

An amendment by Mr. FRANKS of Arizona regarding the conduct of studies of missile defense;

An amendment by Mrs. CAPITO regarding the submission of a report on the implementation of the Office of Rural Health;

An amendment by Mr. GARRETT of New Jersey regarding funding for extended care facilities;

An amendment by Mrs. DRAKE regarding a report on pending disability benefit claims;

An amendment by Mr. BROWN of South Carolina regarding a report on ALS;

An amendment by Mr. HALL of New York regarding awards for certain VA employees;

An amendment by Mrs. MUSGRAVE or Mr. SALAZAR regarding the Pinon Canyon maneuver site;

An amendment by Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas regarding medical centers in underserved urban areas;

An amendment by Mrs. BLACKBURN regarding e-commerce;

An amendment by Mr. DONNELLY regarding implementation of GAO recommendations related to claims processing;

An amendment by Ms. HARMAN or Mr. UPTON regarding purchase of light bulbs;

An amendment by Mr. PEARCE regarding reimbursement of travel expenses for VA employees;

An amendment by Mr. CONAWAY or Mrs. DRAKE regarding deficit spending;

An amendment by Mrs. CAPITO regarding interoperable medical records;

An amendment by Mr. MORAN of Kansas regarding funding for VA medical services;

An amendment by Ms. CORRINE BROWN of Florida regarding funding for the Gainesville Veterans Affairs Medical Center;

An amendment by Mrs. WILSON of New Mexico regarding funding for service dogs for disabled veterans;

An amendment by Mrs. WILSON of New Mexico regarding funding to create a commission concerning women veterans;

An amendment by Mr. MORAN of Kansas regarding funding for certain VA offices;

An amendment by Mr. SMITH of Nebraska or Mr. SALAZAR regarding funding for the VA Office of Rural Health; and

An amendment or amendments by Mr. EDWARDS regarding funding levels.

Each such amendment may be offered only by the Member named in this request or a designee, shall be considered as read, shall not be subject to amendment except that the chairman and the ranking minority member of the Committee on Appropriations and the Subcommittee on Military Construction, Veterans' Affairs, and Related Agencies each may offer one pro forma amendment for the purpose of debate; and shall not be subject to a demand for division of the question in the House or in the Committee of the Whole.

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.

When the Committee rises and reports the bill back to the House with a recommendation that the bill do pass, the previous question shall be considered as ordered on the bill and amendments thereto to final passage without intervening motion except one motion to recommit with or without instructions.

During consideration in the House of H.R. 2642 pursuant to this order, notwithstanding the operation of the previous question, the Chair may postpone further consideration of the bill to such time as may be designated by the Speaker; and

(2) House Resolution 480 is laid on the table.

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

Mr. DREIER. Mr. Speaker, reserving the right to object, I rise to congratulate my very good friend from Vermont for moving through this so expeditiously. I want to say we are very supportive of moving ahead with this very, very important piece of legislation which is designed to focus on our Nation's veterans. We look forward to moving as expeditiously as possible to completion of this.

Mr. Speaker, with that, I withdraw my reservation.

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

There was no objection.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 2462, and that I may include tabular material on the same.

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

There was no objection.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION AND VETERANS AFFAIRS APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2008

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of today 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. 2642.

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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. 2642) making appropriations for military

construction, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2008, and for other purposes, with Mr. LYNCH in the chair.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The CHAIRMAN. Pursuant to the order of the House of today, the bill is considered read the first time.

The gentleman from Texas (Mr. EDWARDS) and the gentleman from Mississippi (Mr. WICKER) each will control 30 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas.

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

Mr. Chairman, we now have before us the fiscal year 2008 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations bill which will ensure the largest increase in VA health care spending in the 77-year history of the Veterans Affairs. There is \$6 billion over the 2007 level of funding, and \$3.8 billion over the President's request for 2008.

Mr. Chairman, this bill sends a clear message to America's servicemen and -women, their families and our veterans that a grateful Nation deeply respects their service and sacrifice.

The national commander of the Disabled American Veterans, Bradley Barton, went to the heart of what this bill is all about when he described it as "keeping faith with America's veterans."

The bill means our servicemen and -women will have more effective training facilities which will save lives and help them carry out their military missions. It means our military families, who sacrifice so much for our Nation, will have better housing, health care and day-care facilities.

This bill means we will honor our veterans in a meaningful way by providing them the health care and benefits we promised them when they put on our Nation's uniform.

