

able to do and what Democrats were able to do for President Clinton and what the majority leader is now doing. But I must tell you because the gentlemen and/or ladies have languished in these committees since April and May and their paperwork was there, there is something amiss.

That was my objection. Obviously, the majority leader has now expedited them. We have worked with the majority leader, and I compliment him for that. I think that is important.

But if there is a problem, let us not suggest that the gentleman doesn't get heard before next year. Let's send the right message instead of that kind of a statement. If there is a problem, what is the problem? If this person is unacceptable, hold the hearing, vote on him, and move him out or move him down.

That is my point. We need to get on with the business of allowing our President to have his people in place to govern. We made a major step, and I thank the majority leader for that.

Mr. DASCHLE. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Idaho for his comment. There clearly will be nominees who will face challenges. We see that in the Commerce Committee as we speak. There will be others. But we will do our level best. That does not mean we are going to roll over and rubberstamp every nominee who comes forward because that isn't why we are here.

We have an obligation to ask questions, to review the data, and to make a decision. We are going to do that. But to whatever extent possible, we are going to be fair, and we are not going to reciprocate, even though I must say there are sometimes temptations that are fairly powerful. I hope we will continue to make progress on the nominations.

I also thank my colleagues, Senator REID and Senator NICKLES, for moving us along on the nominations, and Senator LOTT in particular for his work in trying to reach an accommodation.

My desire now is to work relatively late into the evening so that we might be able to get some of these amendments disposed of tonight. I do not think we will finish the bill tonight, but there is a lot of work to be done on the VA-HUD bill. We still have the Ag appropriations legislation left to do. So there is much to be done. Today is Wednesday afternoon, and we still have a day and a half, or 2, 3, 4, or 5 days perhaps, to do our work. But it is going to get done before we leave.

We will move now to the VA-HUD bill after the Senators who sought recognition are allowed to speak.

I yield the floor.

TRANSPORTATION APPROPRIATIONS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I am very pleased that the Senate has now

finally passed the Senate Transportation appropriations bill. It has been a long and arduous process, but we have done the right thing today. We have done the right thing for our constituents who have been sitting in traffic, for our constituents who are concerned about safety at our airports, for our constituents who daily travel in this country, who use our waterways and our highways and our air transportation system.

We have moved this bill forward in a way that I think is very sound. We have tried to meet the needs, as I said, of all of the Senators, who I think have done a good job on this floor. But, most importantly, I am especially pleased that we have moved the Senate Transportation Appropriations bill out of the Senate without compromising one iota on the safety of our families on our highways in regard to the Mexican truck provision. I think that is absolutely the way to go. I commend my colleagues who stood with me on this issue as we have moved this bill through the Senate.

I also take this opportunity to thank my staff: Peter Rogoff, Kate Hallahan, Denise Matthews, Cyndi Stowe, Angela Lee, and Dale Learn; as well as Senator SHELBY's staff: Wally Burnett, Paul Doerrer, and Candice Rogers; and our Commerce Committee staff: Debbie Hersman.

All of our staff members have spent countless hours in this Chamber, negotiating late into the night on many evenings over the past 10 days. I especially thank all of them for their tremendously good work and hard work and for being a part of getting this bill passed out today.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Jersey.

Mr. TORRICELLI. Mr. President, I congratulate Senator MURRAY for her success on Transportation appropriations. This Senate, commencing a summer recess, is required to deal with Mexican trucks and northeastern cows. We now have one success behind us, and one more to go.

There are those who are going to claim that our insistence on the inspection of Mexican trucks is somehow a defeat for free trade. Nothing could be further from the truth. The commitment of this Senate to free, fair, and open trade is complete. We understand that the foundation of our prosperity rests upon open markets and free trade. But because we worship at the altar of free trade does not mean we have abandoned our faith in truck safety, the rights of labor, or environmental protection. We must keep a commitment to all of these things at the same time.

The roads of the United States are open to Mexican trucks—as they are open to Canadian trucks—when Mexico can pass a regimen of truck weights, the licensing of drivers for hazardous cargo, that licenses are issued to 21-year-old drivers, and that the Mexican

trucks can meet our safety requirements.

