Care	($700)
207	3	Energy Savings Contract-Bronx	($250)
208	9	Restructure Mgn Home Substance Abuse/ HCMI/IPCC	($850)
209	9	Reorganization Mtn Home Physical Medicine & Rehab	($300)
210	14	Integrate all Nebraska sites	($1,000)
211	17	Close substance abuse at a tertiary care facility	($1,548)
212	3	Consolidate anesthesiology leadership	($234)
213	14	Enhanced partnering—Nebraska	($50)
214	14	Adjust RN, LPN, NA mix @ Des Moines	($236)
215	8	Reduce diagnostic costs/patient	($2,000)
216	19	Convert FY9/0 to .01 funds	($3,978)
217	9	Convert Inpataient Psych to Outpatient Psych Residential Care	($5,678)
218	15	Convert Medicine-Consolidate readings to VAMC St. Louis	($500)
219	15	Implement Business Office	($3,000)
220	7	Improve efficiency of Coronary Care services within VISN	($1,480)
221	1	Standardized Supplies	($2,000)
222	7	Contract out Housekeeping Services	($478)
223	9	Improve LTC utilization/Regionalization of Long Term Psych	($7,175)
224	2	Network Pre-Authorization for Fee services/ Impact of CBOCs on Fee	($500)
225	6	Convert 40% of $23.8 million in 9/0 Equipment funds to .001 All Other	($9,537)
226	5	3YR Infrastructure pgm on NRM projects reduced	($3,400)
227	6	VAMC Salem eliminate Orthopedics contract	($200)
228	6	Establish Prosthetic Service Line (10% Savings)	($500)
229	15	Standardization of Supplies and Services	($3,000)
230	3	Network Transcription Contract	($179)
231	3	Reduce prescription practices	($60)
232	9	VISN Protocol in Management of Hepatitis C workload	($4,119)
233	4	Advanced Food prep/Tray delivery Systems	($644)
234	11	CMOP	($3,000)
235	5	VAMC Fayetteville Discontinue contract for ENT services	($30)
236	7	Increase Mentral Health Occupancy	($9,070)
237	17	Reduce usage of Fee Medical	($600)
238	3	Achieve svgs thru drug procurement and excessive scripts	($9,808)
239	15	Advance CMOP Equipment funding to be paid back as reduction in cost	($1,000)
240	14	Laboratory cost avoidance	($195)
241	9	MOD for Non-Admin Hours Management Strategy	($968)
242	6	VAMC Salem eliminate Vocational Rehab	($379)
243	11	Divest of Allen Park facility	($1,000)
244	3	MICA to residential care	($1,000)
245	1	Phase out Medical Surgical Beds	($5,569)
246	15	Reduction of fee basis costs due to improvement mgt. of specialist time	($750)
247	2	Increase Efficient Drug Utilization	($500)
248	6	VAMC Salem eliminate Clinical pharmacists	($292)
249	6	Convert 50% of NRM funds to .001 All Other	($4,484)
250	6	VAMC Durham reduce Administrative Service Supervisors	($160)
251	3	Reduce "All Other" costs due to efficiencies	($1,000)
252	9	Establish Prosthetic Service Line (10% Savings)	($750)
253	6	VAMC Asheville elimination Cardiac Surgery Program	($2,400)
254	9	Improve Murfreesboro Food Production Efficiency	($320)
255	12	Further reduction of BDOC/1000	($13,100)
256	6	VAMC Fayetteville Contral point reductions from current level	($140)
257	21	Fee-Basis program review and adjustment	($2,614)
258	12	Outback on administrative support (research, education, etc.)	($339)
259	6	VAMC Hampton RIF (Completion of Re-organization)	($1,186)
260	9	Integrate Nashville Intermediate Medicine w/ Murfreesboro	($1,200)
261	6	VAMC Asheville consolidate laundry operations	($200)
262	19	Eliminate cardiac surgery contract, perform in-house (Grand Function)	($400)
263	6	Energy Savings Performance Contract—Task Oder #1	($1,500)
264	21	Relocation CMOP activity to less costly CMOP	($1,349)
265	1	Transportation Service Line. (10% Savings)	($700)
266	6	VAMC Fayetteville Discontinue contract for Dermatology services	($228)
267	15	Expansion of Food Service and VCS integration	($500)
268	3	Acute MDS	($700)
269	6	Restructure Administrative Services	($1,000)
270	22	VISN-wide: reduce .01 expenditures on equipment	($3,000)
271	3	Establish Facility Business Offices	($1,250)
272	9	Reorganize Mtn Home Engineering Workshops	($300)
273	18	Clinical Imprvmnts (e.g., telemedicine, dialysis, home oxygen, outsource)	($250)
274	16	Energy Savings Performance Contract	($750)
275	1	Phase out Tertiary Contract	($3,000)
		Total Savings and Reductions	($610,043)

[1] Management initiatives and dollar savings estimates are stated as included in VA's budget planning document entitled, "FY 2000 Financial Projection and Operating Strategies."

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I am pleased to co-sponsor this amendment to increase the appropriation for veterans medical care by $600 million over the amount reported by the committee.

This additional $600 million will bring the appropriations for veterans health care in both the House and the Senate to a total of $1.7 billion over the amount requested by the President. This increase should help stabilize veterans health care services in Iowa.

Iowa is in Network 14, which includes most of Nebraska, part of Illinois, and parts of Kansas, Missouri and Minnesota. Network 14 is one of those which has steadily lost funding under the Veterans Equitable Resource Allocation System, the funding system which, several years ago, changed the way VA monies are distributed around the country.

In addition, as my colleagues know, the VA health care system, following developments in the rest of the nation's health care system, has been emphasizing care in outpatient settings where appropriate. In keeping with this policy, the network including Iowa has developed outpatient clinics in several communities around the State, as well as health screening activities around the State.

In many respects, this shift to an outpatient focus is good policy. Certainly care should be given at the most medically appropriate level. Veterans can receive that care closer to home than might otherwise be the case if sufficient community clinics can be created. It is also probably the case that more veterans can be served by such an approach to health care services. This has certainly been the case in Iowa. Between 1996 and 1998 the total number of veterans served in Iowa has increased from 43,856 to 47,225, an increase of 3,369. Veterans treated on an inpatient

basis declined from 7,615 to 5,204 over that period, but veterans treated on an outpatient basis increased from 36,241 to 42,021.

Unfortunately, the combination of the shift of funding away from States like mine to the south and southwest, and tight Federal budgets for veterans health care has resulted in a squeeze on the budget for Network 14. Although the network has been able to continue to serve the category 7 veterans, I regularly hear complaints about very long waits for service, and, occasionally, about episodes of poor quality service which seem linked to too few staff.

I hope that this increase of $1.7 billion beyond what the President requested will help ease the budget squeeze of Iowa and Network 14, and will help prevent any further deterioration in access to services for Iowa's veterans. I am aware, of course, that the VA will be providing a 4.8 percent increase for VA employees, and this will come from the appropriation for VA programs. And health care costs continue to inflate. Nevertheless, this increased appropriation should help us in Iowa.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the amendment.

The amendment (No. 1744) was agreed to.

Mr. BOND. I move to reconsider the vote.

Ms. MIKULSKI. I move to lay that motion on the table.

The motion to lay on the table was agreed to.

AMENDMENT NO. 1747

(Purpose: To increase the amount appropriated for the Veterans Health Administration of the Department of Veterans Affairs by $1,300,000,000)

Mr. WELLSTONE. Mr. President, I thank my colleagues. I will send an amendment to the desk shortly.

Let me speak about this amendment. It is on the same subject matter. My colleague from West Virginia did a good job of outlining problems with the flatline budget. What we have had the last several years is a budget that has led to a decline, unfortunately, in the quality of health care for veterans. The presiding Chair has been a real leader in this area. I think he is very familiar with this.

Part of the problem is that the budget not only does not deal with gaps in veterans' health care, or the need to deal with a lot of veterans who are homeless—I think it is a shameful statistic when, some believe, maybe up to one-third of the homeless population are veterans—or the need not to do better for drop-in centers for veterans as an alternative to institutionalized care.

I say to my colleague from Maryland, perhaps the biggest gap is an ever-aging veteran population and the fact this carries with it very real challenges in delivering care to this part of the veteran population in a humane and dignified manner.

What this amendment which I will send to the desk does, it is consistent with the veterans independent budget. It will call for an increase of an additional $1.3 billion. I say this to my colleagues: This amount of resources for veterans' health care does not come out of thin air. This is based upon an independent budget which was produced by major veterans organizations—VFW, Disabled American Veterans, Paralyzed Veterans, and the Vietnam Vets.

What this budget does is something that I think is terribly important. It corroborates the findings of a report I was able to issue on the floor of the Senate not that long ago called ''Flatline Veterans Health Care and Fiscal Year 2000 Budget.'' I sent a copy out to all of my colleagues. Let me summarize the conclusion of this report.

Without a doubt, the men and women of the VA health care system will continue their effort to provide quality health care regardless of what future budgets hold. However, the majority of the 22 VA directors report without a significant infusion of new funds, the future is one of fewer staff, offering fewer services and treating fewer veterans.

Let me be clear about what is at stake. I appreciate the amendment we just passed, but the truth of the matter is it does not meet the needs. I want all of my colleagues to understand I came out with this amendment with Senator JOHNSON and 99 Senators voted to increase the amount of veterans' resources, to increase the budget, by exactly this amount of money. We have squeezed about as much money out of this as we can. The VA health care system is desperately short of resources. I think we absolutely have to do better.

This amendment means the difference between an aging World War II veteran driving 6 hours to a hospital for care and the same veteran visiting an outpatient clinic in his own community. The amendment could mean the difference between a week's wait and several months for an appointment at a mental health clinic for veterans suffering from PTSD. The amendment could be the difference between cost-effective and humane care instead of responding to a crisis.

Again, I want to make this clear. My colleagues are on record: 99 Senators voted to support an extra $3 billion above the President's request for the VA. That is exactly what this amendment calls for. This was an amendment to the budget resolution offered by my friend from South Dakota, Senator JOHNSON. It passed the Senate 99–0 and raised the Senate budget to the level recommended by the independent budget. I think it is now time to make good on that vote.

Finally, let me be clear. I think there is a powerful claim that veterans can make. I say to my colleague from Missouri, I will read from this study and what I have heard from the regional directors. It is unbelievable. They are making it clear with an additional $500 million or $600 million there are still huge gaps. If we are really serious about dealing with these gaps, if we are really serious about adequately funding VA health care—and I think the veterans have a moral claim—I think this is a commitment we made to our veterans, this amendment for the additional $1.3 billion brings us to the level that really will deal with these glaring gaps. As a matter of fact, again we had a 99–0 vote to increase the funding to exactly the level called for in this amendment.

I want to be clear. I have been critical of our President, Democratic President. I felt the flatline budget in the original budget proposal that came from the White House was no way to say thanks to the veterans. I have tried to work with colleagues on all sides of the aisle on this question. But in many ways I am on fire on this question. I really believe we have to live up to a commitment we have made.

Let me read from a ''Dear Colleague'' letter that I think brings this into sharp focus:

DEAR COLLEAGUE: We invite you to join us in honoring a commitment to our Nation's veterans, a commitment that we feel is being neglected in their time of need. We are concerned that funding for the fiscal year 2000 Department of Veterans Affairs contained in the fiscal year 2000 VA–HUD appropriations bill is inadequate in addressing the health care needs of our veterans' population.

During consideration of the budget resolution, we offered an amendment that increased veterans' health care in fiscal year 2000 by $2 billion above the level contained in the budget resolution. The U.S. Senate accepted the Johnson-Wellstone amendment by a 99–0 vote. Many of our Nation's veterans' organizations endorsed our efforts to increase veterans' health care.

Unfortunately, this appropriations bill only contains a $1.1 billion increase. Now we have added an additional $600 million to that, which is a step in the right direction. Therefore, we will be offering an amendment which would now provide for an additional $1.3 billion to make the total increase for veterans' health care up by $3 billion.

The VA budget has been flatlined for the past 3 years and this catchup effort is badly needed.

Mr. President, I want to marshal the evidence why I believe it is critically important my colleagues support this amendment. On June 15, 1999, I sent a letter to 22 of the veterans integrated service networks—that is what we mean when we are talking about the VISNs—asking them for data as to what they were dealing with, what were the effects of flatline funding. Each director was asked to provide specific information about the impact on veterans' health care of the Clinton administration's fiscal year 2000 proposal and possible congressional appropriations levels.

By July 12, it was amazing. All 22 directors had provided a response to my office. I want to summarize some of what they had to say.

By the way, some of what they have said, some of the data, is deeply troubling. They made it clear that then-Under Secretary for Health Kenneth Kaiser's words in an internal memo earlier this year, that the President's proposed budget posed ''very serious financial challenges,'' was no exaggeration.

We have made some improvement with this amendment that Senator BOND has introduced. But let me go on with the amendment I have introduced, which my colleague from New Hampshire, Senator SMITH, also wants to cosponsor. I ask unanimous consent he be included as a cosponsor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. WELLSTONE. Mr. President, 20 of these VISNs would have funding shortfalls under the Clinton budget. Twenty out of 22 VISNs reported that the Clinton administration's fiscal year 2000 budget would result in a shortfall of funds necessary to provide either current services or current services combined with new mandates and demands.

As many as 10,000 employees would be cut under the Clinton budget. Nineteen of the 22 VISNs indicated that staff reductions would be necessary under this budget. Altogether, the VISNs reported that staffing levels would have to be reduced by as many as 10,000 employees through a combination of attrition, furloughs, buyouts, and reductions.

Ten of these would reduce patient workload under the President's budget; 71,000—and then I will get to my colleague's improvement to talk about why I think it is an improvement but falls short of what we should be doing—71,129 fewer veterans would be served under this budget.

Let me go to the negative impact of the Clinton budget, plus the additional $500 or $600 million that we have here.

I asked them on the $500 million, the majority of VISNs reported on the budget $500 million above the President's proposal. It is $500 million above, which is not quite the level that my colleague from Missouri has proposed.

Again, here is what we hear: 12 reported they would experience shortfalls in providing services; 13 talked about reduced staffing; and, again, 38,000 fewer veterans would be served. And over and over and over again what I heard from these directors, which reflected the independent budget report by these veterans organizations, is: Senators, if you want to honor your commitment to veterans, if you want to say thanks to us, then you have to recognize the impact, the dramatic negative impact of these flatline budgets.