It means we will have more qualified doctors and nurses to improve medical services to our veterans and to reduce waiting times for doctors' appointments. For veterans with traumatic brain injury, PTSD, mental health care issues and lost limbs, it means renewed hope to rebuild their lives.

For homeless veterans, it means the dignity of not having to live on the streets, and it means hope for the future. For veterans in rural areas and those who serve in the Guard and Reserves, this bill means needed care will be closer to home. For the 400,000 veterans, including combat wounded vets, who are having to wait far too long to have their benefits cases reviewed, it means over 11,000 new VA case workers to reduce the unacceptable delays in receiving earned benefits.

Mr. Chairman, before I mention some of the details of this bill, I want to express some much-deserved thanks. I want to begin with Chairman DAVE OBEY, the gentleman from Wisconsin, for his unwavering commitment and

strong leadership in seeing that America's veterans will receive a much-deserved historic increase in VA health care funding.

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Our subcommittee's work simply would not have been possible had it not been for Chairman OBEY's personal and strong leadership.

Second, Speaker PELOSI made it clear from day one this year that keeping our promises to veterans would be the highest of priorities in this Congress. By working with Chairman OBEY, along with Budget Committee chairman JOHN SPRATT and VA chairman, MR. FILNER, the Speaker made good on her word and millions of veterans will be the beneficiaries.

I want to extend a very personal, special salute and expression of thanks and gratitude to our subcommittee's ranking member, Mr. WICKER of Mississippi. He, a veteran, has had valuable input into this bill and has been a vital part of making this historic day for our veterans a reality. His leadership has been instrumental in crafting this legislation.

His ideas and strong support for our veterans our troops and their families have made this a much better bill, and at every step he and I have worked hard to continue a long, bipartisan tradition of working in behalf of our troops and our veterans, a tradition for which we have great respect.

Last, but certainly not least, is the professional, dedicated staff I want to thank, a staff that has worked together on a bipartisan basis to do what is right for our veterans and troops. I believe they deserve our thanks by name: Carol Murphy, Tim Peterson, Walter Hearne, Donna Shabaz, Mary Arnold, Liz Dawson, Dena Baron, Jamie Swafford, as well as John Conger from my staff and Susan Sweat from Mr. WICKER's office. They're a first-class team, and it's a privilege to work with them.

Let me mention a few specifics about the bill. Overall, the bill totals \$64.7 billion in discretionary spending. As I said, but it bears reemphasizing, it provides the largest increase in VA health care funding in the 77-year history of the Veterans Administration, \$6 billion more than fiscal year 2007.

For the first time in the 21-year history of the veterans independent budget, which is developed by AMVETS, the Disabled American Veterans, the Paralyzed Veterans of America and the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and supported by 52 other veterans and military organizations, this bill meets and actually even exceeds that independent budget request.

The Veterans Health Administration, which includes medical services, medical administration, medical facilities and medical research is funded at \$37.1 billion, \$2.5 billion more than the President's request and \$294 million above the veterans independent budget.

Compared to the administration's request, this bill provides a number of increases: \$604 million more for new initiatives in the area of mental health, including PTSD and for traumatic brain injury; \$71 million more for veterans substance abuse programs; \$23 million more to provide shelter for an additional 2,300 homeless veterans; \$12.5 million more to expand outpatient rehabilitation services for the blind; \$508 million more for medical facilities maintenance. That might not sound important to some. Its goal is to see that we never have a Walter Reed Annex 18 tragedy, like occurred in the Department of Defense health care system, happen in the VA health care system.

We also provide a minimum of \$15 million for joint programs with DOD to improve access to care, to ensure a more seamless transition for veterans going from the Department of Defense into the Veterans Administration system.

Mr. Chairman, the subcommittee heard from many sources about the need for more VA medical research, particularly in the areas of greatest impact for our Afghan and Iraq War veterans, research such as traumatic brain injury and mental health. That is why we significantly increased the VA research budget for the first time in the last 10 years.

The subcommittee also heard from many who talked about the need to increase funding for extended care facilities for elderly and severely disabled veterans. So we took action on a bipartisan basis, more than doubled the programs to allow four new facilities to be

built, as well as to address all currently identified life/safety needs at those facilities.

Let me be clear, Mr. Chairman, along with this historic level of increased funding, we intend to increase the subcommittee's bipartisan oversight of these taxpayer funded programs. Oversight is absolutely essential to ensure that the VA spends the money wisely and for the highest priority needs of our vets.

That's why this bill includes funding for the Office of Inspector General to hire 50 additional people. And it includes \$5 million to establish a toll-free telephone number and Web-page-based link that makes it easier for veterans to provide feedback on the quality of their health care. We want veterans receiving health care to be part of the system of checks and balances to improve the already first-class medical care veterans across America are receiving.

