Preparedness Act of 2002, strengthens the role of the Department of Veterans Affairs to protect the people of the United States from terrorists, particularly bio-terrorism threats such as last year's anthrax attacks in Washington, New York, New Jersey and Florida. We must be proactive in preparing the United States for a future terrorist attack. As Vice President CHENEY cautioned this year, ''The prospects of a future attack against the United States are almost certain. Not a matter of it, but when. It could happen tomorrow, it could happen next week, it could happen next year, but they will keep trying.'' We must respond in an effective and comprehensive manner to protect the American people when an attack occurs. This bill would help do just that.

Under this bill, four geographically separated National Medical Emergency Preparedness Centers would be established. Each center would study and develop treatments for human exposure to chemical, biological, explosive and nuclear substances that may be used as weapons of mass destruction.

The Department of Veterans Affairs is a good host for such a new and important mission. In addition to its medical care mission to care for millions of veterans, the veterans health care system is the nation's largest provider of graduate medical education and is a major contributor to biomedical and other scientific research. Because of its widely dispersed, integrated health care system, VA is an essential asset in responding to national, regional and local emergencies. The VA is an integral part of the Federal Response Plan, and an important local resource in natural disasters. This bill strengthens VA's role as a helping agency in such events, and particularly those that may be caused in the future by those bent on destruction of freedom and the American way of life.

Not only would the four emergency preparedness centers conduct research and develop detection, diagnosis, prevention, and treatment methods; but they would also be charged as clearinghouses to disseminate the information to other public and private health care providers, to improve the quality of care for patients who may be exposed to deadly chemicals or radiation.

In addition, our bill would also require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out a program to develop and disseminate model education and training programs for medical response to terrorist activities. VA's infrastructure, which includes affiliations with over 107 medical schools, and other schools of health professions, would prepare current and future medical professionals in this country to be knowledgeable and medically competent in the treatment of casualties from terrorist attacks. In my home state, the University of Kansas School of Medicine currently partners with 4 Veterans Medical Centers and educates over 700 medical students and more than 390 resident physicians in training.

This bill also provides the VA a formal role in the national disaster medical system, and authorizes the VA to treat first responders, active-duty military forces deployed in domestic deployments, fire fighters, police officers and members of the general public who may fall victim to terrorism or mass casualty disasters. Another important part of this bill is the establishment of a centralized office at VA headquarters to manage all emergency preparedness, security and law enforcement activities, and to organize the VA's resources for maximum efficiency and effectiveness in protecting the security of VA's patients, staff, and infrastructure from the risk and threat of terrorism.

Mr. Speaker, this is a good bill for the American people. The professionals who need to be trained in saving lives will be properly armed with information, education and expertise to provide health care. Mechanisms will be put in place to study the likely avenues and methods of chemical, biological, and radiological poisoning. The VA will also be a part of a national presence for rapid response by local and Federal officials in types of emergencies that only a year ago we could scarcely imagine.

H.R. 3253 is a bipartisan and bicameral compromise, Mr. Speaker. As Chairman of the Subcommittee on Health of the Committee on Veterans Affairs, I am very pleased that the long journey of this legislation concludes today and that we shall send the bill to the President. I want to commend my Chairman, the gentleman from New Jersey, Mr. SMITH, for his leadership and advocacy on this measure, as well as our colleagues, the Ranking Member of the full Committee, the gentleman from Illinois, Mr. EVANS, and the Ranking Member of my Subcommittee, the gentleman from California, Mr. FILNER, for their work. As my Chairman has said previously on the floor of this Chamber, he feels a personal obligation, from events in his own district in the anthrax incidents, that Congress act to improve our safety and prevent such future travesites. I commend him for his dedication and agree that this measure aids in that respect.

I also thank our colleagues in the Senate for their cooperation, contributions and comity.

This bill may be seen as only a small effort today, Mr. Speaker, but it could pay large dividends down the road in America's war on terrorism. I urge its adoption by the House.

Mr. EVANS. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 3253, the Department of Veterans Affairs Emergency Preparedness Act of 2002, as amended.

After the tragic events of September 11th last year, our Chairman, CHRIS SMITH, again demonstrated his leadership. He authored and introduced legislation authorizing an important role for the Department of Veterans Affairs in our national fight against terrorism. This is the primary purpose of the measure before us.