Upon current inspections, nearly 40 percent of Mexican trucks are failing inspections. Our borders are not ready for 24-hour inspections to ensure safety. We want Mexico to have access to American highways. But for 50 years we have insisted that all trucks on our highways have limited weights, properly licensed drivers, and disclose hazardous cargoes. As we have insisted upon these requirements for Canadian and American drivers, we insist upon them for Mexican drivers. We welcome that day. What we have done today is a success.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator's 2 minutes have expired.

Mr. TORRICELLI. I know in time Mexico will be able to comply with these requirements.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona.

Mr. McCAIN. Mr. President, I extend my appreciation to the majority leader and to the Republican leader for negotiating this issue out so that we could move forward. I did not enjoy this exercise. As I mentioned before, I have never—and I have been in the Senate since 1987—engaged in parliamentary maneuvering in order to block consideration of a bill. And I would not have—and I hope I never have to again—if it were not for the fact that it is a solemn treaty. So I thank the majority leader for his assistance in working this out, as well as Senator LOTT.

During the upcoming recess, we are going to meet with the Department of Transportation administration officials to find out exactly what language it is that they need in order to satisfy the concerns we all have about the present language in the bill, which they view and the Mexicans view as a violation of NAFTA. I hope we can come back, at the end of the recess, and we can agree on that language. Then we can move forward.

However, I remind my colleagues that there are three more—three more—cloture votes that may be required which will all involve, of course, extended debate. I do not want to do that. But, if necessary, we will continue through until finality because we really are concerned about language on an appropriations bill affecting a solemn treaty made between three nations.

So again, I thank the majority leader for working this out and giving us the courtesy he has extended. I apologize to him for impeding the important work of the Senate. I hope he understands why we had to do this. I am hopeful this will all be worked out over the recess so that we can come to an agreement on language which will achieve the goal we seek, which is to make sure that every vehicle that enters the United States is safe and inspected and every driver is licensed and qualified.

So I hope we can get this issue resolved. I hope the administration will

be able to work with us and the other side and develop the necessary language. I hope we do not have to continue this parliamentary maneuvering, but we will, if necessary. I hope all understand that this is the importance of this issue.

Mr. President, I yield the remainder of my time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maryland.

DEPARTMENTS OF VETERANS AFFAIRS AND HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT AND INDEPENDENT AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2002

Ms. MIKULSKI. Mr. President, I call up the VA-HUD appropriations bill.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the bill by title.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 2620) 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, 2002, and for other purposes.

Ms. MIKULSKI. Mr. President, I am indeed quite happy and proud to present the Senate with the VA-HUD and independent agencies appropriations for fiscal year 2002.

I thank Chairman BYRD and Senator STEVENS for working with the subcommittee in order to give us an allocation that made the bill workable. The funding level falls within the subcommittee's 302(b) allocation. I also thank Senator BOND and his staff for their bipartisanship and cooperation in support of this bill.

This subcommittee has had a history of bipartisanship. That tradition continues today.

When we began the 107th Congress, Senator BOND chaired this subcommittee. It is one of the most important because it funds so many of the agencies that meet compelling human need as well as the long-range needs of the United States of America.

When the transition came, it came in an orderly, seamless, and collegial way. I hope that will also be the general tenor of our debate, that we can move forward on this bill on a bipartisan basis.

I believe this bill is balanced, fair and meets the needs of the American people.

My guiding principles in drafting this bill were simple: keep the promises to our veterans; meet the compelling day-to-day needs of working poor; re-build our neighborhoods and communities; and, invest in science and technology to create jobs today and jobs tomorrow.

Based on the President's budget proposal and our subcommittee's allocation, we had to focus on restoring cuts in the President's budget and avoiding riders.

Our overriding goal was to make sure that the core programs in veterans and

housing were taken care of first, and we did that.

We could not increase spending for any programs until our core programs for veterans and the poor were taken care of.

While I wish the subcommittee had more resources for science, we did the best we could do given our allocation.