On the military construction side of this bill, the bill also strongly supports our active duty, Guard and Reserve servicemen and women and their families. The bill provides \$21.4 billion in military construction, family housing, and the Base Realignment and Closing program funding. This is \$207 million above the President's request and \$5.1 billion above fiscal year 2007.

This total funding level is unprecedented, largely due to three factors: BRAC, the proposal to increase the size of the Army and the Marine Corps, and the rebasing of troops from Germany and South Korea back to the United States.

We fully fund the President's request for BRAC at \$8.2 billion. We've also increased the subcommittee's oversight of the MILCON funding with new reprogramming and notification requirements, especially in the area of BRAC funding. We want to work together on a bipartisan basis to see that our military construction dollars go to the highest priority needs.

The bottom line in this bill is it honors the promises made to our troops, our veterans and their families with the health care and benefits they earned when they put on our Nation's uniform.

Military Construction - Veterans Affairs - and Related Agencies Appropriations Act - FY 2008 (H.R. 2642)
(Amounts in thousands)

	FY 2007 Enacted	FY 2008 Request	Bill	Bill vs. Enacted	Bill vs. Request
TITLE I - DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE					
Military construction, Army.....	2,017,321	4,039,197	4,070,959	+2,053,638	+31,762
Rescissions.....	-43,348	---	---	+43,348	---
Emergency appropriations (P.L. 110-28).....	1,255,890	---	---	-1,255,890	---
Emergency appropriations (P.L. 110-28). (By transfer, Army Sec. 3309).....	(6,250)	---	---	(-6,250)	---
Total.....	3,229,863	4,039,197	4,070,959	+841,096	+31,762
Military construction, Navy and Marine Corps.....	1,130,821	2,104,276	2,125,138	+994,317	+20,862
Rescissions.....	-27,500	---	-5,862	+21,638	-5,862
Emergency appropriations (P.L. 110-28).....	370,990	---	---	-370,990	---
Total.....	1,474,311	2,104,276	2,119,276	+644,965	+15,000
Military construction, Air Force.....	1,083,000	912,109	927,428	-155,572	+15,319
Rescissions.....	-2,694	---	-5,319	-2,625	-5,319
Emergency appropriations (P.L. 110-28).....	43,300	---	---	-43,300	---
Total.....	1,123,606	912,109	922,109	-201,497	+10,000
Military construction, Defense-Wide.....	1,127,000	1,799,336	1,806,928	+679,928	+7,592
Rescissions.....	-110,229	---	-7,592	+102,637	-7,592
Total.....	1,016,771	1,799,336	1,799,336	+782,565	---
Total, Active components.....	6,844,551	8,854,918	8,911,680	+2,067,129	+56,762
Military construction, Army National Guard.....	473,000	404,291	439,291	-33,709	+35,000
Rescissions.....	-2,129	---	---	+2,129	---
Total.....	470,871	404,291	439,291	-31,580	+35,000
Military construction, Air National Guard.....	126,000	85,517	95,517	-30,483	+10,000
Military construction, Army Reserve.....	166,000	119,684	154,684	-11,316	+35,000
Military construction, Navy Reserve.....	43,000	59,150	69,150	+26,150	+10,000
Military construction, Air Force Reserve.....	45,000	26,559	39,628	-5,372	+13,069
Rescissions.....	---	---	-3,069	-3,069	-3,069
Total.....	45,000	26,559	36,559	-8,441	+10,000
Total, Reserve components.....	850,871	695,201	795,201	-55,670	+100,000
Total, Military construction.....	7,695,422	9,550,119	9,706,881	+2,011,459	+156,762
Appropriations.....	(6,211,142)	(9,550,119)	(9,728,723)	(+3,517,581)	(+178,604)
Rescissions.....	(-185,900)	---	(-21,842)	(+164,058)	(-21,842)
Emergency appropriations.....	(1,670,180)	---	---	(-1,670,180)	---
North Atlantic Treaty Organization Security Investment Program.....	204,789	201,400	201,400	-3,389	---
Family housing construction, Army.....	579,000	419,400	419,400	-159,600	---
Family housing operation and maintenance, Army.....	671,311	742,920	742,920	+71,609	---
Family housing construction, Navy and Marine Corps....	305,000	298,329	298,329	-6,671	---
Family housing operation and maintenance, Navy and Marine Corps.....	505,472	371,404	371,404	-134,068	---
Family housing construction, Air Force.....	1,168,000	362,747	362,747	-805,253	---
Rescissions.....	-18,000	---	---	+18,000	---
Total.....	1,150,000	362,747	362,747	-787,253	---
Family housing operation and maintenance, Air Force...	750,000	688,335	688,335	-61,665	---
Family housing construction, Defense-Wide.....	9,000	---	---	-9,000	---