I say to my colleagues on the floor, I am being scrupulously, if you will, nonpartisan in my critique. The President's budget was woefully inadequate. But what these veterans organizations did, since we have been saying to them for years, ''Stop being so negative; tell us what you need,'' is they got together in an excellent coalition effort. They put together this independent budget, and they talked about what we would need to do to help an increasingly aging population, what we would need to do to make sure we had adequate staff, what we would need to do to make sure that staff wasn't doubling up on hours, what we would need to do to make sure there were not longer waiting lines, what we would need to do to get more community-based care not only to elderly veterans but to veterans who are struggling with posttraumatic stress syndrome—what we would need to do to honor our commitment.

This amendment by our colleague is a step in the right direction. It is what the House has called for, but it is not what Disabled American Veterans, Paralyzed Veterans of America—let me simply read from this letter from PVA, and then I say to my colleague from New Hampshire, if he wants to speak on this amendment, I will finish up.

DEAR SENATOR WELLSTONE,

On behalf of the Paralyzed Veterans of America, I am writing to urge you to provide a $3 billion increase for veterans' health care. The $1.7 billion increase provided by the House of Representatives—

Which is now what we have here—

is inadequate and would only serve to maintain the continuing deterioration in health care provided to veterans. The $1.1 billion increase provided in the bill provided by the Senate Appropriations Committee does not even reach the level of inadequacy.

In fact, the $1.7 billion increase represents a net increase of only $300 million. The Administration's budget proposal not only flat-lined veterans' health care for the fourth year in a row but called for $1.4 billion in ''management efficiencies''—cuts in personnel and health care. Once these cuts are averted, veterans' health care will be left with a $300 million net increase. If the increase of $1.1 billion provided in S. 1596 is maintained, the VA will suffer a net decrease of $300 million.

The Independent Budget identified the resource needs—

This is the operative language—

of the VA, as requiring a $3 billion increase. This was also the same amount identified by the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs in its ''Views and Estimates'' —

That is our Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs—

which stated:

VA requires over $3 billion in additional discretionary account funding in FY 00 to support its medical care operations.

Mr. President, what I am simply saying to my colleagues is that if, in fact, we have DAV and VFW and Paralyzed Veterans and Vietnam Veterans of America who do their own analysis, present this budget, say we need to go up $3 billion from the President's request, and in addition we came out with an amendment, Senator JOHNSON and I and every colleague—99 Senators voted for this increase—then why in the world are we not going to vote for an appropriation of money that will, in fact, deal with these gaps, that will, in fact, make a huge difference?

So I send my amendment to the desk, which would increase the amount appropriated for the Veterans Health Administration of the Department of Veterans Affairs by $1.3 billion. I send this amendment to the desk on behalf of myself, Senator JOHNSON, and Senator SMITH.

I see Senator JOHNSON and Senator SMITH on the floor. But let me just summarize.

I thank my colleague from Missouri.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. If the Senator would suspend, the clerk will report.

The bill clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Minnesota [Mr. WELLSTONE], for himself, Mr. JOHNSON, and Mr. SMITH of New Hampshire, proposes an amendment numbered 1747.

Mr. WELLSTONE. I ask unanimous consent reading of the amendment be dispensed with.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The amendment is as follows:

On page 17, between lines 14 and 15, insert the following:

SEC. 108. The amount appropriated or otherwise made available by this title under the heading ''VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION'' is hereby increased by $1,300,000,000.

Mr. WELLSTONE. I just simply say to my colleagues, we are on record supporting this increase in funding. We voted for it 99–0. In addition, I have three pieces of evidence to support this.

Our own Senate Veterans' Committee said this is really what we need. That is what our Senate Veterans' Committee said. I sent out, because I could not get a straight story from the Veterans' Administration, a survey to all these different VISNs, and 22 directors responded. They said: This is what we need. And they talked about staff reductions and longer waiting lines and what they really needed.

Finally, the veterans organizations themselves spent a considerable amount of time studying the needs of veterans and came up and said: Listen, this is the shortfall. If you really want to make a commitment to us, if you really want to deal with some of these deficiencies, if you really want to deal with some of these gaps in health care, if you really want to say thanks to us, whatever money you are going to have in the surplus—which will go wherever—you ought to at least honor your commitment to us.

That is what this amendment asks my colleagues to do. I hope there will be a strong vote for it.

Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, if I might ask my colleague a question.

Mr. BOND addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota has not yielded the floor.

Mr. WELLSTONE. I am pleased to take a question.

Mr. JOHNSON. Yes.

Let me say first, while I am very grateful for the effort that our colleague from West Virginia and our colleague from Missouri have undertaken to try to better fund the VA budget, I commend my colleague from Minnesota, Senator WELLSTONE, for clarifying and making it very clear that in fact while the budget picture is difficult—we know that—at the same time, if we were to fully fund everything that really ought to be done, it would require a $3 billion infusion, given the 3 years of flatline budget that the VA health care budget is already suffering through.

Certainly, I applaud the effort to bring the VA health care budget up $1.7 billion instead of $1.1 billion. I think that is a very positive thing. But it does concern me that when we talked about the full $3 billion increase, we were talking then about the opportunity, as I understand it—if the Senator agrees with me—that that would have been sufficient then to fund the hepatitis C screenings, emergency care services, and 54,000 new patients in 89 outpatient clinics around America. This is the kind of agenda we would have been able to proceed with if we had been able to secure the full $3 billion instead of $1.1 billion—or certainly $1.7 billion.

So I applaud again my friend, Senator WELLSTONE, recognizing we worked together on the budget resolution earlier this year to secure House agreement with a $3 billion increase. And we have been fighting ever since to try to hold the number as high as we can get it, recognizing that when it comes to veterans' health care, would the Senator agree with me, this ought to be the kind of budget priority that comes at the head of the line rather than one that we fund with whatever is left over after everything else has been concluded.

In fact, these are the individuals who put their lives on the line, who disrupted their families, who did their duty, who gave their service to our Nation and made it possible for our liberty to be protected, for our democracy to be preserved. Yet, too often, when it comes to living up to the obligations that our Government has made to the health care of our veterans and their families, we cry poverty when in fact virtually everything else in the budget has already been taken care of.

It would seem to me that we do have a need to continue to put veterans' health care concerns among our very first priorities—in fact, right up there with our national security funding itself. I think that veterans' health care funding—if the Senator would agree with me—is part and parcel of our national defense strategy—at least it ought to be regarded in that respect—because it is part of what keeps so many of our best and brightest young people interested in a military service career at a time when we have too many people leaving the military, where we have retention problems.

It would seem to me that one of the reasons we have that problem is, we have too often reneged on and neglected our obligations on such fundamental things as veterans' health care and veterans' benefits in the past.

So again, I appreciate the effort to try to raise the visibility of our obligations to our veterans and to secure the best possible funding we can possibly get out of this conference report.

Mr. WELLSTONE. Mr. President, I say to my colleague from South Dakota, first of all, I appreciate his support and his work, as I do the support of my colleague from New Hampshire.

I remind my colleague from South Dakota that when we started out working on this and brought the amendment before the Budget Committee, where colleagues voted to what would now raise this $1.3 billion above the amendment from my colleague from Missouri up to the $3 billion difference between what the administration had and what the veterans independent budget said we needed, we were doing this on the basis of just lots of meetings and conversations with veterans.

My colleague gives some very good examples. It is not a question of political strategy. I was very moved by this letter from PBA. One of the things they say to me and say to us, I say to Senator JOHNSON, is they point out that the VA requires this is the amount—this is a report from the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, views and estimates. This is the summary of our own Veterans' Committee of what we need.

VA requires over $3 billion in additional discretionary account funding in FY 00 to support its medical care operations: an additional $1.26 billion to meet unanticipated spending requirements; an additional $853.1 million to overcome the effects of inflation and ''uncontrollables'' in order that it might maintain current services; and at least $1 billion—

This is the way they break it down—

in additional funding to better address the needs of an aging and increasingly female, veterans population.

Mr. JOHNSON. Would the Senator agree, with this fiscal year ending with the estimated $14 billion surplus over and above that required for Social Security, that we ought to be able to, with the $14 billion surplus, find some additional room to address the problems of veterans' health care?

Mr. WELLSTONE. I say to my colleague from South Dakota that given the surplus and given the record economic performance, I am in complete agreement with him.

I again say to all of my colleagues, Democrats and Republicans—who I think support this and are on record supporting this additional investment—that we get in my office back in Minnesota more constituent calls from veterans than any other group. All too often these are veterans who fall between the cracks.

I was a cosponsor of the Bond amendment. I think it is a step in the right direction. But we are on record saying we know we have to do a better job. We have the Senate Veterans' Committee on record in its own report. We have the veterans independent budget that identifies gaps in all these needs.

In addition, I have a survey that I did with a lot of these visiting directors in which they say they will need these resources. If we are going to say on the floor of the Senate we are for the veterans, if we are going to say we are for improving veterans' health care, then I think this is an additional improvement to the amendment we have just passed. This is an amendment that does the job. This is the amendment that many veterans organizations are saying we ought to fight for.

Again, I say to my colleagues, 99 colleagues are on record. I hope we will get a very strong vote for it.

I yield the floor.

Mr. BOND addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BURNS). The Senator from Missouri.

Mr. BOND. Mr. President, for the information of all Senators, I hope the leadership will be able to clear an agreement that all first-degree amendments in order to this bill be submitted to the desk by 3 p.m. today. That will help ensure swift passage of this HUD-VA bill. In addition, let me clarify, the call for regular order with respect to the HUD-VA bill only applies to the bankruptcy bill. Therefore, Members can expect a late night this evening in order to make progress on the bill.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Ms. MIKULSKI. Mr. President, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mr. BOND. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that Senator JEFFORDS and Senator HAGEL be added as cosponsors.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Ms. MIKULSKI. Mr. President, I ask that Senator SARBANES be added as a cosponsor to our $600 million VA amendment.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Ms. MIKULSKI. Mr. President, I join with my colleague from Missouri in asking all those on my side of the aisle, please cooperate with the committee, have those first-degree amendments in by 3, so we can expeditiously move this bill.

I also ask my colleagues on my side, those who want to speak about aspects of the bill, come forward and be prepared to speak. We have already been on the bill for 2 hours and haven't had one quorum call. I hope, in order to move expeditiously, we don't have big, empty spaces.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Missouri.

Mr. BOND. Mr. President, I should clarify that I was not asking unanimous consent that all amendments be in by 3 p.m. I am hoping the leadership

will be able to clear an agreement establishing a time. This was an expression of hope. I am sure my distinguished colleague from Maryland has the same hope burning in her heart that I do in mine, but it is not ripe to propound as a unanimous consent at this time.

I was not asking unanimous consent on the 3 p.m. for filing all amendments. We hope we can get a reasonable time.

The distinguished ranking member of the full committee wishes to speak. I need to make just a few quick points about the Wellstone amendment.

We have, as everyone knows, been working for some time to determine how much VA needs in its budget. We knew that the budget submitted to us was entirely inadequate, and we know that the VA's own Under Secretary issued a memorandum last February indicating his concerns about it. There were no details in the President's budget. So in our committee, where we have responsibility for preparing a budget, we take requests, and these requests we judge in good faith.

We have the responsibility of allocating the scarce dollars. We asked the VA and its networks to put together plans as to how they would operate. That is where we learned about the closures, cutbacks in care, reduction of 13,000 employees. We saw that was a disaster. We asked VA about the proposed management efficiencies that networks said could be implemented, and should be implemented, to improve the efficiency of VA care, and they said about half of them could be. So they are finding money by making savings within their budget.

The things that they are doing are commonsense, good practices, such as bulk purchasing, improving prescription patterns, centralizing certain functions, closing unused buildings, and so forth. We are going to have to do more of that.

To be clear, we expect continuing reforms. We want to see good health care for veterans. In many instances in the past, that has not been accomplished purely by throwing in more money. We need to make sure the money is effectively spent. We have provided an additional $600 million to make sure they have the funds adequate to ensure the health care dollars do deliver to the needs of veterans.

The amount we have agreed to, this addition of $1.7 billion, is, I understand, the highest increase ever for VA medical care. The amount we have agreed to in the budget of $19 billion will allow VA to provide more care and better care to our veterans. Also, I should note that the Veterans Affairs budget has not been flatlined. We have been adding about $100 or $200 million a year, and we think that this increase, a very significant one, is vitally important.

The proposal the Senator from Minnesota made would not take money from the surplus. It would take money from Social Security. We are working within very tight budget constraints to provide an additional $600 million. Any dollars above that will come straight out of Social Security. The $14 billion is onbudget, non-Social Security funds and has been used up in emergency spending for agriculture, the census, and other emergencies. There is no free money floating out there. That is one of the constraints under which we must operate on the Appropriations Committee. That is why the leadership of the Senator from West Virginia, the Senator from Alaska, and the Budget Committee has been so important to make that we could provide additional funds.

I know the distinguished Senator from West Virginia has some comments.

Mr. WELLSTONE. Mr. President, might I respond to what my colleague said, if I could ask my colleague from West Virginia.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Who yields time?

Mr. BYRD. Mr. President, is time under control?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Time is under control.

The Senator from West Virginia.

Mr. BYRD. Mr. President, I will only speak briefly. I was in an appropriations conference meeting when Mr. BOND so graciously called up the amendment on my behalf and on his behalf and on behalf of Senator STEVENS, Senator MIKULSKI, and others. I express my appreciation to Senator BOND for doing that. I express my appreciation to Senator STEVENS for helping us in the Appropriations Committee to have increased allocations for the various subcommittees. And particularly with reference to the Subcommittee on VA, HUD, and Independent Agencies, the Senator from Missouri, Mr. BOND, and the Senator from Maryland, Ms. MIKULSKI, have performed an extremely important job and have done it well, with the limited amount of funds that have been available to them.

In the committee, we recently increased the amount for veterans' health care by $1.1 billion. We did it because Mr. STEVENS and I were able to find ways to add monies for the VA–HUD subcommittee. On the floor earlier today, the Senate agreed to the amendment offered by Mr. BOND on my behalf and on his behalf and the others whose names I have already mentioned.

I am sure that each of us would like to do more. I have been in Congress now, this is my 47th year. I have always supported the interests of our veterans. I was a member of the Senate when we did not have a Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee. The Rules Committee, on which I served, made it possible for the Senate to consider and agree to the proposal that there be a standing committee of the Senate entitled the Veterans' Affairs Committee. I was a Senator who was on the Rules Committee then and who stood up for the veterans. We received a lot of mail at that time from veterans all over the country in support of having a standing committee of the Senate designated the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

So, I have been very supportive of the veterans and their families, and legislation and appropriations that affect their welfare and their well-being.

Now, the House has approved a figure of $1.7 billion as an increase over the amount that was in the President's budget. The Senate committee approved an increase of $1.1 billion. That left us $600 million short of where the House of Representatives stood. I think it would be very important to the veterans if the Senate were able to go to the House, in conference, with a figure that matched the higher figure the House has already agreed upon. That is one reason why Senator STEVENS, Senator BOND, Senator MIKULSKI, and I thought it was very important to increase the amount by $600 million.

