

This underlying bill is fiscally responsible. It is important to note that it is almost \$1 billion below the original amount requested by the President. If we are serious about fiscal responsibility, we should identify specific programs for specific reductions. This amendment shirks the difficult choices in favor of an easy vote.

I urge my colleagues to defeat the amendment and pass the bill.

Mr. YOUNG of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I yield the balance of my time to the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. WOLF).

Mr. WOLF. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong opposition to the Toomey amendment.

Just before I came here for this series of votes, we were meeting with the FBI. The FBI needs additional resources because they have taken personnel out of crime fighting and drug fighting and are now putting them in with regard to homeland security. They need more people. Then they have taken people off the streets that are working on drugs. So this would not be good for the FBI, aside from the homeland security.

Lastly, across-the-board cuts never work. The best way to do something, if there is a particular program that you want to cut, you go after it. But across the board, to make the FBI take that cut now, and DEA, would not be good for the country, not good for crime, and not good for the fight against drugs.

So on that, I strongly urge a "no" vote on the Toomey amendment.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to House Resolution 339, the previous question is ordered on the bill and on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. TOOMEY).

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

The question was taken; and the Speaker pro tempore announced that the noes appeared to have it.

Mr. TOOMEY. Mr. Chairman, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays are ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the previous order of the House earlier today, further proceedings on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. TOOMEY) are postponed.

LIMITATION ON AMENDMENTS DURING CONSIDERATION OF H.R. 2861, DEPARTMENTS OF VETERANS AFFAIRS AND HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT, AND INDEPENDENT AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2004

Mr. YOUNG of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that during consideration of H.R. 2861 in the Committee of the Whole pursuant to House Resolution 338, no amendment to the bill may be offered except:

pro forma amendments by the chairman or ranking minority member of the Committee on Appropriations or

their designees for the purpose of debate;

an amendment by Mr. WALSH striking provisions in title III and title IV, which may be offered en bloc;

Two amendments by Mr. SMITH of New Jersey, each regarding medical care for veterans;

an amendment by Mr. SMITH of New Jersey striking section 114, which shall be debatable for 20 minutes;

an amendment by Mr. EDWARDS regarding medical care for veterans;

an amendment by Mr. STEARNS regarding medical and prosthetic research;

an amendment by Mr. KIRK regarding sharing agreements with the Department of Defense;

an amendment by Mr. NADLER regarding the housing certificate fund, which shall be debatable for 20 minutes;

an amendment by Mr. FATTAH or Mr. DAVIS of Illinois regarding public housing, which shall be debatable for 20 minutes;

an amendment by Mr. NADLER regarding housing opportunities, which shall be debatable for 20 minutes;

an amendment by Mrs. CAPPS regarding science and technology programs on the Environmental Protection Agency;

an amendment by Mr. HASTINGS of Florida regarding environmental programs and management;

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an amendment by the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. DINGELL) regarding environmental programs and management;

an amendment by the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. MARKEY) regarding hazardous substance Superfund, which shall be debatable for 20 minutes;

an amendment by the gentleman from Texas (Mr. HALL) regarding NASA;

an amendment by the gentleman from Kansas (Mr. MORAN) regarding beneficiary travel;

an amendment by the gentleman from Maine (Mr. ALLEN) regarding the Clean Air Act, which shall be debatable for 20 minutes;

an amendment by the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. MANZULLO) regarding the Buy America Act;

an amendment by the gentleman from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS) or the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. KANJORSKI) regarding veterans integrated service networks;

an amendment by the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. LYNCH) regarding veterans;

an amendment by the gentleman from Kansas (Mr. MOORE) regarding Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services;

an amendment by the gentleman from Hawaii (Mr. CASE) regarding redesignation of Hawaiian counties;

an amendment by the gentlewoman from California (Ms. LEE) or the gen-

tlewoman from Illinois (Ms. SCHAKOWSKY) regarding homeless assistance grants, debatable for 20 minutes;

an amendment by the gentleman from Washington (Mr. INSLEE) or the gentleman from New York (Mr. HINCHEY) regarding environmental programs and management;

two amendments by the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON-LEE) regarding NASA, each of which shall be debatable for 5 minutes;

an amendment by the gentleman from New York (Mr. BISHOP) regarding human testing of pesticides;

an amendment by the gentleman from New York (Mr. MEEKS) regarding VA clinics, which shall be debatable for 20 minutes.

Each amendment may be offered only by the Member designated or a designee, shall be considered as read, shall not be subject to amendment, and shall not be subject to a demand for a division of the question in the House or in the Committee of the Whole. Except as specified, each amendment shall be debatable for 10 minutes, equally divided and controlled by the proponent and an opponent. An amendment shall be considered to fit the description stated in this request if it addresses in whole or in part the object described.

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

Mr. OBEY. Reserving the right to object, Mr. Speaker, and I certainly will not object because we have been working on this for a long time, but I would still like to point out to the Members of the House that while I certainly welcome this time agreement for planning purposes, Members need to understand that if everyone included in this agreement exercises the full amount of time listed in this agreement, we will still be here about 9 o'clock this evening. So if people are trying to catch their airplanes and they have amendments, many of these amendments are subject to a point of order and many of these amendments are probably not going to get very many votes. So I think Members need to ask themselves how much time they want to take in situations like that.

The committee is doing everything it can to get Members out of here so they can catch their planes, but we will need the cooperation of the individual Members, or it is not going to happen.

Mr. YOUNG of Florida. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. OBEY. I yield to the gentleman from Florida.

Mr. YOUNG of Florida. I thank the gentleman for yielding, and I want to confirm what the gentleman has said.