Military Construction - Veterans Affairs - and Related Agencies Appropriations Act - FY 2008 (H.R. 2642)
(Amounts in thousands)

	FY 2007 Enacted	FY 2008 Request	Bill	Bill vs. Enacted	Bill vs. Request
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Family housing operation and maintenance, Defense-Wide Department of Defense Family Housing Improvement Fund.....	49,000	48,848	48,848	-152	---
2,475	500	500	-1,975	---	
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Total, Family housing.....	4,021,258	2,932,483	2,932,483	-1,088,775	---
Appropriations.....	(4,039,258)	(2,932,483)	(2,932,483)	(-1,106,775)	---
Rescissions.....	(-18,000)	---	---	(+18,000)	---
Chemical demilitarization construction, Defense-Wide..	131,000	86,176	86,176	-44,824	---
Base realignment and closure:					
Base realignment and closure account, 1990.....	252,279	220,689	270,689	+18,410	+50,000
Base realignment and closure account, 2005.....	2,489,421	8,174,315	8,174,315	+5,684,894	---
Emergency appropriations (P.L. 110-28).....	3,136,802	---	---	-3,136,802	---
Total, Base realignment and closure.....	5,878,502	8,395,004	8,445,004	+2,566,502	+50,000
Appropriations.....	(2,741,700)	(8,395,004)	(8,445,004)	(+5,703,304)	(+50,000)
Emergency appropriations.....	(3,136,802)	---	---	(-3,136,802)	---
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Total, title I.....	17,930,971	21,165,182	21,371,944	+3,440,973	+206,762
Appropriations.....	(13,327,889)	(21,165,182)	(21,393,786)	(+8,065,897)	(+228,604)
Rescissions.....	(-203,900)	---	(-21,842)	(+182,058)	(-21,842)
Emergency appropriations.....	(4,806,982)	---	---	(-4,806,982)	---

TITLE II - DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

Veterans Benefits Administration

Compensation and pensions.....	38,007,095	41,236,322	41,236,322	+3,229,227	---
Readjustment benefits.....	3,262,006	3,300,289	3,300,289	+38,283	---
Veterans insurance and indemnities.....	49,850	41,250	41,250	-8,600	---
Veterans housing benefit program fund program account (indefinite).....	66,234	17,389	17,389	-48,845	---
(Limitation on direct loans).....	(500)	(500)	(500)	---	
Credit subsidy.....	-100,000	-108,000	-108,000	-8,000	---
Administrative expenses.....	154,284	154,562	154,562	+278	---
Vocational rehabilitation loans program account.....	53	71	71	+18	---
(Limitation on direct loans).....	(4,242)	(3,287)	(3,287)	(-955)	---
Administrative expenses.....	305	311	311	+6	---
Native American veteran housing loan program account..	584	628	628	+44	---
(Limitation on direct loans).....	(30,000)	---	---	(-30,000)	---
Total, Veterans Benefits Administration.....	41,440,411	44,642,822	44,642,822	+3,202,411	---

Veterans Health Administration

Medical services.....	25,518,254	27,167,671	28,906,400	+3,388,146	+1,738,729
Emergency appropriations (P.L. 110-28).....	466,778	---	---	-466,778	---
Medical administration.....	3,177,968	3,442,000	3,635,600	+457,632	+193,600
Emergency appropriations (P.L. 110-28).....	250,000	---	---	-250,000	---
Medical facilities.....	3,569,533	3,592,000	4,100,000	+530,467	+508,000
Emergency appropriations (P.L. 110-28).....	595,000	---	---	-595,000	---
Medical and prosthetic research.....	413,980	411,000	480,000	+66,020	+69,000
Emergency appropriations (P.L. 110-28).....	32,500	---	---	-32,500	---
Medical care cost recovery collections:					
Offsetting collections.....	-2,329,000	-2,414,000	-2,414,000	-85,000	---
Appropriations (indefinite).....	2,329,000	2,414,000	2,414,000	+85,000	---
Total, Veterans Health Administration.....	34,024,013	34,612,671	37,122,000	+3,097,987	+2,509,329
Appropriations.....	(32,679,735)	(34,612,671)	(37,122,000)	(+4,442,265)	(+2,509,329)
Emergency appropriations.....	(1,344,278)	---	---	(-1,344,278)	---