I want to thank our veterans organizations also. Many of us can only imagine how difficult it must be for a soldier to be awakened in the depths of the night by the startling sound of shell explosions or small arms gunfire, to be on the other side of the world from where one's family and friends make their homes, to wade through muddy water up to one's shoulders, to carry 50 pounds of ammunition and supplies on one's back, not knowing if one will live to see the sunset at the end of the day.

Our veterans have gone into harm's way time and time again in order to preserve the freedoms that we Americans enjoy and that our friends and allies have also fought and died to protect. There are many Americans who have dared to know the horror of war in service to this country. I am not one of those. I am not a veteran. I worked in the shipyards and helped build the *Victory* ships and *Liberty* ships to convey men and supplies to our military forces overseas. So I did my part. But I did not serve in any of the military forces.

Unfortunately, as the veteran population begins to reach an age where they need more health care, too many American veterans are facing the stark circumstances wherein it may appear that the Nation they faithfully and honorably served is turning its back on them in time of need. We do not intend to do that. We don't intend to do that on the VA–HUD subcommittee. We don't intend to do that on the full Appropriations Committee of the Senate.

So we think we have responded as best we could under the budgetary restrictions that confront us. We have caps that are set in statute. We would like to do more in many areas where appropriations are concerned, but we are restricted by the budgetary caps. I have been in favor of lifting those caps, but they are not lifted as of now.

I think it is our duty to honor our debt to the veterans who, in the spirit of those patriots of the Revolution,

dared much, risked much, and sacrificed much that we might enjoy the blessings of freedom.

I also will take a moment here to say I was very supportive of our veterans when I was chairman of the Appropriations Committee. I helped to appropriate funds and to allocate funds to the VA–HUD subcommittee in order that we might add clinics, add space in various veterans hospitals around the country. We did it in my own State of West Virginia, in Huntington, Beckley, Clarksburg, Martinsburg. I can remember when I helped to provide $76 million for a new veterans hospital in Martinsburg to replace the old Newton D. Baker Hospital. I have been in this fight a long time. I am not a veteran, but I think I have been true to my duties and responsibilities here, one of which duties is to see that our veterans are taken care of, treated fairly, and that their services are respected, appreciated, and remembered.

Therefore, I was happy today to provide the amendment that was offered by Mr. BOND and cosponsored by Mr. BOND, Mr. STEVENS, Ms. MIKULSKI, and an additional 20 or more Senators.

I thank the distinguished Senator from Missouri for yielding this time.

I have to go back to another appropriations conference. This time, I want to take up the battle for our drought-stricken areas of West Virginia and other States in the eastern United States, stretching from Tennessee up to Vermont. Again, that is with respect to the drought and the problems it has created for our livestock farmers. I want to go there and fight their battle. For the moment, I have been delighted to come to the floor. I also appreciate the support of other Senators on this amendment. I express my appreciation to Senator STEVENS, who is not on the floor, and to Senator BOND, and Senator MIKULSKI for the excellent leadership they continue to give in this extremely important bill.

I thank all the cosponsors to the amendment which would provide an additional $600 million for veterans' medical care, including Senators BOND, DOMENICI, STEVENS, MIKULSKI, GRASSLEY, BINGAMAN, JOHNSON, SPECTER, MURKOWSKI, WELLSTONE, SMITH of New Hampshire, HOLLINGS, ROCKEFELLER, AKAKA, CONRAD, KERREY, BIDEN, LEAHY, BOXER, HAGEL, MURRAY, JEFFORDS, SARBANES, HUTCHINSON, REID, KERRY, ROBB, BUNNING, BRYAN, KENNEDY, ROBERTS, ASHCROFT, SNOWE, COLLINS, COVERDELL, HARKIN, ABRAHAM, DORGAN, DURBIN, THURMOND, MCCAIN, LEVIN, LANDRIEU, FRIST, and others.

Mr. WELLSTONE addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

Mr. WELLSTONE. Mr. President, I know my colleague from New Hampshire wishes to speak. I thank Senator BYRD, and I agree with what he said. I want to go over the evidence that in fact we can do better and we have to. I support Senator BOND's effort. But in terms of all of the data we have on veterans' health care, I think the amendment meets that.

I ask unanimous consent I be able to follow Senator SMITH. I will only take 5 minutes.

Mr. BOND. I object, Mr. President. We don't have the time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mr. SMITH of New Hampshire addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Hampshire is recognized.

Mr. SMITH of New Hampshire. Mr. President, I want to say that I support the efforts of the committee in increasing by some $600 million the money for the benefits to veterans that was not in the bill. I commend them for their leadership in doing it. I agree with my colleague from Minnesota that this is simply not enough.

I think my colleague is correct. I want to say to my colleague from Minnesota that not only do I appreciate his efforts on the floor in behalf of our Nation's veterans, but I support those efforts.

I am proud to be a cosponsor of this amendment because I believe we have heard horror story after horror story after horror story in all of our offices year after year after year. It seems as if we always have money for everything. Lord knows I have been down here many times opposing that ''money for everything.'' Indeed, I have an amendment that I will offer very shortly. My colleague from Minnesota might disagree with me, but it increases money for veterans but takes it out of the AmeriCorps Program, which he probably will oppose me on.

But on this amendment, I want to say that we agree. The veterans of this country need more help. They shouldn't have to beg for it. They deserve it; they earned it. We have heard it time and time again—whether it is the American Legion, the VFW, DAV—whomever you spoke to. In meeting after meeting in my office, we hear the same thing.

I think my colleague from Minnesota will agree with me on this. We drive to work into Washington, especially in the winter, and nothing is more painful than seeing a veteran lying on a grate in this city. This happens all over America. I have seen this now for 15 years. I have fought for 15 years to try to correct it.

I am just determined now that I am going to do whatever I have to do on this floor to see that it stops.

There is no way this country, as great as it is and as rich as it is, should tolerate that. Enough is enough. It has happened in Democratic administrations. It has happened in Republican administrations. Enough is enough.

Whatever we have to do to help these veterans get off those grates, whatever we have to do to help veterans get the health care and shelter and things they need, then I am prepared to do it. I am prepared to sacrifice somewhere else in the budget to do it—whatever it takes, whatever we have to do.

I say to my colleague from Minnesota that I appreciate his leadership on this. I am proud to support him on it. I will continue to support any efforts that he should author, or perhaps he may support some that I may author, in terms of helping to get this mess straightened out so that we don't have to continually hear these horror stories of veterans being denied care.

I know the Senator from Minnesota has, as I have, gone to veterans homes. You see some of the conditions they have to endure. It is outrageous.

We give them the best. We try to give them the best when they go to serve, wherever that may be. We ask them to go all over the world—too much in my view. Then when they come back, they deserve the best, as well, in terms of care. I think with good intentions we try to do that, but we have failed. We have come up short in a lot of areas. I think the Senator's amendment will help to address that.

I think everybody on the floor supports our Nation's veterans. I don't in any way insinuate that any of my colleagues who are offering another amendment of a lesser amount don't support veterans. But we clearly have not addressed this problem. The Senator from Minnesota pointed out that there was a 99–0 vote on exactly what the Senator is proposing. I see no reason why we can't step forward. It is a shame that we have to have another vote. I think it ought to be in the legislation. It ought to be in the bill.

But I am going to stand here no matter how many times it takes, as often as possible, and as long as possible to make these points.

I am more than happy to join my colleague in doing this to help our Nation's veterans.

Mr. President, parliamentary inquiry? Are we on the Wellstone amendment at this point?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. That is correct.

Mr. SMITH of New Hampshire. Could I ask a question of the manager? Is it the manager's intention to have a vote on this amendment? I have one I would like to offer. I would be happy to offer it and have it set aside, or have this one set aside. I don't know what the intention of the manager is.

Mr. BOND. Mr. President, we are busily working to get a unanimous consent order as to the timing for the vote on this issue to accommodate a number of our colleagues. We are working busily right now. The reason I asked that I be able to regain the floor after the Senator from New Hampshire spoke was to be able to propound that unanimous consent request. I am still hoping that momentarily we will have the unanimous consent request.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maryland.

Ms. MIKULSKI. Mr. President, while we are waiting to fine-tune the unanimous consent on this amendment, I

would like to comment on this amendment.

I also would like to take this opportunity to ask unanimous consent that Senator HARRY REID be a cosponsor of the $600 million VA amendment offered by Senators BYRD, STEVENS, BOND, and MIKULSKI.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Ms. MIKULSKI. Mr. President, first I thank the Senator from West Virginia, Mr. BYRD, for his assistance on this bill and his advocacy for veterans. We would not have even be able to move this bill to the floor had it not been for Senator STEVENS and Senator BYRD identifying the $600 million. We need to look at where we were 6 weeks ago.

Veterans' health care under the spending caps was down $1 billion. Thanks to the advocacy and ingenuity, I might add, of the chairman of the Appropriations Committee and the ranking member, we were able to come to the floor. That is why I also said in my opening statement that we had the will, but we didn't have the wallet.

Again, with Senator BYRD and Senator STEVENS identifying a window or a particular technique to declare $600 million in emergency, we will be able to ensure that nothing is closed.

I don't dispute the comments of the Senator from Minnesota about the need for more. I also don't dispute his comments about the need for better. The Senator from Minnesota is well known for his advocacy for veterans. We particularly congratulate him for his steadfastness in continuing to bring to our attention the plight of veterans with posttraumatic stress syndrome.

I also remember him speaking for the nuclear vets—those who were exposed to nuclear radiation where that trauma was not compensated for or identified.

I thank the Senator for what he has done, but I have to say his amendment violates the Budget Act. It breaks the spending caps. He and I know the Budget Act leaves much to be desired. The budget policy leaves much to be desired because the spending caps have prohibited us from meeting compelling human needs.

I know that some time this week President Clinton will be vetoing the tax bill. I am glad he is going to do that because then maybe we can get down to serious business about how we can fund Social Security, extend the solvency of Medicare, and meet compelling human needs.

I say to the Senator that I support what he wants to do in principle, but I will not be able to support his amendment because it violates the budget caps. But, again, the points that he has made are very well taken.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Missouri.

Mr. BOND. Mr. President, just for the information of all Senators, we have been working on a time for the vote on this amendment. There seems to be a consensus, although I am not in a position to ask unanimous consent, that most of the colleagues will be back and prepared to vote at 2 p.m.

For the information of all Senators, I will propose to raise a Budget Act point of order at 2 p.m. I believe the Senator may wish to make a motion to waive that Budget Act point of order.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

Mr. WELLSTONE. Mr. President, if my colleague eventually propounds this, I wonder if I might have a few minutes after he speaks to waive it—5 minutes.

Mr. BOND. Mr. President, if we are able to have a unanimous consent agreement to establish it at 2 o'clock, I will ask for 4 minutes equally divided prior to that time to discuss the Wellstone amendment. I did not understand we were ready to have that unanimous consent agreement. Without the unanimous consent agreement, we cannot assure the Senator he will have that time because raising the Budget Act point of order triggers the activities resulting in potentially an immediate vote.

Apparently, we are not ready to propound a unanimous consent request, so I urge the Senator sometime before 2 o'clock to make his comments in support of waiving the Budget Act.

Ms. MIKULSKI. If the Senator will yield, isn't it safe to say we will have no votes before 2 o'clock, to protect Members?

Mr. BOND. It is the wish of the bipartisan leadership we not have any votes prior to 2 o'clock. I assure all Senators if we conclude debate on this amendment, it might be possible for the amendment to be set aside and others to be considered. There will be no votes before 2 o'clock.

Mr. WELLSTONE. Mr. President, I want to go, first of all, to the substance of what has been said about veterans' health care. Then I will talk to staff about how we might debate my motion to waive the Budget Act.

Let me, first of all, say my good friend from Missouri said we didn't have a flatline budget. If we increase the budget $100 million, $200 million a year, compared to medical inflation, that is a flatline budget. Spend time with veterans anywhere and one knows it did not work. The budget ran way behind health care needs. That is to what the amendment tries to speak.

Second, I ask my colleagues, deciding what we need to do by way of making sure we are providing good health care for veterans, my colleague talks about what the Veterans' Administration has said to him. They have to deal with OMB and the bean counters. Or are you going to pay some attention to this independent budget put together by many veterans organizations, which calls for the need for an additional $3 billion above the President's proposal, which is now, my amendment, $1.3 billion. We are getting there because the veterans community has organized and the veterans community has been heard. I am glad they have done so.

Here is a list of independent budget endorsers: National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, Veterans of the Vietnam War, Vietnam Veterans of America, Retired Officers Association, Military Order of the Purple Heart, Disabled American Veterans, Paralyzed Veterans. There are 40 different organizations that endorse this budget.

It is interesting to me; we have been saying to the veterans: You have to stop complaining. Tell us what the needs are.

They did the research. They put this budget together. They say: Here are the gaps; here are the needs; here is what it will take. My colleagues come to the floor on a budget resolution and 99 of them vote for exactly what this amendment calls for. Then I cite as evidence our own Senate veterans committee, Committee on Veterans' Affairs, which I serve. Its views and estimates are the VA will require over $3 billion in additional discretionary spending to meet the needs of the aging, to meet the needs of an increasingly female veteran population. That is what we say we need to do.

We have an independent budget, our own Senate veterans committee, saying this is what we need. In addition, I sent this letter to the VISN directors and asked what was happening—I do not get the straight story—the same people my colleague from Missouri says on whom we are relying.

I supported the amendment of the Senator from Missouri. I did not second degree. I think it is a step in the right direction.

However, I ask my colleagues this question: Aren't we going to live up to the commitment we made in a vote not that long ago?

Then I am told this is going to come out of Social Security. This comes out of the surplus the same way your additional expenditures for defense come out of the surplus, the same way your tax cuts come out of the surplus. Why don't you put as high a priority on veterans as you do on additional defense expenditures or in tax cuts? My colleague, Senator SMITH, obviously does. I think other colleagues will, too, when it comes time to vote.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent Senator JOHNSON be included as an original cosponsor, if he is not.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

PRIVILEGE OF THE FLOOR

Mr. WELLSTONE. Mr. President, I ask that Harold R. Holmes, an intern with me, be given floor privileges during consideration of this debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. WELLSTONE. Mr. President, on the caps and this whole question of breaking the caps, maybe I should be one of the first Senators to come to the floor of the Senate and say why not be straightforward about this. We keep doing all the emergency expenditures. I didn't vote for the caps. I didn't vote for the budget agreement. I didn't vote

for the budget caps. I find it a little surprising that a lot of people say: Oh my gosh, the Medicare reimbursement is struggling; our rural hospitals are toppling; what is happening to our producers who are struggling to survive? Home health care providers are struggling to survive, and our teaching hospitals and medical schools are struggling to survive. All of this is true.