I remain fully committed to doubling the budget for NSF over the next 5 years, but without the support of the administration, the authorizing committees, and the Budget Committees, the appropriators can not do it alone.

Finally, we did not break new ground this year. We are staying the course because this is a year of transition both in the administration and in the Senate.

For our Nation's veterans, we have increased VA healthcare by \$1.1 billion over last year, for a total of \$21.4 billion. This is \$400 million more than the President's request. This will allow the VA healthcare system to serve 4 million patients in 2002 through 172 medical centers, 876 outpatients clinics, 135 nursing homes and 43 domiciliaries.

VA continues to shift from an inpatient focus to outpatient care to serve more veterans in their communities. The funding in this bill will allow VA to open more community based outpatient clinics to better serve our Nation's veterans. This bill provides funding for VA to open 33 new outpatient clinics in fiscal year 2002.

This marks the second year in a row that we have had billion-dollar-plus increase for veterans healthcare.

We have also increased funding for VA medical research by \$40 million over last year and \$30 million above the President's request. This funding level will allow VA to continue progress in the treatment of chronic diseases; diagnoses and treatment of degenerative brain diseases, such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's, and; research involving special populations, especially those who suffer from spinal cord injury, stroke, nervous system diseases, and posttraumatic stress disorder.

VA is also a training ground for doctors, nurses, and physician assistants.

VA medical care and research is a national asset that benefits both veterans and non-veterans.

We have also maintained our commitment to the VA State home construction program. As our veterans age in place, their needs and the needs of their families are changing. Outpatient clinics and State veterans homes bring the delivery of healthcare and healthcare services closer to our veterans and their families. This approach reduces costs for the VA and improves the quality of services for the veterans.

We have also provided funding to speed the processing of veterans claims. From the time a veteran files a claim, to the time he or she receives a decision, takes an average of 205 days or nearly 7 months. This bill includes \$46 million to hire additional claims processors to help reduce waiting times to 100 days by the summer of 2003.

For the Department of Housing and Urban Development, we had two overall goals: expand housing opportunities for the poor, and rebuild our neighborhoods and communities; and help special needs populations.

First, we have fully funded the renewal of all section 8 housing vouchers by funding the housing certificate fund at \$15.6 billion. This is \$1.7 billion more than last year.

This amount includes an advance appropriation of \$4.2 billion, for fiscal year 2003.

This advance appropriation was included as part of the concurrent budget resolution for fiscal year 2002 adopted earlier this year. We have carried this advance appropriation for the last several years and continue it this year.

Within the section 8 account, we have provided funding for 17,000 new or "incremental" vouchers to provide more vouchers for people waiting for section 8 assistance.

We have restored the cuts proposed by the President to critical the public housing capital account.

The Public Housing Capital Program provides funds to public housing authorities to repair and renovate public housing units to update heating, ventilation, electrical, and plumbing systems. Funds can also be used to construct new public housing, as well as renovating existing units.

We have provided \$2.9 billion for public housing capital which is just below last year's level.

We have restored funding for the Drug Elimination Grant Program to fight crime and drugs in public housing.

We have provided \$300 million for the Drug Elimination Program, just below last year's funding level. President Bush eliminated this program in his budget.

We cannot stop or delay our fight against drugs and crime in public housing. HUD needs to be a force for stability in the neighborhoods that surround public housing.

We increased funding for the CDBG program by \$200 million over last year, to just over \$5 billion in FY 2002. The CDBG program is one of the most effective tools for local economic development efforts. It gives our State and local officials flexibility to use Federal funds to meet local needs.

For other HUD programs, we have continued funding at last year's levels for: empowerment zones; brownfields; homeless grants; and housing for the elderly and disabled. We would like to have increased funding for these programs this year, but our allocation was simply not high enough to provide across-the-board increases.

We have included language to raise the FHA loan limits for multi-family housing by 25 percent this year—the first increase in many years.

This proposal was included as part of the administration's budget request, and we included it as part of our bill. Raising the loan limits will help increase the supply of multi-family housing in this country.