Departmental Administration

General operating expenses.....	1,481,473	1,471,837	1,598,500	+117,027	+126,663
Emergency appropriations (P.L. 110-28).....	83,200	---	---	-83,200	---

Military Construction - Veterans Affairs - and Related Agencies Appropriations Act - FY 2008 (H.R. 2642)
(Amounts in thousands)

	FY 2007 Enacted	FY 2008 Request	Bill	Bill vs. Enacted	Bill vs. Request
Information technology systems.....	1,214,000	1,859,217	1,859,217	+645,217	---
Emergency appropriations (P.L. 110-28).....	35,100	---	---	-35,100	---
National Cemetery Administration.....	160,747	166,809	170,000	+9,253	+3,191
Office of Inspector General.....	70,641	72,599	76,500	+5,859	+3,901
Construction, major projects.....	399,000	727,400	1,410,800	+1,011,800	+683,400
Construction, minor projects.....	198,937	233,396	615,000	+416,063	+381,604
Emergency appropriations (P.L. 110-28).....	340,485	---	---	-340,485	---
Emergency appropriations (P.L. 110-28) (Rescission).....	-14,485	---	---	+14,485	---
Grants for construction of State extended care facilities.....	85,000	85,000	165,000	+80,000	+80,000
Grants for the construction of State veterans cemeteries.....	32,000	32,000	37,000	+5,000	+5,000
Total, Departmental Administration.....	4,086,098	4,648,258	5,932,017	+1,845,919	+1,283,759
Appropriations.....	(3,641,798)	(4,648,258)	(5,932,017)	(+2,290,219)	(+1,283,759)
Emergency appropriations.....	(458,785)	---	---	(-458,785)	---
Rescissions (emergency appropriations).....	(-14,485)	---	---	(+14,485)	---
Total, title II.....	79,550,522	83,903,751	87,696,839	+8,146,317	+3,793,088
Appropriations.....	(77,761,944)	(83,903,751)	(87,696,839)	(+9,934,895)	(+3,793,088)
Emergency appropriations.....	(1,803,063)	---	---	(-1,803,063)	---
Rescissions (emergency appropriations).....	(-14,485)	---	---	(+14,485)	---
(Limitation on direct loans).....	(34,742)	(3,787)	(3,787)	(-30,955)	---
Discretionary.....	38,265,337	39,416,501	43,209,589	+4,944,252	+3,793,088
Mandatory.....	41,285,185	44,487,250	44,487,250	+3,202,065	---
TITLE III - RELATED AGENCIES					
American Battle Monuments Commission					
Salaries and expenses.....	37,000	42,100	43,470	+6,470	+1,370
Foreign currency fluctuations account.....	5,000	11,000	11,000	+6,000	---
Total, American Battle Monuments Commission.....	42,000	53,100	54,470	+12,470	+1,370
U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims					
Salaries and expenses.....	20,189	21,217	21,397	+1,208	+180
Department of Defense - Civil					
Cemeterial Expenses, Army					
Salaries and expenses.....	30,000	26,892	30,592	+592	+3,700
Armed Forces Retirement Home					
Operation and maintenance.....	55,991	55,724	55,724	-267	---
Capital program.....	1,236	---	---	-1,236	---
General fund appropriation.....	---	5,900	800	+800	-5,100
Total, Armed Forces Retirement Home.....	57,227	61,624	56,524	-703	-5,100
Total, title III.....	149,416	162,833	162,983	+13,567	+150
Appropriations.....	(149,416)	(162,833)	(162,983)	(+13,567)	(+150)
Grand total.....	97,630,909	105,231,766	109,231,766	+11,600,857	+4,000,000
Appropriations.....	(91,239,249)	(105,231,766)	(109,253,608)	(+18,014,359)	(+4,021,842)
Rescissions.....	(-203,900)	---	(-21,842)	(+182,058)	(-21,842)
Emergency appropriations.....	(6,610,045)	---	---	(-6,610,045)	---
Rescissions (emergency appropriations).....	(-14,485)	---	---	(+14,485)	---

Military Construction - Veterans Affairs - and Related Agencies Appropriations Act - FY 2008 (H.R. 2642)
(Amounts in thousands)