Everybody knows we will eventually get beyond these caps. We are saying to the veterans, there is a surplus but we use it for defense, we will use it for tax cuts, we will vote for $3 billion more—which is now $1.3 billion—because we increased it. But we are going to say this violates the Budget Act, and we are going to use that as a reason not to vote for this?

I will try to say this in a very substantive, quiet way. I appreciate what the Senator from Maryland said, and I thank her. I haven't heard any Senator come to the floor and disagree with any statements I have made about the gaps in veterans' health care, about the needs, and about what we really need to do to live up to our commitment. I haven't heard anybody refute the case that I have made on the floor of the Senate.

By the way, I say to my colleague from Maryland, I will have it filed by 3 o'clock. We have had various atomic votes. Every time I pass this on the floor of the Senate, it is taken out in conference committee. I will be back with an amendment on this bill. I am sure I will be told this is in violation of some kind of budget agreement. People who go to Nevada, ground zero, with no protective gear, and the Government doesn't tell them they are in harm's way. It is a nightmare what these people have been through because of their exposure to radiation—and their children and their grandchildren. We still don't want to provide compensation. Everybody says they are for it, they don't want to vote against it, and they take it out in conference committee.

I come to the floor of the Senate and I say here is our own Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs saying we will need this $3 billion, which is now the $1.3 billion. Then I talk about my own research and survey to the VISN directors. Same conclusion. Then I say to my colleague from Missouri and others: Who do you want to believe? Do you want to believe the Veterans' Administration and OMB or some 30 or 40 different veterans organizations that have endorsed this independent budget?

I say to my colleagues, you voted for this additional investment. We have come a long way, I say to the veterans community. I thank the veterans community for standing up for themselves and speaking for themselves. We have come a long way from the President's original budget proposal. We have gone on a long ways from what was originally proposed in the House and the Senate. My colleague from Missouri does a good job helping us to really make some improvement here.

But in all due respect, I do not see how we can say to veterans: Here is the evidence. We know this is what you need. We know these are the gaps. We know what the problems are. We made a commitment to you. We have gone on record supporting this. But now, with your amendment, we are going to basically say it violates the Budget Act, these caps, phony caps of this Budget Act which everyone knows we are not going to live by. Everybody knows they are going to be busted. Everybody knows at the very end we are going to be spending more on key domestic needs.

What are we going to do? Cut Head Start and child nutrition and child care and all the rest by 30 percent, or 20 percent, or 25 percent? We are not going to do that. So why not just be honest about it? We have an emergency here, and we have an emergency there, and we figure out other ways to do it. We are spending the money.

Then, too many of my colleagues were all too ready to take some money out of the surplus for defense and tax cuts. Now all of a sudden, I come out here with an amendment on veterans' health care that speaks directly to what the evidence tells us we need to do to really improve veterans' health care, and my colleagues are going to vote against it and say it is a violation of the Budget Act?

I will conclude this way. I think we ought to do what is right for veterans. I think we are on record calling for exactly the investment this amendment calls for. I think there is not a shred of evidence that suggests we should do anything less for veterans. And I do not think we should be hiding behind the Budget Act. I do not think we should be hiding behind these phony caps that we all know are not going to be operative when we finish up this session. So if I get to be the first person to come to the floor of the Senate and say that and say it directly, so be it. If the test case is on veterans' health care, so be it. But I am determined to fight for what I think is right and to see whether we can improve upon what my colleague from Missouri has done.

I hope my colleagues, Democrats and Republicans, will vote for this amendment. You have supported it in the past, you are on record supporting it, and I hope you will support the same investment of resources for veterans' health care again.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Hampshire.

Mr. GREGG. Mr. President, I appreciate the enthusiasm of the Senator from Minnesota. I think we are all concerned about what has happened with veterans. I certainly congratulate the Senator from Maryland and the Senator from Missouri for their excellent effort to try, in the context of a strict budget structure, to do the most that is available for us for veterans.

But I do think in a philosophical discussion here we need to make something clear. ''Caps'' is not some euphemism that just gets thrown out and has no meaning to it. It is not just a term of art. In substance, it is a statement of the difference between spending money that we raise from revenues in the general fund versus spending money that is raised by taxes paid to the Social Security fund.

If we exceed the caps—and I am not going to argue the point; I think the Senator from Minnesota and a lot of other folks in this body are intent upon exceeding the caps, either with emergency spending in agriculture or with emergency spending for Kosovo or with advance funding gimmickry or with, possibly, in this case, an amendment that significantly increases funding under this bill over the caps that are available to it. But I think it has to be pointed out that when that occurs, that money comes from the Social Security trust fund. There is no other place for it to come from. Every dollar the caps are exceeded in this budget cycle—this may not be true next year—but every dollar that the caps are exceeded by in this budget cycle is going to be dollars that come out of the Social Security trust fund because we have already spent the onbudget surplus for emergency funds, emergency obligations. Those are already committed. So there are not really any onbudget surplus funds available to us.

So when these amendments come forward like this, I think there has to be some integrity in the debate. There has to be some statement of what the implications are of these types of amendments. The implication of this amendment is that the Social Security trust fund and Social Security itself will be hit for the amount this amendment exceeds the caps because the onbudget surplus that is non-Social Security has already been spent. That is the way it is.

It is easy to come to the floor and say we have to get rid of the caps because ''caps'' is a term of art nobody really understands. What that really means, a more honest statement would be, we have to take money out of the Social Security trust fund. We have to take money out of the Social Security trust fund. We have to take money out of the Social Security trust fund. That is the proposal. That is where we are. This Congress, this Senate, is going to have to make that decision.

Right now, there is a lot of effort to try to avoid that, and I am strongly committed to trying to avoid that event. I chaired a subcommittee, and I had the same problem the chairman of this subcommittee had. We were able, as was Chairman BOND, to bring in a bill that was under the caps, as the Presiding Officer now presiding over the Senate was also able to do with his bill on military construction. We brought it in at the cap level or under the cap level. It was difficult, very difficult, because we had the census in our bill. That was new spending which we had not really any money to pay for. So we have the same problem.

But the reality is that ''caps'' is not some arbitrary event here. It is not some term of art that has no meaning. There is significant meaning to the event ''breaking the caps.'' If we are going to have integrity in the debate, instead of using this term ''breaking the caps,'' we ought to say what the event is. The event is using the Social Security trust fund to fund whatever amendments are proposed to break the caps. That is the way it stands because there is not any onbudget surplus available beyond what has now already been committed for emergency funds, primarily to agriculture. So we are left only with Social Security surplus money.

So, yes, it pits this amendment against Social Security recipients. That is a public policy decision this Congress is going to have to make though, because on all these amendments that come forward that are not cap related, that are exceeding the cap, what we are basically doing is invading the Social Security trust fund.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

Mr. WELLSTONE. Mr. President, first of all, I say to my colleague, in the appropriations bills, it is not true we don't have any onbudget surplus. The President has only signed two appropriations bills. There is still money in the surplus.

Mr. GREGG. Will the Senator yield?

Mr. WELLSTONE. I am pleased to.

Mr. GREGG. The Senator knows the President has not signed all the bills. The Senator also knows this Senate has committed significant dollars to, and I suspect the Senator voted for, the agriculture emergency. That takes out the onbudget surplus. So I think the Senator can say: Yes, the President has not signed the bills; therefore, the money has not been spent. The fact is, the Congress has spent the money. It is just that the President hasn't agreed to it.

Mr. WELLSTONE. I say to my colleague, what we have here, I think, is a philosophical debate. But actually it is more on the lines of what the other Senator from New Hampshire said. It is a matter of where veterans fit in. Apparently, they come in last. We have this arcane rule that I am supposedly in violation of with this amendment which, by the way, makes it easy for my colleagues to go with tax cuts, it makes it easy for my colleagues to put much more into defense, and makes it easy for my colleagues to then come out on the floor and say there is no more money left for veterans.

Veterans should not come last. With all due respect, if Senators want to vote, cast a vote that says this amendment, which provides the resources we need for veterans' health care, is in violation of this arcane rule. That is the fact. The reality here is, we have this arcane rule, all part of this agreement that we had which is not working, and everybody here knows it is not working, and we still went forward with all the money for tax cuts and we still put more into defense.

I say to my colleagues, again, the President has only signed two appropriations bills. But now what we are told is, the veterans are last. All of a sudden, there is no money for the veterans. All of a sudden, the veterans are to be pitted against Social Security. It does not mean a thing.

Let me tell you what the facts are. The facts are that there are a lot of elderly veterans. It is an aging population. And we are nowhere near where we should be in terms home-based health care for them, and we are nowhere near where we should be when it comes to institutional nursing home care for those who need to be in nursing homes.

The facts are, as my colleague from New Hampshire mentioned earlier, that we have a scandal of maybe as many as a third of the homeless population being veterans.

The facts are that we have long waits in too many places. We have staff working double time. We have veterans who do not have the accessibility to the specialty services they need. We have a VA medical system that is not working the way it should work for veterans.

Those are the facts.

Next set of facts: My colleagues are on record in this budget resolution calling for exactly the same expenditure I call for in this amendment.

Next fact: The veterans independent budget, put together by veterans, not the VA, talks about these gaps and what we need and comes up with this investment that is in this amendment.

Next fact: Our own Senate Veterans' Committee admits that this is what we need if we are going to fill these gaps.

Next fact: Since I could not get a straight answer from the VA—where are you now, Jesse Brown, when we need you?—I sent out my own questionnaire to all these different VISNs and directors, and 22 of them responded; and they talked about the gaps, and the need, and what kind of investment it would take to get our veterans' health care system up to where it should be for veterans, if you really want to say thank you to veterans.

Those are the facts.

Last fact: I voted for Senator BOND's amendment. I think it is good. It helps, but it still is inadequate. It is not what we should be doing. We all talk about how much we care for the veterans. We all talk about how we are for the veterans. Then we ought to match the rhetoric with the resources.

I do not think my colleagues should be able to vote against this, arguing that it is in violation of this arcane Budget rule that we have. I do not think that means a thing to veterans. I do not think it means a thing to them. I think what means something to veterans is whether or not they are going to have the health care they thought they were promised, whether or not our Government is going to live up to its commitment. That is what this amendment calls for us to do. I hope my colleagues will vote for this amendment.

I yield the floor.

Mr. SMITH of New Hampshire addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. GREGG). The Senator from New Hampshire.

Mr. SMITH of New Hampshire. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to temporarily lay aside the Wellstone amendment in order to offer another amendment on the bill.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered. The Wellstone amendment is laid aside.

AMENDMENT NO. 1757

(Purpose: To provide an additional $209,500,000 for Medical Care for the Veterans Health Administration, an additional $5,000,000 for the Homeless Providers Grant and Per Diem (GPD) program, and an additional $10,000,000 for grants for construction of State extended care facilities for veterans, and to provide an offsetting reduction of $224,500,000 in amounts available for the AmeriCorps program)

Mr. SMITH of New Hampshire. Mr. President, I send an amendment to the desk and ask for its immediate consideration.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The legislative assistant read as follows:

The Senator from New Hampshire [Mr. SMITH of New Hampshire] proposes an amendment numbered 1757.

Mr. SMITH of New Hampshire. I ask unanimous consent reading of the amendment be dispensed with.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The amendment is as follows:

On page 7, line 23, strike ''$19,006,000,000'' and insert ''$19,215,500,000''.

On page 8, line 10, insert after the colon the following: ''*Provided further*, That of the funds made available under this heading, $5,000,000 shall be available for the Homeless Providers Grant and Per Diem (GPD) program:''.

On page 14, line 21, strike ''$90,000,000'' and insert ''$100,000,000''.

On page 73, line 22, strike ''$423,500,000'' and insert ''$199,000,000''.

On page 74, beginning on line 9, strike ''*Provided further,*'' and all that follows through ''section 121(d)(2) of such Act (42 U.S.C. 12581(d)(2)):''.

Mr. SMITH of New Hampshire. Mr. President, the amendment I am proposing will increase funding for our veterans by transferring funds from the Corporation for National and Community Service, also known as AmeriCorps. So what we have here, in addition to the amendment that passed, the increase of $600 million and the other proposed by Senator WELLSTONE, is an additional sum of money beyond that to be taken from the AmeriCorps program and placed in veterans programs.

I think, here again, it is a question of priorities. We will need to decide

whether we are going to pay volunteers—a little interesting; pay volunteers—or whether we are going to pay our Nation's veterans. That is the crux of the matter.

It is going to be a test of our priorities. It is going to enable Members of this body, who are concerned about our veterans, to basically put their money where their mouth is. That is the bottom line. This vote will be a test of our seriousness about whether we are going to provide our veterans with the care they need or not. It is a clear-cut choice.

There is nothing complicated about this amendment. It is AmeriCorps and paid volunteers versus veterans. That is it, pure and simple. It is between a big Government program that is paying volunteers—I will talk about that in a minute, whether there is such a thing as a paid volunteer—and our sacred responsibility to care for those who have sacrificed so much for our Nation.

My colleagues know we have debated the question of AmeriCorps funding before. They know I have always opposed this program. That is no secret. I opposed it in principle when it was proposed, and my concerns only grew when I saw how it worked or did not work in practice. I think the time has come to face the fact that this is money that could be better spent caring for those who fought for our liberty and in many cases were wounded for our liberty.

The rhetoric of AmeriCorps supporters is certainly stirring. The goals they profess are goals with which no one would disagree. But the rationale for using Federal taxpayer dollars —hard-earned taxpayer dollars—to fund this program always breaks down when we come back to the fundamental oxymoron it is based on. And it is an oxymoron. Some say perhaps more ''moron'' than ''oxy''—my view—but it is an oxymoron because it says ''paid volunteers.''

Where I grew up, if you volunteered, you did not get paid. So I do not know what a ''paid volunteer'' is. But in this city of Washington, now we have come up with this new definition of a paid volunteer—only in Washington. It is like here in Washington we also have floors below the basement in the elevators, here in the Senate. Those people who come and visit know what I am talking about. You can take an elevator to the basement, and then you can go to the subbasement if you want to, or G, one below the basement. It is just too complicated to have the basement be the bottom floor, I guess.

Now we have come up with this paid volunteer, and it is being sold to the American people.

I checked, before I came to the floor today, in my American Heritage College Dictionary. I must confess, I probably did not look at it enough when I was in college and do not look at it an awful lot now. But I was puzzled by this term, so I looked up the term ''volunteer.'' The American Heritage College Dictionary defines a ''volunteer'' as a person who performs or offers to perform a service of his or her own free will, or to do charitable or helpful work without pay.

This is the definition I always grew up with. It is the definition I always understood. And I believe it is the definition that most Americans would also say is correct.