VA provides medical care to millions of veterans each year. It conducts ground-breaking health care research. It also provides educational opportunities to many of our nation's health care providers. VA is truly an unparalleled national resource.

This legislation provides the structure and authority for VA to leverage its expertise to combat terrorism. For VA to achieve this goal it must have adequate resources.

Today, VA does not have enough resources. This is not my judgment. This is the judgment of the Task Force to Improve Health Care Delivery to Veterans established by President Bush. I call on the President to fully fund the VA, to provide all funding needed by VA to deliver timely and quality care to our veterans. Mr. President, provide VA the resources it requires to combat terrorism.

I am pleased H.R. 3253, as amended, has been approved by the other body. I urge all Members to support this important legislation so it can be sent to the White House for action by the President.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support passage of this legislation.

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

There was no objection.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Without objection, the various amendments to the titles are agreed to.

There was no objection.

AUTHORIZING THE CLERK TO MAKE CORRECTIONS IN ENGROSSMENT OF VARIOUS LEGISLATIVE MEASURES

Mr. ARMEY. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that, in the engrossment of the measures just passed, the Clerk be authorized to correct spelling, punctuation, numbering, and cross-references, and to make such other changes as may be necessary to reflect the actions of the House.

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

There was no objection.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. ARMEY. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks on the measures just passed and to insert extraneous material thereon.

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

There was no objection.

RELATING TO EARLY ORGANIZATION OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES FOR THE 108TH CONGRESS

Mr. ARMEY. Mr. Speaker, I offer a resolution (H. Res. 590), and I ask unanimous consent for its immediate consideration.

The Clerk read the resolution, as follows:

H. RES. 590

Resolved, That any organizational caucus or conference in the House of Representatives for the One Hundred Eighth Congress may begin on or after November 1, 2002.

SEC. 2. (a) With the approval of the majority leader (in the case of a Member or Member-elect of the majority party) or the minority leader (in the case of a Member or Member-elect of the minority party), the provisions of law described in subsection (b) shall apply with respect to the attendance of a Member or Member-elect at a program conducted by the Committee on House Administration for the orientation of new members of the One Hundred Eighth Congress in the same manner as such provisions apply to the attendance of the Member or Member-elect at the organizational caucus or conference.

(b) The provisions of law described in this subsection are as follows:

(1) Subsections (b) and (c) of section 202 of House Resolution 988, Ninety-third Congress, agreed to on October 8, 1974, and enacted into permanent law by chapter III of title I of the Supplemental Appropriations Act, 1975 (2 U.S.C. 29a).

(2) Section 1 of House Resolution 10, Ninety-fourth Congress, agreed to on January 14, 1975, and enacted into permanent law by section 201 of the Legislative Branch Appropriations Act, 1976 (2 U.S.C. 43b–2).

SEC. 3. As used in this resolution, the term ''organizational caucus or conference'' means a party caucus or conference authorized to be called under section 202(a) of House Resolution 988, Ninety-third Congress, agreed to on October 8, 1974, and enacted into permanent law by chapter III of title I of the Supplemental Appropriations Act, 1975 (2 U.S.C. 29a(a)).

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

There was no objection.

The resolution was agreed to.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

ELIMINATING NOTIFICATION AND RETURN REQUIREMENTS FOR STATE AND LOCAL PARTY COMMITTEES AND CANDIDATE COMMITTEES

Mr. BRADY of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Ways and Means be discharged from further consideration of the bill (H.R. 5596) to amend section 527 of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to eliminate notification and return requirements for State and local party committees and candidate committees and avoid duplicate reporting by certain State and local political committees of information required to be reported and made publicly available under State law, and for other purposes, and ask for its immediate consideration in the House.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

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

Mr. DOGGETT. Mr. Speaker, reserving the right to object, I do find most objectionable a procedure that brings up important legislation after many Members have departed.

It is particularly ironic that this bill which has not been before any committee of the House or voted upon by any Member of the House up until tonight and which deals with open government should be brought up in this manner. A genuine commitment to openness and public participation requires applying these concepts to more than just the bills that one may not like or be opposed to. The need for a more complete discussion of this particular bill is all the more apparent because of the extended history surrounding it.