	FY 2007 Enacted	FY 2008 Request	Bill	Bill vs. Enacted	Bill vs. Request
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CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET RECAP					
Scorekeeping adjustments:					
Emergency appropriations defense.....	-4,806,982	---	---	+4,806,982	---
Emergency appropriations non-defense.....	-1,788,578	---	---	+1,788,578	---
ATB pay raise (Sec. 111 of P.L. 110-5) adjustment.....	-925	---	---	+925	---
Total, adjustments.....	-6,596,485	---	---	+6,596,485	---
Total (including adjustments).....	91,034,424	105,231,766	109,231,766	+18,197,342	+4,000,000
Scorekeeping adjustments.....	(-6,596,485)	---	---	(+6,596,485)	---
Prior year outlays.....	---	---	---	---	---
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Total mandatory and discretionary.....	91,034,424	105,231,766	109,231,766	+18,197,342	+4,000,000
Mandatory.....	(41,285,185)	(44,487,250)	(44,487,250)	(+3,202,065)	---
Mandatory (prior year).....	---	---	---	---	---
Mandatory (total).....	(41,285,185)	(44,487,250)	(44,487,250)	(+3,202,065)	---
Discretionary.....	(49,749,239)	(60,744,516)	(64,744,516)	(+14,995,277)	(+4,000,000)
Discretionary (prior year).....	---	---	---	---	---
Discretionary (total).....	(49,749,239)	(60,744,516)	(64,744,516)	(+14,995,277)	(+4,000,000)
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Military Construction - Veterans Affairs - and Related Agencies Appropriations Act - FY 2008 (H.R. 2642)
(Amounts in thousands)

	FY 2007 Enacted	FY 2008 Request	Bill	Bill vs. Enacted	Bill vs. Request
RECAP BY FUNCTION					
Mandatory.....	41,285,185	44,487,250	44,487,250	+3,202,065	---
Prior year outlays.....	---	---	---	---	---
Total, Mandatory.....	41,285,185	44,487,250	44,487,250	+3,202,065	---
General purpose discretionary:					
Defense.....	13,123,989	21,165,182	21,371,944	+8,247,955	+206,762
Prior year outlays.....	---	---	---	---	---
Total, Defense.....	13,123,989	21,165,182	21,371,944	+8,247,955	+206,762
Nondefense.....	36,625,250	39,579,334	43,372,572	+6,747,322	+3,793,238
Prior year outlays.....	---	---	---	---	---
Total, Nondefense.....	36,625,250	39,579,334	43,372,572	+6,747,322	+3,793,238
Subtotal, General purpose discretionary.....	49,749,239	60,744,516	64,744,516	+14,995,277	+4,000,000
Prior year outlays.....	---	---	---	---	---
Total General purpose discretionary.....	49,749,239	60,744,516	64,744,516	+14,995,277	+4,000,000
=====	=====	=====	=====	=====	=====
Grand total, Mandatory and Discretionary.....	91,034,424	105,231,766	109,231,766	+18,197,342	+4,000,000
=====	=====	=====	=====	=====	=====

DISCRETIONARY 302B ALLOCATION

GENERAL PURPOSE.....	49,749,239	60,744,516	64,744,516	+14,995,277	+4,000,000
302B ALLOCATION.....	---	---	---	---	---
OVER/UNDER.....	49,749,239	60,744,516	64,744,516	+14,995,277	+4,000,000

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

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

Mr. Chairman, I would like to begin the debate by thanking Chairman EDWARDS for all the hard work he's put into preparing this legislation. I congratulate him on his first bill as chairman of Military Construction-VA, and I appreciate his kind words made just a few moments ago. Mr. EDWARDS has continued the excellent bipartisan relationship that this subcommittee has enjoyed for years. The chairman held many, many hearings this spring, perhaps more hearings on the VA accounts than any previous subcommittee with jurisdiction over this issue.

Mr. EDWARDS has previously thanked our staff for their diligent work to prepare this bill and has mentioned them by name. I will thank them once again by name. They include Liz Dawson, Dena Baron, Jamie Swafford and Susan Sweat on the minority staff, and Carol Murphy, Walter Hearne, Tim Peterson, Donna Shabaz, Mary Arnold and John Conger on the majority staff. They have worked very hard on this measure, but their work is just beginning.

As most of us know by now, there's much left to do in conference on this bill. For the first time in the history of the subcommittee, for the first time since 1958, the military construction portion contains no specific recommendation for projects. While I remain disappointed that no projects were included in this appropriation, I am pleased that last night we reached an agreement that will restore the transparency and openness begun by the Republican majority in the last Congress with regard to earmarks in the remaining appropriations bills.