But now the President of the United States is rewriting the definitions in the American Heritage College Dictionary. He is rewriting the rules for federalism with his executive orders. He has awesome powers. Now he is redefining the word ''volunteer.'' These are the volunteers whom Americans see in their communities every day. For the past few years, the AmeriCorps bureaucracy has sprinkled thousands of so-called volunteers across America's 50 States—so-called volunteers.

But meanwhile, 90 million Americans truly volunteer in some capacity each year. These are the real volunteers. These are the Americans our speeches should be honoring.

We do not need a Government program to honor volunteers because volunteers do not get paid. When true volunteers offer their time and energy, they expect and receive nothing but the satisfaction of serving their neighbors.

What can AmeriCorps' so-called volunteers expect? Here is what they can expect. They can expect a salary supplemented by a grant for education expenses, and they can expect health and child care benefits.

I might just ask anybody out there in America listening right now, if you went down and volunteered, perhaps somewhere in North Carolina where the hurricane hit, and you were throwing sandbags up there, most likely you did it because you wanted to help your neighbors; I do not think you would be asking whether or not you got health care benefits or child care or a salary.

If you received a hot meal and a thank-you, I think you would be very appreciative of that and no more, and you would be glad to do it. That is what voluntarism is. Now we have changed the definition. We are now paying volunteers under this President. Work compensated by a salary and benefits isn't volunteer work; it is a job. Look up the word ''job'' in the dictionary. I think you will find that is what it says.

There is a difference between being a volunteer and having a job. They are both worthwhile, but let us not try to blend together something that is quite different.

In a past year's oversight hearing on this program, a very prominent and distinguished Member of this body claimed that the traditional notion of voluntarism has changed. Now voluntarism is no longer voluntarism; it is the notion of voluntarism. The implication is that volunteer work, the type performed by the 90 million Americans who are putting sandbags up and protecting their neighbors' homes in the midst of a hurricane, is obsolete. That it is gone. Now the wave of the future is the AmeriCorps volunteer, the paid volunteer, the person who gets health care, child care. That is what this President has said, and that is what this bill is sanctioning, about $225 million worth of sanctions, I might add, of paid volunteers.

I hope it is not the case, after all the Executive orders this President has signed and all the things we have seen him do in redefining—he redefined NATO to be an offensive rather than a defensive organization; he redefined our military to be a 911 response team rather than a military; he has taken Executive orders and redefined federalism—that we are going to allow this President to continue moving us toward a society in which volunteer service can be offered only by professional volunteers and only with the assistance and permission of a Washington bureaucracy.

My goodness, have we really come to that? Only in Washington, only in some government budget or in some government bill could we possibly ever come up with anything as stupid as this. But we have done it. Boy, are we good at it.

I hope we are not going to send our children a message that anyone who volunteers should expect a salary and benefits in exchange for serving his or her community. Is that what we are saying?

Honestly, that is what we are saying. I have to wonder if we are serious when we say the era of big government is over. I have heard our Vice President say that. Maybe he should take over Jay Leno's slot because that is about the funniest thing I have ever heard, to say that the era of big government is over and then talk about having $225 million placed in a bill to pay volunteers. The era of big government is over? Somebody needs to explain that to me.

If we allow this program to become a permanent fixture of the Federal Government, we are going to send a message that the era of big government is just getting started, not over. For when we allow government to intrude on the voluntary sector, we guarantee the further erosion of civil society, the area of community life that falls outside the purview of government. Frankly, we insult the millions, the 90 million or so Americans who do volunteer in charity after charity after charity—cancer, Humane Society, helping friends in times of earthquakes and floods; they volunteer and do it willingly, and they don't get paid. There is no such thing as a paid volunteer. Very bluntly and very frankly, I don't care if you are a Republican or a Democrat or Independent or what you are, male or female. You should not sanction it by funding paid volunteers. It is wrong. We ought to eliminate it, and we ought to take this money out. We ought to

take it out, period. But I am not even asking Members to do that. I am asking them to take it out of there and give it to our Nation's veterans.

I know opponents of my amendment are going to claim they simply want to use big government to help the volunteer sector. We are going to help the volunteer sector. How many times do we have to go down this road? We let the Federal Government set up a program to help in an area of American life that has survived without government help, but we are going to put up a program now to help volunteers and pay them. The government program always starts small and always gets bigger.

Remember the Department of Education. That started in the mid-1970s at about $3 billion. It is getting up there close to $60 billion now—not bad in 20 or 25 years. Soon the government funding is supplemented with government mandates, and then we find that something that used to be a function of civil society is now a function of big government in everything but name. When we try to slow its growth, we are told that the loss of government funds will be fatal. You will destroy the arts. You will destroy the humanities. You will destroy the charities that serve the poor. These are areas that once functioned without government aid. Now we have set up government monies to help them. If we take it away, we are accused of not wanting to help the humanities or the arts or help with charities.

Now the people who work in these areas will tell us government is indispensable. We have to keep it here. We have to have it. We can't have volunteers now unless we have them paid.

The question is—and this is all my amendment is about—Do we want to have the volunteer sector dependent on Big Brother or not? I say we should not. Even in the short lifetime of the Corporation for National and Community Service, otherwise known as AmeriCorps, we have seen the influence of big government corroding the ethic of service that animates our voluntary sector. We have seen massive administrative costs. We have seen large numbers of AmeriCorps' so-called volunteers deployed in Federal agencies to staff big government, and in some cases, to lobby for its continued expansion. That is right, paid volunteers to lobby us for the continued expansion of what they are doing. We have seen the promise that private sector sources would match Federal funds fall by the wayside.

Let me make one thing clear: Good work has been done under the auspices of this program. I don't doubt it. If you pay somebody, you hopefully can get work out of them, and maybe something beneficial will come of it. A lot of this has been done in my own State of New Hampshire. I have met with some people of AmeriCorps. I salute their desire to offer service to their communities. No one is disputing that.

But I am concerned that by cultivating direct links between voluntary service organizations and big government, we risk sending some of our most selfless young people the message that public employment is the only avenue available for serving their communities. That is not true. The American people know it is not true, but that is what we are doing.

We risk sending true volunteers a message that their efforts are no longer necessary. That is not going to be the case with people who have volunteered all their lives, but look at young people today. Do you want to go down and help Ms. Brown mow her lawn and not get paid? Do you want to go collect money for the charity of your choice, perhaps the Cancer Society, and not get paid? Or do you want to go work for the Federal Government as a paid volunteer and get paid and get benefits? What message are we sending to our young people? We have just redefined the word ''volunteer.''

We just redefined the whole word ''voluntarism.'' This amendment I am suggesting is far more than $225 million. It is far more than providing money from AmeriCorps to veterans. Both of those are admirable, in my view, but it is more important than that. We are sending a cultural, moral message to the young people in our country by supporting this amendment, and that is: You volunteer; you don't get paid. You volunteer because you want to. That is the message I want to send.

Now, you cannot compare AmeriCorps and the veterans. There is no comparison. On the one hand, we have the health and well-being of brave men and women whose sacrifices have ensured our continued freedom. And you talk about volunteers. Many, if not most, of the people who have made those sacrifices did so as volunteers. They volunteered for their country to serve in time of war. Some were drafted, but many would have gone whether drafted or not.

When we called upon these Americans to serve their country, we took on certain obligations. This is a sacred obligation, one that we can't shirk and should not shirk. On the other hand, with AmeriCorps we take on another new obligation.

As I have made clear, the task of manning the voluntary sector will be performed whether or not we appropriate Federal taxpayer funds for the Corporation for National and Community Service. On the other hand, the job of addressing the pressing medical needs of America's heroic veterans is one that only we in the Federal Government can do.

Now, Senator BOB SMITH does not stand down here at any time and promote additional Government funds where it is not constitutional to do so. I don't support unconstitutional spending, and I have cited example after example on the floor of this Senate over a number of years. It is constitutional, it is right, it is just, and it is our obligation to support our Nation's veterans with whatever it is they need. This amendment says those needs are more important than paid volunteers.

This amendment will add funding to critical resources in the VA budget. The funding would go toward three areas: long-term care, medical care, and combating homelessness. I propose increasing funding for State veterans nursing homes out of this $225 million to allow our veterans to age with dignity and with the care they deserve. We know how desperately the VA health care system needs additional funding just to stay afloat. I also propose increasing funding to the Homeless Providers Program and Per Diem Program. This would help to build programs that would get veterans off the grates, if they are homeless, and help get them back on their feet.

Even the amounts I am proposing to be transferred here only scratch the surface of what we need. But we have to start somewhere, and this is where we need to draw the line.

So let me summarize and conclude by saying this: It is a simple amendment; $225 million is in the bill for AmeriCorps, paid volunteers, young people who are good young people. We are telling them we are going to pay you and call you a ''volunteer'' to do X, Y, or Z. We can do that or we can send another message, which is that homeless veterans on grates and inadequate care facilities is wrong, and we are going to fund those entities. Maybe it would even be a more powerful message if we would ask those AmeriCorps volunteers—paid volunteers—to suspend the payments and say: No, thank you, Mr. President, I am not interested in your benefits or your salary. Just tell me where the nearest veterans home is or the nearest VA hospital, and I will go there and give my time to those veterans who did so much.

Isn't that a better message to send to America? What is wrong with this country? What is happening to this country? That is what I want to know. Day after day, we fund this stuff, and half of the time we don't talk about it. It just slips in there and goes by—with good intentions, not always bad, but it is wrong. We are sending the wrong message to our people.

I taught school. Once you are a schoolteacher, you are always a schoolteacher. You are never a former teacher. We are sending the wrong message to our kids. We have sent wrong messages for the last several years.

Starting in February, we said right here on the floor that the President of the United States can commit crimes and not have to be held accountable for them. We said that. That is what we told our young people. We have told our young people that it is OK to do whatever you want. Do your thing. Shoot your friends and colleagues in school, and then blame somebody else. Blame innocent gun owners who have done nothing except exercise their constitutional right to own a firearm. But

blame somebody else; don't blame ourselves. We abort our young children every day, and we say: Johnny, go off to school, and, Mary, go off to school, be a good little girl and boy, and we will abort your brother or sister while you are going to school being a good kid. That is the message we are sending. We do it every day.

So, you see, that is what is wrong with America. It is the greatest country in the world, but we need to change it. The structure is there. We just need to change a few people and a few places, get reality back, and bring this country back to what it should be and what it can be and what it must be, what our Founders wanted.

Do you think for one minute that Thomas Jefferson, if he could stand here today or James Madison or George Washington or Sam Adams or Patrick Henry—do you think for one minute they would stand up here and defend paid volunteers? These are the people who picked up the weapons, put on the militia uniform, and went to Concord Bridge in Lexington and fought the British, sometimes never getting paid, not knowing whether they were going to be paid, nor caring whether they would get paid. These are the people who brought us our liberty. We disgrace what they did for us by standing on the Senate floor and even proposing to pay somebody to be a volunteer.

It is the wrong message, folks. It is the wrong message. I hope somebody out there might be listening. It doesn't happen often around here that we listen to each other's speeches, but I hope somebody listens because we need to change the culture of this country, the attitude. All we can do on the Senate floor is single out things which are wrong and point them out—not to attack anybody. I am not attacking the motives of anybody. But I am saying it is wrong. Let's accept that it is wrong and change it so that we don't tell America's young people that paid volunteers are more important than our Nation's veterans, more important than the people who sacrifice for their country, more important than those who are, today, barely able to move or speak —some not able to move or speak—in veterans homes across America, who are being neglected. By the way, they are taken care of by nonpaid volunteers, in many cases, who come and visit.

This is what is wrong with America. This is why America will perish, if we don't stop. I don't want to see that happen. I want my kids or grandkids someday to say: I read old grandpa's speeches when he had the time to serve on the Senate floor. He stood up and said paid volunteers were wrong, and I am glad he did because we changed it. We don't have paid volunteers anymore and we don't have veterans lying helpless on grates freezing to death. We don't have veterans who are no longer able to get the help they need and the care and the shelter they need. We don't have that anymore because old grandpa stood up on the Senate floor and said it was wrong, and we changed it. That is what I would like.

''Do you want to leave a legacy?'' People ask you that all the time. If they write that about me, I will be happy. Nothing else. That is all. This is Daniel Webster's desk right here, one of the greatest Senators of all time. This desk belongs to the senior Senator from New Hampshire, and I am not going to give it up.

I think all the time about the fact that he stood here and that we are just temporary stewards. We are just here for a blip on the radar screen of history, trying to do our job. As great as Webster was, he is off the stage, as the founders are and as are so many great orators and Senators who have spoken in this great body. But you try to make a difference. You try to make a difference. You have to speak up and try to make a difference.

I urge my colleagues, ask yourself, are volunteers whom you are paying more important than veterans who gave their limbs, and their lives in some cases, not to mention the suffering of the families—more important than those veterans? I don't think so. I am asking you to vote to take $225 million from paid volunteers and give it to our Nation's veterans. There is the offset. It is not adding any more money anywhere. It is not costing the taxpayers another dime. That is all I am asking you to do.

Let me conclude on a couple of points about veterans because I think we need to personalize this a little bit so we understand it.

I mentioned earlier in the debate with Senator WELLSTONE that driving to work in the morning, especially in the winter, and seeing those veterans on the grates—they are not all veterans. There are about 750,000 homeless people, they tell me, in America. But they say a third of them are probably veterans. What happened? How did that happen? Why are they there? It is pretty disgraceful, really, when you stop and think about it, because somewhere at some point they reached out and asked for help, and they didn't get it or they wouldn't be homeless.

I can't help but think of something that Johnny Cash immortalized so very well with ''The Ballad of Ira Hayes,'' the Indian, one of the people who raised the flag at Iwo Jima Hill. He was an Indian who was discriminated against when he came back but hung out around the reservation and became an alcoholic and died in a ditch. He was one of the ones who held that flag up at Iwo Jima Hill. Why did that happen? Because something slipped through the cracks.

There are thousands of Ira Hayeses out there in America right now, lying on those grates, looking for hope. This is one of the most affluent cities in the world. You can't go around the block without running into some function where they serve caviar, shrimp, steak, or something, day in and day out. And yet, homeless veterans have no place to live, nothing to eat, and are lying on grates, freezing to death. Let's take $220 million, help them, take it away from paid volunteers, and send the right message to America.

Homeless veterans start showing up 10 years after they are discharged. Ten years after they have served this country, many times in combat, they start showing up. That is why, within the past 10 years, the veterans homeless problem has increased. They don't give the veterans a fair share of the money that is designated for the homeless because somehow when they move out of the service and back into society, they slip through the net. Who knows what it is? Posttraumatic stress? I don't know. But they are slipping through the net.