This bill seeks to correct a problem that was produced by a process not unlike that we are having tonight. In other words, the error that this bill seeks to address is the result of a hurried-up process that did not involve full participation by all in this House. This measure concerns the first substantive reform of our campaign laws that occurred during the period from 1979 all the way up until the year 2000. And in the spring of 2000 it became apparent that the use of stealth PACS, that is, a form of political action committee in which the donors and the expenditures would not be known, so-called 527 committees, might become a significant factor in the political activity of that year.

Accordingly, I have introduced legislation in the spring of 2000 to put a stop to this, and sought unsuccessfully on at least two occasions in the Committee on Ways and Means and here on the floor of the House to correct this problem but was blocked on the floor at least by fairly narrow efforts in getting those reforms adopted.

Finally, after months of delay, the House Republican leadership reversed course and brought up a 527 bill for consideration in this House, but it did so late at night, even later than tonight here in Washington, with the bill text presented essentially as the floor consideration got under way. No amendments were permitted and the debate was truncated.

Because this process occurred in this way and because the bill was presented rapidly, it was also presented sloppily. And as a result of the sloppy way in which it was presented, some problems were created. During the full Committee on Ways and Means consideration of this issue, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. COYNE) and I had offered a comprehensive alternative. That was an alternative that recognized that State and local elected officials were already filing some of these reports and that they ought not to have to pay the price for the need to reform at the Federal level by having to make duplicative filings. None of that language that the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. COYNE) and I proposed was included in the bill that was rushed through the House late one evening in an effort to prevent broader 527 reform.

The bill was quickly signed into law and by September of the year 2000 it became apparent that there was a problem for State and local officials. More and more of them recognized they were now going to have burdensome and in some cases conflicting reporting requirements at the Federal level, in addition to the reports that they were already filing at the State or local level.

Accordingly, I introduced legislation in September of the year 2000 to correct the problem that I had not created. I recognized then that while this was not a bipartisan problem, it did deserve a bipartisan solution. Unfortunately, the same people who created the problem refused to correct it in the year 2000.

In the new Congress of 2001 I refiled legislation to address this problem and indeed even tried to move it on the Corrections Calendar of this House; but, again, the same crowds expressed their objection to doing so and to correcting a problem for which our State and local officials have had to file duplicative reports during all this time.

Finally, in April of this year, almost 2 years after this problem had been created, one got an indication of why it had never been corrected when H.R. 3391 was offered. That was the Taxpayer Protection and IRS Accountability Act to which at the last minute provisions dealing with 527s were added in the Committee on Ways and Means. I referred then in committee and on the floor to that as a loophole exploitation act because it attempted to undermine the bipartisan campaign finance law called the Shays-Meehan Act even before that law could take effect.

In the committee, I offered as an alternative language that Senator HUTCHINSON from Texas and Senator LIEBERMAN had proposed in the Senate, offered it verbatim to deal with this issue of duplicative reporting without opening new loopholes. That was also rejected in the committee on the same basis that earlier legislation had been rejected on a party line vote.

Fortunately, this House on a bipartisan basis rejected H.R. 3391, what I would refer to as the loophole exploitation act. And it is only that action of the House in rejecting that measure that presents us this opportunity tonight. Because as I read it, H.R. 5596 basically takes the language that I offered in the Committee on Ways and Means earlier in the year, language that sought to offer a bipartisan approach to this and builds on it in a couple of ways.

It first adds a provision that the public should be made fully aware of that will exempt Members of this House, Members of the House and Senate, Federal, State and local candidate committees and national party committees from filing what is known as the 990 information form. That is information that we would not been required to file in the past. It is information that is really designed for charities, nonprofits, to file. And it is most cumbersome and awkward, as all Members have found when they prepared their 990 forms this year, to apply it to Members of Congress because the IRS has not changed the form to reflect the fact that we are in a different situation and there are different needs for information and the filing of forms for individuals in a political situation than occurs for nonprofits around the country. So many of the questions are inapplicable.

It has been a problem for many to complete that form. I suppose that changing this provision is not a great loss, but it is clear that less information will be available than exists under the current law there. And in return for that change made, there are some other changes that I think are positive. These are modest changes, but they are changes that will make more accessible the access to information on Web sites. So that the information as I proposed back in the year 2000 for electronic filing would occur but there would be a searchable Web site.

And it is because these provisions seem to have merit and because I have