I recall yesterday the dialogue between the minority whip and the majority leader that if we work things out that Members could probably consider leaving here about 5 o'clock. And I know that, if we continue to do everything that is on this unanimous consent list, that is just not going to happen. So Members need to be aware that

the 5 o'clock suggestion that was made yesterday may not work if we do all of this.

Mr. OBEY. Reclaiming my time, I would simply say it most certainly will not work if we do all of this. So people need to think about it.

Mr. Speaker, I withdraw my reservation of objection.

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

There was no objection.

DEPARTMENTS OF VETERANS AFFAIRS AND HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT, AND INDEPENDENT AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2004

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to House Resolution 338 and rule XVIII, the Chair declares the House in the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union for the consideration of the bill, H.R. 2861.

The Chair designates the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. SHIMKUS) as Chairman of the Committee of the Whole, and requests the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. NUSSLE) to assume the chair temporarily.

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IN THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Accordingly, the House resolved itself into the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union for the consideration of the bill (H.R. 2861) 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, 2004, and for other purposes, with Mr. NUSSLE (Chairman pro tempore) in the chair.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The CHAIRMAN pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the bill is considered as having been read the first time.

Under the rule, the gentleman from New York (Mr. WALSH) and the gentleman from West Virginia (Mr. MOLLOHAN) each will control 30 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New York (Mr. WALSH).

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. WALSH. Mr. Chairman, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks on H.R. 2861, and that I may include tabular and extraneous material.

The CHAIRMAN pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from New York?

There was no objection.

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

Mr. Chairman, it is my pleasure to bring before the House today H.R. 2861, the Departments of Veterans Affairs and Housing and Urban Development, and Independent Agencies Appropriations Act for 2004.

Prior to proceeding, Mr. Chairman, in discussing the bill before us, I would like to offer my sincere recognition and thanks to my ranking member, the gentleman from West Virginia (Mr. MOLLOHAN), for his help in bringing this bill to the floor. He and I have forged a strong relationship over the last 5 years working on this bill. I feel the result reflects most of our shared priorities. We consulted during hearings during the formation of the bill, during markups, and his advice has been remarkable and we would not be here if we had not had it.

I would also like to thank and recognize the staff on both sides of the aisle for their hard work and assistance. My personal thanks to Tim Peterson, the clerk of the subcommittee; Dena Baron; Jennifer Whitson; Jennifer Miller; and Doug Disrud on the majority side, and to Michelle Burkette, Mike Stephens, and Jerry Johnson for the minority.

I would also like to express my appreciation to Gavin Clingham and Angela Ohm on the gentleman from West Virginia's (Mr. MOLLOHAN) personal staff, as well as Ron Anderson and Art Jutton on my personal staff for their assistance in getting this bill to this point in the process.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to just sum up briefly the bill. Most of the attention has been focused on the veterans portion, and I will address that at the end. In housing, we have provided an increase of about close to \$1 billion to provide for full funding for section 8 housing vouchers. There are no new incremental vouchers, but we have fully funded the existing vouchers that include vouchers that are targeted for housing for people with AIDS. It is also for disabled individuals in our society. So those are dedicated funds, and they will continue to flow.

In the Environmental Protection Agency, we provided approximately \$8 billion, and I think we have done a good job in continuing the progress that we have made in protecting the environment; and we do expect several amendments in that area of the bill, some of which we will accept.

In NASA, NASA really is a status quo budget, pending the outcome and the release of the Gehman Commission report. We expect that that report will have profound implications for NASA, and we expect that the administration, once that report is available, will come forward and express their views to us, which may result in additional supplemental expenditures depending on what the report says, but we do await that report.

The National Science Foundation, the Congress is on record as requesting that we double the National Science Foundation in 5 years. We cannot keep that pace, although in the past we have done close to double-digit increases in the past 3 or 4 years in NSF; and I think the subcommittee has shown great leadership in supporting the in-

vestment in the new technologies, information technologies and others that this country leads the world in. We will have a 5 percent increase, which I think given our allocation is a remarkable commitment to our scientific community. These are all peer reviewed, non-earmarked funds. So they encourage some of our finest educational institutions across the country and our finest young people.

Lastly, the veterans budget, which has been the focus of most of the discussion so far. Mr. Chairman, we have increased veterans medical care by approximately \$1.3 billion over last year. It is about a 6 percent increase in medical care. We have provided about \$1 billion increase in the mandatory portion of the bill which is veterans benefits. It is a \$2.5 billion increase.

We were asked to provide additional funds to veterans. We were unable to do that, given the allocation that we had. It is an increase, it is a substantial increase, but it is not a record increase similar to what we provided 2 years ago and then again last year. But, in fact, this subcommittee has increased the veterans budget and the medical care side by close to 50 percent in the last 5 years. So since 1998, close to a 50 percent increase in veterans medical care. The difficulty is that the number of customers, the number of patients that we have had at the veterans hospitals has outstripped those increases.

The Congress has tried diligently and this has been the number one priority of the subcommittee to fully fund veterans health care, and we are trying. It is pretty clear by the discussion that Members expect us to provide more, veterans expect us to provide more, veterans service agencies expect us to provide more.

This is not the end of the process. The process continues after this bill is hopefully passed today. We have to go to conference with the Senate. And I pledge to work with the minority, with the gentleman from West Virginia (Mr. MOLLOHAN), with our Republican leadership, the leadership of the House, and with the Senate to find any way we can to improve the funding for veterans medical care and at the same time looking down the road at things that the Congress can do to improve the situation by making administrative decisions to bring veterans in through the process more quickly, to take some of the pressure off the prescription drug problem by passing a prescription drug benefit for all Americans, by looking at the Medicare subvention issue which would allow veterans to use their Medicare payments to pay for going to the veterans hospital.

There are a number of things we can do. We cannot do them all in this bill, but I do pledge to continue to work to try to improve the situation as we go towards the conference.