This is not meant as a criticism of anybody or any agency or anybody else. But let's tighten the net. Let's rethread the net. We can do a lot of rethreading of the net with that $220 million.

In my State, a veteran from northern New Hampshire who needs an MRI has to take at least two van trips to have this simple test done. That is why we need to change that. The median age of homeless veterans is 45. It is not a way to treat our heroes.

This is just one small way to try to make a difference, one moral lesson to send to the people of America, and to the children of America, that we are not going to fund paid volunteers until we fund our Nation's veterans. Then if you want to talk about paid volunteers, fine. But at least be honest; let's just call them paid workers instead of paid volunteers.

That is all I am asking for with this amendment. That is all I am asking.

Mr. President, at this point for the sake of the RECORD, I ask for the yeas and nays on my amendment.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There is not a sufficient second.

Mr. SMITH of New Hampshire. I will withhold. I see the manager on the floor. I am prepared to yield the floor or go to a quorum call.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Missouri.

Mr. BOND. Mr. President, it is my hope that we will be able to have a vote on the Smith amendment immediately following the Wellstone amendment. There are a number of people who want to speak. The Senator from Ohio wants to speak. I know the Senator from Maryland is coming back to speak. But that means we only have about 35 minutes to get discussion on all of these. Since there is no time agreement, we depend upon the good graces of our colleagues to wrap all of the discussions up prior to 2 o'clock. I will then move to table the Smith amendment.

Mr. SMITH of New Hampshire. Mr. President, I again ask for the yeas and nays on my amendment.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There is not a sufficient second.

Mr. BOND. I move to table the Smith amendment and ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. There is not a sufficient second.

Mr. BOND. Mr. President, I see the Senator from Ohio who has been waiting.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is the Senator withdrawing his motion to table?

Mr. BOND. I withdraw that motion. I see the Senator from Ohio is on the floor. I will address the amendments afterwards.

Mr. SMITH of New Hampshire. Mr. President, I again renew my request for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

Mr. BOND. I move to table the amendment, and ask for the yeas and nays and ask that the vote be withheld.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There is a sufficient second.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

Mr. BOND. I ask unanimous consent that the vote be withheld to follow the vote on or in relation to the Wellstone amendment.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Ohio.

Mr. VOINOVICH. Mr. President, I rise to oppose the amendment to the Veterans' Affairs-HUD appropriations bill that was submitted by the Senator from Minnesota.

This morning, I had the privilege of presiding over the Senate to hear the presentation of the Senator from Missouri and the Senator from Maryland in what they tried to do to put together a very fair VA-HUD appropriations bill.

One of the things that was emphasized was the fact that after reviewing the needs of this country, particularly the health care needs of our veterans, they inserted in the appropriations bill another $1.1 billion for health care for our veterans. Subsequent to that, Senator BYRD and Senator STEVENS came to the floor with an amendment to provide another $600 million for emergencies.

The reason I rise to oppose the request of the Senator from Minnesota for another $1.3 billion is the fact that we are reaching the end of the appropriations cycle. We are getting down to the nitty-gritty. The fact is, when anyone comes to this floor and asks for additional money over and above what the appropriators have appropriated, they should stand and point out where the money is going to come from to fund whatever it is they are asking for.

First of all, in this particular case, I think the committee did its very best to deal forthrightly with the needs of our veterans' health.

It seems to me from a logic point of view, the person who proposed this amendment should have laid out clearly where the money, the $1.3 billion, was coming from, what programs would be cut in order to come up with the money or, in the alternative, to explain which taxes will have to be raised to pay for the funding of the program. Last but not least, explain that it is not coming from Social Security.

I have noticed around here so many of the spending programs ultimately would be paid for out of Social Security. I believe anyone who looks at what the Appropriations Committee did in terms of this issue would think they did the very best they could under the circumstances. No one advocates taking money out of Social Security to pay for another $1.3 billion for health care for our veterans.

I think we have reached the point where we have to come clean on the fact that we will have a difficult time dealing with this budget. If we are not going to dip into Social Security, if we are not going to raise taxes, if we are not going to be fiscally irresponsible, we need to explain how we will be paying for these additional programs.

I urge my colleagues to reject the amendment of the Senator from Minnesota for the additional $1.3 billion because the money to pay for that is just not there. If we don't find the money, it means we will end up using our Social Security pension funds.

I remind Members we have a $5.7 trillion debt. Part of that is because over the years we continued to use our Social Security funds to pay for things for which we weren't willing to pay. Today in this country out of every $1 we are spending, 14 cents is being paid for interest. In fact, we are spending more money in this country on interest than we pay for Medicare. It is time to be fiscally responsible. It is time for truth in budgeting. We have a wonderful opportunity in this session of Congress to forthrightly deal for the first time in anyone's memory with the financial responsibility of the fiscal things we need to do in this country to enter the new millennium, in what I refer as an ''intellectually honest'' way in terms of our budget.

Mr. BOND. I thank the Senator from Ohio for cogent and knowledgeable comments. We appreciate his assistance. I thank the Senator for his statements.

Let me make a couple of brief points about the two amendments before the Senate. This year, 51 Senators wrote me in support of a $1.7 billion increase in the veterans' medical care budget. The budget resolution which passed this body assumed a $1.7 billion increase for VA medical care. We have worked hard to meet the needs that we believe are responsibly identified for veterans' medical care. We would love to have more money but we are at the end of our available stream of funds.

We have increased funding for homeless assistance for the veterans by $40 million. That is why I cannot support either of these amendments.

With respect to Senator SMITH's amendment, I have had significant concerns about the operations of AmeriCorps. I have worked closely with the inspector general to clear up some of the agency's management problems. There was a problem with $31 million that was lost. We are very much concerned about it. The battle over whether we ought to have an AmeriCorps program or not is over. It has been decided. It is authorized. It is funded. It is in place in communities in my State and across the Nation. There are people who are providing valuable services. There is strong support.

We have attempted to continue AmeriCorps at the existing level. We did rescind $80 million because the inspector general identified that money as not needed. However, we have to develop a bill that will be signed by the President. The President has already threatened to veto any bill that cuts AmeriCorps. It is that simple. If you want the additional funding we provided for veterans, the additional $1.7 billion above the President's request, then we have to have the bill signed. It is a rather simple matter. If this bill is vetoed over AmeriCorps, then we can't get the money for veterans. To ensure that the operations of AmeriCorps are properly addressed, we boosted the inspector general's budget from $3 million to $5 million to oversee the work of AmeriCorps. The concept has already been approved. It is in place. It is ongoing.

For the information of all Senators, we expect to have a vote at 2 o'clock on a motion to waive the budget point of order, followed by a tabling motion on the Smith amendment. We are hoping everybody who has first-degree amendments will get them in by 4 o'clock. We have not propounded a unanimous consent request. People are busily working on amendments. I do not want to discourage Members from doing that. We want to see an end to the process.

I have had a number of colloquies provided to me. I appreciate that people get them in. Colloquies sometimes explain the difficult and complex parts of a bill. If a Member has a colloquy which they want included, I ask Members to get those colloquies in by 5 o'clock this afternoon. We do have to review them. Sometimes we need clearance from the authorizing committee. If we are hit with a rush of colloquies at the last moment, we may simply not be able to deal with them and get them read and approved. In order to get colloquies in, I hope Members will bring them to the ranking member or me prior to 5 o'clock to review them.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. VOINOVICH). The Senator from Maryland.

Ms. MIKULSKI. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that Senator TED KENNEDY be added as a cosponsor to the Byrd-Bond-Stevens-Mikulski VA amendment for $600 million additional funds for VA medical care.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Ms. MIKULSKI. Mr. President, this is a sad state of affairs. This last amendment offered by the Senator from New Hampshire is particularly troubling. We all agreed that we need to fund veterans' medical care. We all agreed that we needed to fund more. We all agreed when we worked in the full committee, in the Appropriations Committee, we wanted to do more. We had the will but we didn't have the wallet.

Working on a bipartisan basis, the chairman and ranking members of the Appropriations Committee found a way to add $600 million more to VA medical care. It is absolutely a good idea. We intend to support it.

Also, the chairman and ranking member, along with Senator BOND and myself, know that declaring it an emergency is a temporary technique because we are in a situation where we are operating under such tough spending caps.

The Senator from Minnesota has offered an amendment that violates the Budget Act because it busts the caps. We will oppose that.

The Senator from New Hampshire, a well-known advocate for veterans, a staunch supporter for the return of the MIAs, now offers an amendment. However, he takes it out of the Corporation for National Service, otherwise known as AmeriCorps. This is a sad state of affairs, that while we are trying to meet the compelling human need of our veterans, we are going to further reduce a self-help opportunity program for higher education, which is exactly what our veterans want Members to support. I will go into that in a minute.

I will oppose the amendment of the Senator from New Hampshire and support the tabling motion of the Senator from Missouri. Why? Not because I don't want to help veterans; we are helping the veterans in this bill. But we are now pitting one good program against another good program in terms of its mission and purpose. Both veterans' medical and AmeriCorps leave a lot to be desired in the management area. But at the same time, if we stick to the mission, we can continue this bill.

I strongly believe in the importance of National Service and voluntarism. I helped create the original bill. I believe we need to do all we can to maintain an opportunity structure for access to higher education and also to teach the values of the habits of the heart—that for every right there is a responsibility, for every opportunity there is an obligation.

The National Service does that. Right now, there are 66,000 people who have participated in the program. They are out there doing very important community service, leveraging other volunteers. For that, they are earning a voucher toward their higher education. I do not think anyone can dispute the merits of a program that shows for every opportunity there is an obligation, for every right there is a responsibility. That is one of the core values for which our vets fought so hard. But the corporation has already taken a cut in funding. It is now being funded below last year's level and below the President's request.

The corporation was established to enhance those opportunities available for national and community service and to provide these educational awards for those who participate. Through the corporation, we help not only communities but those who volunteer as well. National Service participants may receive educational awards that can be used for full-time or part-time education, vocational ed, or job training. This is great. I know how much the Senator from Ohio believes in the great American opportunity structure. But this is not a giveaway; you have to do sweat equity in the community.

National Service does have its problems within its organization. Its oversight and its management do need to be improved. But we should not further reduce the funding of National Service; we should find a way to deal with the spending caps. This program is a success, and it must be maintained.

Earlier today we adopted that amendment to increase veterans' health care by $600 million. With this, it means that veterans' health care will be funded at $1.7 billion over the President's request. Senator BOND and I agree, the President's request was too skimpy. We agree with that. So we added in a billion in the committee. Now we are adding another $1.6 billion. So we believe we are working, as a work in progress, to meet the needs of veterans' health care.

But I do not want to see these generational issues here. I do not want to see old, sick vets pitted against young Americans who are willing to be working in disaster relief, tutoring people, and also serving the homeless—pitted against that.

Guess one of the other things that National Service is doing. We talk about it in our own report. The National Service volunteers are helping the homeless. They also have a particular outreach program to homeless vets. So it should not be either/or. National Service right now, as we speak—as we speak, there are over 10,000 volunteers providing tutoring in elementary schools. The Civilian Corps is a 10-month program on disaster relief. They are right there now in North Carolina. They are helping clean up other parts of our country. But we are saying no, we are not going to fund these programs because we want to fund veterans' health care? I think the vets would say: We need our health care; we need our facilities open, with the best of the staff and the supplies and the prescription drugs we need. We agree with that. But I do not think they would want it at the expense of these young people. I really do not believe it.

One of the things National Service is doing is not only helping the community but it is called values. What do our vets stand for? Patriotism. Our young people are out there serving America. They stand for loyalty. These young people are learning loyalty and the habits of the heart.

Our veterans stood for self-sacrifice, neighbor helping neighbor, and the defense of the Nation. These young people are part of a national defense effort, eliminating poverty, illiteracy, helping the homeless. At the end of their 2-year program, they go on to school and they get on with their lives. Just as the Peace Corps, they are forming alumni associations, and they keep on giving, and they keep on recruiting people who give, many of whom will visit veterans' nursing homes.

So let's not pit one generation of Americans against the other. Let's make sure we follow a wise and prudent course to honor our veterans and to make sure that our young people have access to higher education, earning a voucher through their own sweat equity, but learning the values of the greatest generation that ever existed, those who fought for us in World War II.

I yield the floor.

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, I oppose the amendment offered by Senator SMITH of New Hampshire. I am a strong supporter of AmeriCorps and the positive changes that Corps members have made and continues to make in communities across this country AmeriCorps members are doing an outstanding job helping children in schools. Over two and one half million children have been taught, tutored or mentored in the nation's schools, and half a million children have been served in after-school programs through AmeriCorps.

AmeriCorps members give a year of their life to tackle critical problems like literacy, crime and poverty. After their year of service, AmeriCorps members receive education awards to help finance college or pay back students loans. AmeriCorps enables its volunteers to improve their communities while improving themselves.

In Massachusetts, the Service Alliance distributes $13 million in grants a year to more than 200 service and volunteer programs across the state. More than 180,000 citizens have contributed 3.5 million hours of service—mentoring young people, helping the homeless, and cleaning up neighborhoods. Through programs like City Year, Habitat for Humanity and Boys and Girls Clubs, volunteers have a wide choice in activities and are bringing their talent and enthusiasm to communities across the state.

I urge the Senate to reject this amendment and maintain strong bipartisan support for these important programs.

Several Senators addressed the Chair.

Mr. BOND. I have an amendment that will strike several sections of the bill.

I ask unanimous consent the pending amendments be set aside temporarily.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

AMENDMENT NO. 1760

(Purpose: Strike provisions that would amend the Fair Housing Act)

Mr. BOND. Mr. President, I send an amendment to the desk and ask for its immediate consideration.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Missouri (Mr. BOND) proposes an amendment numbered 1760.

On page 112, strike line 3 and all that follows through line 4 on page 113.

Mr. BOND. Mr. President, as you can see, it is a simple amendment. It strikes sections 427 and 428. They were put in the bill to amend the Fair Housing Act to provide a 72-hour cooling off period for newspapers that had been accused of having published an item that was alleged to have been discriminatory. The two major publishers in my State and publishers around the country presented to us what they thought was a very unfair situation. We thought we could accommodate them with this provision in the bill.

However, Senators KENNEDY and HARKIN have raised substantive concerns and pointed out that this amendment would violate rule XVI. I therefore offer this amendment to strike these provisions so we do not have to have a battle over rule XVI.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, the amendment is agreed to.

The amendment (No. 1760) was agreed to.

Mr. BOND. Mr. President, I move to reconsider the vote.

Ms. MIKULSKI. I move to lay that motion on the table.

The motion to lay on the table was agreed to.