I want to make sure my colleagues understand that there is very little to the military construction portion of this bill. Unlike some appropriations bills, such as the Homeland bill we passed earlier today which include funding for specific agencies, offices and programs in addition to projects, the MILCON appropriation consists almost entirely of projects.

Pursuant to yesterday's agreement, specific detailed funding amounts for the following programs will have to wait until conference: Base Realignment and Closure needs; initiatives to restation 70,000 troops and their families from Europe and Korea to the United States; projects necessary for increasing the active duty Army by 65,000 and the Marine Corps by 27,000; relocating Marines from Okinawa to Japan; consolidating U.S. forces south of Seoul, South Korea; establishing enduring bases in Afghanistan and Djibouti; new runways, control towers, National Guard readiness centers, and projects in the Middle East or Afghanistan where we have soldiers in harm's way. All of these specific details will have to wait until conference, Mr. Chairman.

In addition, we know that quality-of-life issues are a priority for our mili-

tary; yet, no specific initiatives such as modernization of unaccompanied housing, construction of new medical facilities or much-needed child development centers, which we continuously heard in our hearings was the primary quality-of-life issue for our soldiers and their families, none of these are included in this bill.

Specific projects and earmarks will no doubt be included in the Senate version of this bill, and I hope Chairman EDWARDS and Chairman OBEY will work with Mr. LEWIS and me to make sure that House Members' initiatives will receive equal consideration at the conference level and are not disadvantaged by our airdropping of these projects into the conference. I would point out that the bill is different from other appropriations bills in that military construction projects have an added layer of examination, having already undergone scrutiny by the Department of Defense.

It is my hope that our colleagues will not offer amendments today that may decrease the military construction accounts. Though this bill today does not detail how these accounts will be used, the accounts will provide for many important military projects that our troops need.

Now, with regard to the VA portions of the bill, the VA is receiving the largest increase in the Department's history, an increase of \$6.7 billion over the last fiscal year level. All of us in this body are deeply grateful for the sacrifices and service our veterans have provided this Nation, and this generous increase is appreciated by Members on both sides of the aisle. We do have concerns about the VA's ability to absorb so large a funding increase in one fiscal year. We are determined to work with VA officials in this effort as part of our oversight responsibilities.

The bulk of the increase is going to boost medical services, medical facilities and construction for the VA. The bill increases the VA's discretionary funding by more than 18 percent over the fiscal year 2007 level. It is important to remember that the increase in this bill is in addition to the \$1.8 billion this Congress just provided to the VA in the supplemental. When considered together, the supplemental funding and the funding in this bill amount to a 23 percent increase for the Department of Veterans Affairs' discretionary accounts.

Chairman EDWARDS has indicated that we will be conducting oversight hearings later in the year, and I'm glad to know that. Hearings will be needed to ensure that the funding we have provided actually gets to the veterans and does not languish in an administrative account. Mr. Chairman, we all want to make sure our veterans receive the care they deserve, but we will have to be diligent in our oversight in order to get this funding where it is intended, to our veterans.

The President has indicated he will sign this bill even though it exceeds his

budget request by some \$4 billion. However, he has stated that offsets for these increases should be found in other appropriations bills. I agree with him, and I call upon my colleagues across the aisle to work with us and find these savings elsewhere.

I think it is important to point out that, though we have some concerns on our side of the aisle about the feasibility for this large 1-year increase, it has been in large part Republicans that have a track record of meeting veterans' needs. During the period of Republican majority from 1995 to 2007, VA funding increased by 96 percent from \$38.2 billion to \$74.5 billion. I would point out that in the final decade of the last Democratic majority, veterans funding increased by less than half as much, about 42 percent, Mr. Chairman.

Similarly, Republicans led the way to increase spending per veteran by over \$1,800 when we held the majority, while the Democrats managed to increase per-veteran spending by \$411 during a similar period of their majority. It was also a Republican Congress that passed the Veterans Health Care Eligibility Reform Act of 1996, which expanded eligibility for millions more veterans to access VA health care.

I point out these things to make sure my colleagues understand the historical record on veterans' issues. And in truth, Mr. Chairman, funding for our veterans has always been a bipartisan issue.

I support the bill on the floor today. It continues in the bipartisan tradition. It's not a perfect bill in my opinion, but our subcommittee has a good work product, and I'm proud of the combined efforts of Republicans and Democrats to continue the long-standing tradition of support and commitment for the men and women who have served our great country.

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

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Chairman, I yield 6 minutes to the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. OBEY), the chairman of the Appropriations Committee, absolutely the vital leader to see that we have this historic increase for veterans health care in this budget today.