Mr. BOND. Mr. President, since we are nearing 2 o'clock, I ask unanimous consent that at 1:55 the Senator from Minnesota be recognized to make 2 minutes of closing statements on his amendment, that I be recognized to make opposing comments and raise the point of order, and that he may ask that it be waived.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. WELLSTONE addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

Mr. WELLSTONE. Mr. President, I will take this time to speak. I want to make a couple of compelling points for my colleagues.

First, our own Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee has gone on record saying, if we really want to fill these gaps in veterans' health care, we require what this amendment calls for above what we have spent, which is $1.3 billion more.

Second, I cite as evidence this independent budget put together by many different veterans organizations. We asked the veterans to really look at veterans' health care and come up with recommendations.

Third, I cite as evidence, again, a study my office conducted when we really could not get good straight information from the VA, called Veterans Health Care and Fiscal Year 2000 Budget Flat-Line.

Fourth, I want to again remind my colleagues that all of us, on an amendment in the budget resolution, have been on record, in a 99–0 vote, saying we ought to make this additional investment. I think that is extremely important.

My second point is, what is at stake? We have traveled a long way from where this budget once was. The President's budget was inadequate. I think what the House and the Senate were doing was inadequate. Colleagues have stepped forward. I am glad to see we have made some progress. The veterans community, I think, has spoken up and has made it clear to us that they want to see us respond to their needs and the circumstances of their lives.

What I am saying in this amendment is that what is at stake is the quality of care. It is just simply true. There is not enough good care for elderly veterans, and many veterans are living to be 80 and 85 years of age. There is not enough good care for those veterans struggling with posttraumatic stress syndrome. The waits for care are too long. Too many of our facilities are understaffed. I do not know why we would not go forward with what we have already gone on record saying we are committed to. I do not think that is acceptable.

What is being used against this amendment is that it is in violation of this arcane rule of the Budget Act. But I say to my colleagues—this is the point I want to make; and I will make it in the last 2 minutes if Senator JOHNSON is not here—we have, whatever it is, $15 billion in surplus. We know darn well we are going to be breaking these caps and we are going to be spending that money. We know that. Every single Senator knows we are going to be spending that money. We are going to be spending that money later on.

When we do that later on, and we invest that money in whatever areas we invest in, then you are going to have to come back and tell the veterans why you voted against this amendment. If you do not believe that we are going to break the budget caps and spend that additional surplus money on some important domestic needs, then I guess you could vote against this amendment. But if you know in your heart of hearts what everybody I think in the Senate knows, that we are going to spend that money, we are going to break the caps, then why would you want to put veterans at the bottom of the list? Why wouldn't you up front vote for the additional resources that we need for veterans' health care?

I thought maybe we would have an up-or-down vote, maybe it would be a vote to table the amendment. I did not realize we were going to have this budget debate.

But I think now we have two issues. No. 1, are we going to follow through on the commitment we made to veterans? We are all on record saying we need to make this additional investment. No. 2, are we going to sort of play this game, knowing full well we are going to spend the surplus, we are going to spend this $15 billion surplus? We know that. We are going to break the caps and do that.

We have too many glaring needs in this country, too many draconian cuts that are mean-spirited in their effects on many citizens—vulnerable citizens, children. Start with children. What are we going to cut? Low-income energy assistance? Are we going to cut Head Start? Early Head Start? Child care? What exactly do people think we are going to do with these budgets we have with these caps?

I say to my colleagues, you know we are going to spend that surplus. And if you know that, and later on you are going to vote to spend it, as you should, on some of these needs, then why wouldn't you vote for it right now for veterans?

This is really a test case about whether or not we are going to follow through on a commitment. It is also a test case not just about a commitment to veterans and doing what we need to do to get the resources to veterans' health care—I believe so strongly about that question—but now I have come to believe as strongly about the other question, which is: Let's be honest about this in terms of where we are at in this budget process.

We cannot live within these caps. Our appropriators are two great Senators—I do not know why the Senator from Missouri is wrong on so many issues, but he is a darn good Senator, there is no question about it—and they are trying to deal with this in housing for veterans. It is a nightmare. So I do not accept this, even though they are two colleagues who I respect.

I do not accept this argument. I do not accept this argument that we are going to use this arcane rule, we are going to use these caps, we are going to use this budget rule as a reason for not voting for the investment in resources that would make a huge difference in the quality of health care for veterans in this country, especially when we know we are going to go into this surplus and use this surplus on some critical needs in our country. I am here to argue this is a critical need—veterans' health care.

Mr. President, I yield the floor. I know we have 5 minutes left for wrapup.

Mr. BOND addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Missouri.

Mr. BOND. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Minnesota for his kind words and note with gratitude that he did point out we disagree. This is a great relief to many of my constituents. I thank him for that acknowledgement.

But seriously, this very important amendment, the Wellstone amendment, would eat into the Social Security reserve. It ignores the fact that a majority of Members of this body wrote me in support of a $1.7 billion increase. I therefore state that the pending amendment, No. 1747, offered by the Senator from Minnesota, increases spending in excess of the allocation to the Appropriations Committee; therefore, I raise a point of order against the amendment pursuant to section 302(f) of the Budget Act.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

Mr. WELLSTONE. Mr. President, I move to waive the Budget Act.

I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

Mr. WELLSTONE. Mr. President, I think that I can do it in 1 minute because my colleagues have been gracious enough.

Again, I cite as evidence our vote on the budget resolution calling for this additional investment that is in this amendment; second, the independent budget from the veterans; third, our own Senate veterans' health care committee, which said we need to spend the additional $3 billion, this gets us up to that point; fourth, the study where I sent a questionnaire out to all the VISN directors, when I could not get the straight information from the VA about the needs; fifth, I translated this into human terms, in terms of the not adequate care for elderly vets, not adequate care for vets struggling with PTSD, not adequate home-based care, longer lines than there should be, longer waits, not the access to specialists. This is important if we want to fill these gaps.

Finally, I say to my colleagues, I am being told this violates the budget caps, but everybody knows we are going to take that $15 billion in surplus and spend it. We know that. There are too many glaring needs in this country. If later on you are going to vote to spend it on something, then why would you put veterans' needs at the very bottom? Why wouldn't you vote for veterans' health care right now?

I think we ought to be straightforward and honest about what we are doing. I think that has to do with the budget, but I also think it has to do with what we need to do to try to make sure veterans' health care is as high a quality as possible. We have a long ways to go. This amendment takes us far in that direction.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Missouri.

Mr. BOND. Let's be honest. There was a budget surplus. We spent it. It is gone. It is done. We had the increased spending for defense because we made commitments in many areas around the world and we have to defend and support our fighting men and women when we ask them to put their lives on the line for us. We have to remedy the shortfall that every one of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said the President's budget has caused. We are spending it on agriculture. We approved a $7-plus billion ag relief bill that came out of this body. It is now in conference. We have to put money in for the census. We have spent the money. It is gone.

So what this amendment seeks to do is to take an additional $1.3 billion out of Social Security. The Senator says we have to provide priorities for veterans. We just added $1.7 billion over the President's request for veterans' medical care—the largest increase in veterans' medical care in history—to allow expanded care to thousands of veterans, initiating new programs for veterans, helping homeless veterans, providing for inflationary increases, enabling the VA to treat the veterans who have hepatitis C with a new therapy.

The Veterans' Administration is making cuts, increasing efficiencies, good business practices that will enable them to serve more. The money we have already provided should assure good quality care for the next year in the health care facilities for our veterans.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD a letter dated April 30, signed by 51 of our colleagues, to Chairman STEVENS and Senator BYRD asking for the $1.7 billion to be provided by the Appropriations Committee for veterans' health.

There being no objection the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC, April 30, 1999.

Hon. TED STEVENS,
Hon. ROBERT C. BYRD,
Senate Committee on Appropriations, Washington, DC.

DEAR TED AND SENATOR BYRD: We write to urge the Appropriations Committee to follow the recommendations set forth in the Budget Resolution pertaining to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) discretionary health care appropriation.

Veterans' health care funding has been held virtually constant for four years. The additional $1.7 billion, recommended by Congress, will allow the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) to help fulfill the country's obligation to provide health care to our military veterans. The funding will also help VHA address newly emerging health care challenges such as the high incidence of hepatitis C among veterans, emergency care, technological advances in medicine, and patient safety, as well as long-term and end-of-life care. Additionally, the new funding may enable VA to avoid some of the recently announced personnel reductions that prompted the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs to hold a hearing on April 13.

Once again, America is facing a situation that has focused enormous attention on the importance of our Armed Forces. These men and women, who have answered the call of our nation, may someday call on the Department of Veterans Affairs to come to their aid. An increase in the VA health care appropriations account for FY 2000 will go a long way to demonstrate that not only is America committed to be there for the veterans of today, but we are prepared to handle the veterans of tomorrow as well.

We believe it is imperative for the future viability of the VA health care system that the Appropriations Committee follow through with the recommendations set forth in the Budget Resolution. We look forward to working with you and the other members of the Committee to achieve this goal.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Arlen Specter, John D. Rockefeller IV, Daniel K. Akaka, Jack Reed, Harry Reid, Kent Conrad, Pete V. Domenici, Mary L. Landrieu, Trent Lott, Tom Daschle, Tom Harkin, Pat Roberts, Larry E. Craig, John Edwards, Strom Thurmond, John Warner.

Dianne Feinstein, John F. Kerry, Slade Gorton, Patty Murray, Bob Smith, Carl Levin, Chuck Grassley, Jim Bunning, Bill Frist, Charles Schumer, Peter G. Fitzgerald, Richard H. Bryan, Jim Jeffords, Barbara Boxer.

John Breaux, Max Cleland, Russ Feingold, Joe Biden, Patrick Leahy, Rick Santorum, Tim Hutchinson, Tim Johnson, Paul Sarbanes, Jeff Bingaman, Bob Kerrey, Frank H. Murkowski, Robert G. Torricelli, Bill Roth.

Daniel Moynihan, Susan Collins, Paul Coverdell, John Chafee, Chuck Hagel, Mike Crapo, Jeff Sessions, Olympia Snowe.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. GREGG). All time has expired. The question is on agreeing to the motion to waive the Budget Act in relation to the Wellstone amendment No. 1747. The yeas and nays have been ordered. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. NICKLES. I announce that the Senator from Arizona (Mr. MCCAIN) is necessarily absent.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 36, nays 63, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 285 Leg.]

YEAS—36

Akaka	Durbin	Reed
Baucus	Grassley	Reid
Biden	Harkin	Robb
Bingaman	Hutchinson	Rockefeller
Boxer	Jeffords	Santorum
Campbell	Johnson	Schumer
Cleland	Kennedy	Smith (NH)
Collins	Kerrey	Smith (OR)
Conrad	Kerry	Snowe
Daschle	Leahy	Specter
Dodd	Lieberman	Wellstone
Dorgan	Murray	Wyden

NAYS—63

Abraham	Feingold	Lincoln
Allard	Feinstein	Lott
Ashcroft	Fitzgerald	Lugar
Bayh	Frist	Mack
Bennett	Gorton	McConnell
Bond	Graham	Mikulski
Breaux	Gramm	Moynihan
Brownback	Grams	Murkowski
Bryan	Gregg	Nickles
Bunning	Hagel	Roberts
Burns	Hatch	Roth
Byrd	Helms	Sarbanes
Chafee	Hollings	Sessions
Cochran	Hutchison	Shelby
Coverdell	Inhofe	Stevens
Craig	Inouye	Thomas
Crapo	Kohl	Thompson
DeWine	Kyl	Thurmond
Domenici	Landrieu	Torricelli
Edwards	Lautenberg	Voinovich
Enzi	Levin	Warner

NOT VOTING—1

McCain

The PRESIDING OFFICER. On this question, the yeas are 36, the nays are 63. Three-fifths of the Senators duly chosen and sworn not having voted in the affirmative, the point of order is sustained and the amendment falls.

Mr. BOND. I move to reconsider the vote.

Mr. CRAIG. I move to lay that motion on the table.

The motion to lay on the table was agreed to.

AMENDMENT NO. 1757

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question now is on agreeing to the motion to table amendment No. 1757. The yeas and nays have been ordered. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. NICKLES. I announce that the Senator from Arizona (Mr. MCCAIN) is necessarily absent.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 61, nays 38, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 286 Leg.]

YEAS—61

Akaka	Durbin	Lieberman
Baucus	Edwards	Lincoln
Bayh	Feingold	McConnell
Bennett	Feinstein	Mikulski
Biden	Graham	Moynihan
Bingaman	Grassley	Murray
Bond	Hagel	Reed
Boxer	Harkin	Reid
Breaux	Hatch	Robb
Bryan	Hollings	Roberts
Byrd	Inouye	Rockefeller
Campbell	Jeffords	Santorum
Chafee	Johnson	Sarbanes
Cleland	Kennedy	Schumer
Cochran	Kerrey	Specter
Collins	Kerry	Stevens
Conrad	Kohl	Torricelli
Daschle	Landrieu	Wellstone
DeWine	Lautenberg	Wyden
Dodd	Leahy	
Dorgan	Levin	

NAYS—38

Abraham	Gorton	Nickles
Allard	Gramm	Roth
Ashcroft	Grams	Sessions
Brownback	Gregg	Shelby
Bunning	Helms	Smith (NH)
Burns	Hutchinson	Smith (OR)
Coverdell	Hutchison	Snowe
Craig	Inhofe	Thomas
Crapo	Kyl	Thompson
Domenici	Lott	Thurmond
Enzi	Lugar	Voinovich
Fitzgerald	Mack	Warner
Frist	Murkowski	

NOT VOTING—1

McCain

The motion was agreed to.

Mr. BOND. I move to reconsider the vote.

Mr. SARBANES. I move to lay that motion on the table.

The motion to lay on the table was agreed to.

Mr. BOND addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Missouri.

AMENDMENT NO. 1744

Mr. BOND. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have added as cosponsors to amendment No. 1744: Senators ROBERTS, ASHCROFT, SNOWE, COLLINS, COVERDELL, and HARKIN.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. BOND. I yield the floor.

Mr. SARBANES addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maryland.

Mr. SARBANES. Mr. President, I thank the chairman of the appropriations subcommittee, Senator BOND, and my colleague and close friend from Maryland, the ranking member of the VA–HUD appropriations subcommittee, Senator MIKULSKI, for their good work in developing this bill under extremely difficult circumstances.

All of us should recognize that due to the steadfastness of these two Senators, many important programs that had otherwise been scheduled for the cutting block, programs that had, indeed, been severely damaged by the House bill, have been largely preserved in the legislation that is before us this afternoon.

My colleagues, Senator BOND and Senator MIKULSKI, working with the strong support of Senator STEVENS, the chairman of the full committee, and Senator BYRD, the ranking minority member of the full committee, worked hard to prevent deep House cuts from being carried forward in their bill.

So I very much appreciate the efforts by the chairman and the ranking member, for example, to preserve the affordable housing stock and to provide tenant protections in cases where owners insist in opting out of their assisted housing contracts. That is important progress, and I thank them for their hard work.

There is always the ''but.'' While recognizing and applauding the work of the subcommittee, I do not want to lose sight of the continuing, pressing affordable housing needs and the efforts that we must continue to make beyond the floor consideration of this legislation today as a Congress and as a nation.

Today, in the midst of the longest peacetime economic expansion in our Nation's history, we are faced with the largest number of our citizens facing ''worst case housing needs.'' Let me explain briefly what that phrase means. Families with ''worst case housing needs'' are those who pay over half their income in rent or live in severely substandard housing, housing that fails to meet basic standards of safety and decency.

For families paying so much of their income for rent, homelessness is only one bout of unemployment away. For those families, an unexpected medical bill brought on by a sick child or an elderly parent, a broken down car that makes it impossible to get to work, or any modest financial disruption in life's routines that most people could absorb, any of those activities can lead to eviction. Today, there are almost 5.5 million families who live with this sword of Damocles just over their heads.

Work in and of itself is not a solution. A recent study indicates that people working for the minimum wage, a full-time working family earning the minimum wage, would have to work in excess of 100 hours a week at the minimum wage in order to pay the rent for a two-bedroom apartment.

In other words—and the HUD statistics support this data—the fastest growing segment of the population with worst case needs are families. So there is this big gap between what working at the minimum wage brings in and what it costs on average for a modest apartment.

This underscores, in my opinion, the need to increase the stock of affordable housing. It also underscores, of course, the need to address the minimum wage as well. But this legislation before us now deals with housing.

We need to increase the stock of affordable housing. The fastest way to do that is by funding additional section 8 rental vouchers. This is very much the issue I hope will be addressed in conference.

Last year, we worked together to authorize 100,000 vouchers for fiscal year 2000 in the public housing bill. The budget the President submitted included the 100,000 vouchers in the proposal. In the current year, we funded 50,000 vouchers.

I make this point fully understanding the constraints under which Senators BOND and MIKULSKI worked to bring this bill to the floor today. As I have indicated, they did a good job within those constraints. But it is the responsibility of all of us now to consider how we can move beyond those constraints so we can start to meet the needs of the millions of working families, the millions of poor families, and the elderly that desperately need housing assistance just in order to make ends meet. I very much hope we can start to address this problem in the conference. I encourage both of my colleagues to place this issue of section 8 rental vouchers high on their priority list as they go to conference.

Let me add two other brief points. Last year we passed important new public housing legislation, working successfully in a bipartisan way with Senators MACK, BOND, MIKULSKI, and D'Amato. That new law holds real possibilities for strengthening our public housing stock by giving more flexibility to local housing authorities while at the same time providing important protections for the poor. To make this law work, however, we must provide adequate funding. We need to give the housing authorities adequate operating subsidies to run their programs effectively on a day-to-day basis.

Furthermore, these housing authorities are public agencies that cannot opt out of the program, as many of their private counterparts do. We must provide them the capital necessary to maintain and upgrade their units so we can begin to build the kind of economically diverse communities we know are healthier for all residents. I very much

hope this issue will also be kept in mind as my colleagues go to conference.

Finally, I note my concern with the provisions of the bill that eliminate the Community Builders Program entirely this coming February. In fact, many of these employees are the sole HUD workers in various State or local HUD offices. Surely, a more measured approach to addressing these concerns is possible. Eliminating these positions will result either in offices being closed or HUD being forced to shuffle employees around in ways that simply may not be optimal. From all reports, the community builders are doing a good job. They have been well received. I hope we allow them to continue with their efforts.

In closing, I again thank my colleagues for their work on this bill. Many improvements were made possible by their resolve and their many efforts even before the bill was marked up, but there is still much to be done. I look forward to working with both of them, and the other members of the Appropriations Committee, as the bill moves to conference in the hope and anticipation that we may be able to move beyond some of the constraints under which they were laboring and to address these issues which I have outlined and, certainly, this very pressing need for affordable housing all across the country.

I yield the floor.

Mr. REED addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BUNNING). The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. REED. Mr. President, I join my colleague, Senator SARBANES, and commend both Senator BOND and Senator MIKULSKI for their extraordinary work in trying to fashion an appropriations bill under very difficult fiscal constraints and to meet the demands for so many different programs.

I, too, am concerned that the amount of resources devoted to the Department of Housing and Urban Development is not sufficient to meet the demands for all Americans for adequate and safe housing. I am also concerned that some of the reductions in staffing may impair the operations of HUD in the delivery of effective services to Americans throughout the country.

Again, I recognize the extraordinary conflicting demands that both Senator BOND and Senator MIKULSKI faced and the remarkable job they have done in fashioning the bill to date. It is my hope that as we go into conference, we can find additional resources to address two critical issues. First and foremost is access to affordable housing for all of our citizens. There is, in fact, an affordable housing crisis throughout this country. The second issue, as I mentioned before, is related to the issue of staffing at HUD.

Let me talk about the crisis that many Americans face with regard to affordable housing. As Senator SARBANES articulated, there is a request within the President's budget for 100,000 new vouchers that will allow individuals to move into adequate, decent, and safe housing. It is estimated that there are 5.3 million households in the United States that suffer from worst-case housing needs. These needs, as has previously been explained, are either the fact that the family is paying more than 50 percent of their income for housing or that they are living in very substandard housing. This is not an academic problem anywhere in the United States; it is a real problem. In Rhode Island, for example, it is estimated that there are 23,000 families suffering worst-case housing needs. They are spending a huge amount of their income simply to find a place to live. Sometimes these places are inadequate. Others are in places in which, frankly, we would not live, nor would we want to see anyone else live. So we do have a problem. This problem is worsening.

We used to build affordable housing units at a fairly substantial rate. Between 1979 and 1980, we built a significant number of houses. That was a trend that had begun all through the 1970s. In the 1980s, we essentially stopped building affordable housing throughout this country. In 1995, the Government went further and stopped issuing any additional rental vouchers for needy Americans. So as a result, predictably and understandably, we have a shortage of decent, affordable housing throughout the United States.

This problem of a lack of supply has been further exacerbated by a booming economy that is driving up the price of everything, including the price of houses. So we have limited housing stock and increased demands. We have accelerating prices. We have families that are in crisis.

Last year we authorized 100,000 new vouchers—I commend the leadership for doing that—but still there are more than 1 million Americans on waiting lists for public housing or for section 8 vouchers. They are not waiting for days or weeks; the average waiting time for section 8 vouchers in our country is 28 months. In most large cities, the waiting time is much longer. For example, in Philadelphia, the waiting time is 11 years. In Cincinnati, it is 10 years. In Los Angeles, it is 8 years. In my own home State of Rhode Island, the average waiting time for public housing is not quite that severe, but it is still 7 months. That is a long time for a family to wait to get into public housing. In addition, there is a long waiting list and waiting period for section 8 vouchers. That is estimated to be months and months, if not years.

So we have a problem we have to address. In light of this great problem, we should this year, once again, authorize at a minimum 100,000 new rental assistance vouchers. We haven't done that. We haven't been able to do that in this particular appropriations bill. I hope in the conference we can, in fact, achieve that objective. Even if we do that, we will not be totally satisfying the tremendous housing needs of the American people, but at least it will be another forward step in that appropriate march to a goal of adequate, safe, decent, and affordable housing for all of our citizens.

The second issue I will mention is the issue of staffing in the Department of HUD; in particular, the Community Builders Program. My colleague, Senator SARBANES, mentioned the concerns that I, too, share. This is a program which is now, under this legislation, scheduled to be eliminated. It has only been in operation for about a year. We haven't given it a chance to operate. If, in fact, we eliminate this program, not only will we miss the opportunity to truly and effectively evaluate this program, we will also take away many of the workers who are doing all the work in some of the regional and district offices of HUD. We will effectively impair the ability of HUD to deliver their services, and that is not something we want to do.

There are reports already that the cuts HUD has made in their staffing—and they have been significant over the last several years—have reached a point where both GAO and the IG at HUD are questioning whether or not HUD has reduced too many employees. In this context, where they have already made significant reductions and where we have a new program that shows some promise, although there has been some criticism, I think it is premature to eliminate the Community Builders Program.

I hope we will study it carefully, evaluate it objectively, make changes, if necessary, but certainly not at this juncture eliminate a program that deserves, I think, additional time to prove its worth and merit.

Let me conclude by thanking Senators BOND and MIKULSKI for their extraordinary work. Also, I will work with them over the next several weeks and months in conference to see if we can find and dedicate these resources to addressing many of the issues I have raised.

I yield the floor.

Ms. MIKULSKI addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maryland.

Ms. MIKULSKI. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Maryland, Mr. SARBANES, and the Senator from Rhode Island, Mr. REID, for their compliments. I particularly want to thank the Senator from Maryland, my very dear and esteemed colleague. We have a wonderful alignment in Maryland with Senator SARBANES, the ranking member on authorizing and I on housing appropriations. I thank him for all of the work he has done in terms of our housing and our urban economic development initiatives, and also for being concerned to make sure that HUD serves not only urban America but our rural and suburban communities as well. I thank him for his steadfast belief that the American dream is home

ownership and for his desire to promote home ownership. I am particularly grateful for that, and we have done that in this bill. Also, he is a champion for the homeless, which, again, I believe we address in this bill.

Then there is the in-between group, those people working for self-help, working very hard to move from welfare to work. They often qualify while they are working for certain subsidies, be they food stamps and, in some cases, section 8 housing, essentially making work worth it. If you are willing to work hard every day, we are willing to at least subsidize housing for you and your family. So his presentation about the need for more section 8 vouchers, I believe, was an excellent one and one with which I am in complete agreement.

I say to my colleague from Maryland that this bill is a work in progress. To be able to find an offset or a new revenue stream to meet the need for new vouchers now and to be able to sustain them in the future is a set of actions I wish to take. I am working closely with the administration to find an offset that would be both reliable and sustainable, and I look forward to our continued working relationship. I welcome his ongoing support and collaboration. Again, this bill is a work in progress. I really do thank the Senator.

Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative assistant proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. DASCHLE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. DASCHLE. Mr. President, let me begin where others have also begun by complimenting the distinguished chair and ranking member. They have an extraordinary working relationship. They are excellent partners in moving this important bill. I commend them both for their work.

This has not been easy, especially this year, but they have demonstrated once again what happens when two people of intelligence and determination can work together to achieve the product that we have before us. I certainly hope that our colleagues will recognize that work and will be as supportive as I hope we can be on a bipartisan basis.

If there is one area where I hope we can take another look in conference it is section 8 and the question of public housing. The affordable housing crisis, as many know, is now at record levels. But we are in a situation where very little is available in the form of new vouchers to deal with millions of children and senior citizens who are currently at risk, not because we don't have the desire but because we haven't had the resources.

We have considered the demand for section 8 housing. We have looked at public housing in many ways but have not funded it adequately because we have felt the need to fund other priorities. In fact, we have used section 8 as an offset to fund other programs. That offset has now been completely depleted.

But 5.3 million American households suffer from the worst-case housing situations—defined as paying more than 50 percent of their income in rent or living in substandard conditions. I believe Senator SARBANES mentioned that.

In my home State of South Dakota, the average waiting list for public housing is now 9 months for section 8. It is a very serious problem even in a rural State such as ours where one wouldn't think that the availability of public housing is nearly as much of a problem as it might be in some of the larger cities.

But we have seen a half decade of a budget freeze on housing assistance. From 1977 to 1994, the number of HUD-assisted households grew by 2.6 million—an average of 204,000 additional households each year from 1977 through 1983, and an additional 107,000 households per year from 1984 to 1994. But in 1995 we saw a reversal of that policy—a freeze on new housing vouchers despite the growing need.

In 1999, we saw the first new vouchers in 5 years. The President has made a modest request for fiscal year 2000 of 100,000 for this year. Last year we made available 50,000 new section 8 vouchers, the first in 5 years. In my own State, again, 321 families would receive section 8 assistance with appropriations of 100,000 new vouchers. To provide no new vouchers is, frankly, a flaw in what is otherwise a very important bill. I hope we can begin to work on it much more constructively.

In some areas, housing costs have risen faster than incomes of low-income working families. In addition, due to the aging and gentrification of older housing, the number of affordable rental units has actually declined.

The section 8 housing voucher program clearly provides one of the only means—if not the only means—to subsidize the rents of apartments that families locate on the private rental markets. They don't give families a free ride. I think everyone hopefully understands that. There is no free ride for families. They still must find the resources to pay between 30 and 40 percent of their incomes for rent. They have to take some responsibility in their own right. Without vouchers, many low-income working families simply are unable to secure affordable housing.

Another problem, of course, related to public housing and section 8 housing is the Community Builder Program. The bill currently would require the firing of 410 HUD employees, which would eliminate local service in almost two dozen communities, including South Dakota. That also would be a problem.

I realize our distinguished colleagues had to make some very tough choices. I applaud them for making many of the choices they did and coming up with as fair and comprehensive a bill as we have before the Senate. I intend to support it strongly and enthusiastically. I do hope, though, when we get to conference, we can address the section 8 and public housing programs. I believe that is the one area where, as good as this bill is, we still can demonstrate real progress.

Failing that, I am very concerned about the implication for housing for low-income people across this country, in South Dakota, in rural areas, as well as in urban areas that I know are commonly associated with public housing programs. This is not just an urban problem; it is a rural problem as well. I know the distinguished ranking member understands that and is very knowledgeable and cognizant of that issue and problem. I hope we can do better in resolving it once we get to conference.

I congratulate my colleagues and yield the floor.

Mr. BOND. Mr. President, I add another cosponsor to amendment No. 1744. I ask that Senator ABRAHAM be added.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. BOND. Mr. President, let me first thank the distinguished minority leader for his kind comments. I share his concern about the availability of affordable housing. At an appropriate time, I want to discuss some of the problems in a little more detail. I recognize his concern and the concerns raised by the Senator from Maryland, the Senator from Rhode Island, and others. There is a bigger problem, and we will discuss that later.

We have been in quorum calls for almost the last hour. We have an amendment Senator MIKULSKI will offer shortly on behalf of Senator INOUYE. However, we are open for business. This is daylight. This is a good time to present amendments, to argue amendments, with great coverage. Everybody is paying attention; everybody is awake. We beg and plead with our colleagues to come down and get going so we can finish this up at an early hour.

I see the distinguished junior Senator from North Carolina who wants to share some views on the very serious problem caused by the hurricane in his State.

I yield the floor.

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak up to 10 minutes as in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

HURRICANE FLOYD

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. President, I am here to talk about the terrible devastation that has occurred in my State of North Carolina, which most of my colleagues, I know, are aware of, and to