□ 1215

Mr. OBEY. I thank the gentleman.

Mr. Chairman, as we all know, we have been mired in a god-awful war in Iraq for almost 5 years. What bothers me most about it, except for the deaths that occur on a daily basis, what bothers me most about it is that there is virtually no sense of shared sacrifice in this country in dealing with that war.

The only people who are being asked to sacrifice are military families, and they are being asked to sacrifice again and again and again. They are being sent back to Iraq and to Afghanistan again, again, and again. Not much sacrifice is being asked of anybody else.

We hear politicians prattle about the need to stand behind the troops. You betcha, we certainly should.

But we need to stand behind the troops not just when the bands are playing. We need to stand by those troops when they come home, and they are injured, and they are sick, or they may have lost their job, or they may have lost their spouse; and that's what this bill tries to do.

I think we need to put in context how we got here. It has been a struggle to see to it that we have adequate funding in veterans medical care programs.

Two years ago, on this side of the aisle, we were given information from people within the Veterans Administration that their veterans health care budget was going to fall \$2 billion short. We tried to put that money in the budget. We were then in the minority. We were blocked by the majority then, except for one fellow. The Republican chairman of the Veterans' Committee sided with us, he agreed with us that we needed that \$2 billion in additional money.

What happened to him? Not only did the then-majority party leadership fire him as chairman, they took him completely off the committee because he told the truth. We finally got that money, but we had to get a double hernia to finally pry that money out of the administration.

Then we had, as you know, the budget process collapse last year, and no domestic appropriation bills were passed by the then-majority party. In fact, this very bill, the Military Construction bill, was held up in the Senate by two Members of the Republican Party who put a hold on it because they didn't like certain earmarks that were on the bill.

So the bill never passed. When we took the majority, the very first thing we did was to make veterans health care a number one priority, and we added over \$4 billion to that account, made it the number one priority. Then we added additional funding of over \$3 billion in the Iraqi supplemental, and now we have added this money today to make this the largest increase for veterans health care in the history of the country.

When we did that, the White House announced it was going to veto the bill. Now, finally, they have had a St. Paul conversion on the road to Damascus. I welcome the White House on board the bandwagon.

But as Golda Meir said to Anwar Sadat when he finally came to Jerusalem a long time ago: "What took you so long?" I am glad the President has finally changed his view.

But the President continues to say, "Well, now, I may not veto the bill, but you have got to have offsets. You have to find compensating savings."

Why do we single veterans out for that requirement? There were no offsets that the President required when he decided that this year we were going to spend \$57 billion to provide tax cuts to people who make over \$1 million a year and pay for it all with borrowed money. No offsets around then. Do you

see them? I don't see any offsets in sight for that.

So what do we get? Finally, we get grudging acceptance from the White House that after they stuck us in this miserable war, and after they sit there with no clue about how to get out, at least they are now grudgingly going to recognize that we need the funds in this bill to deal with veterans medical care.

This bill ought to pass unanimously. It is far past the time that we put our votes where our mouths are in terms of long-term funding for veterans health care. I am proud of the fact that I provided the allocation to the subcommittee so that they could do that.

We are taking funding from \$49.7 billion last year to \$64 billion this year. Now, green eyeshade people may say, "Oh, that's too much." You know what? In my view, nothing is too much for people who have risked everything on behalf of this country. Finally, over the last 2 years, we have been able to get funding up to begin to meet our obligations in this area.

I want to congratulate the gentleman from Texas for helping to lead the way, and I want to express my appreciation to people on both sides of the aisle who stood up for veterans when it was tough, including Mr. SMITH of New Jersey, the former Republican chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, who paid a high price for his dedication to the needs of veterans, who paid a high price for putting truth ahead of the partisan wishes of the Bush administration.

Mr. WICKER. Mr. Chairman, I yield to my friend from Indiana, the former chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, Mr. BUYER, for as much time as he may consume.

Mr. BUYER. Mr. Chairman, I was sitting here, and I enjoyed the comments of the Chair of the subcommittee, Mr. EDWARDS, and the comments of Mr. WICKER, and then I was disturbed by the comments of Mr. OBEY.

Mr. Chairman, what I would say is he didn't go back far enough. I came here in 1992, and I heard the horror stories of what was occurring in the Appropriations Committee of how individuals would cut veterans programs to fund WIC and other programs. I was deeply disturbed by that.

Then I would watch as the Clinton years would flatten VA spending. I guess the gentleman forgot about that too.

I want to associate myself with Mr. EDWARDS' comments and Mr. WICKER's comments because this is a bipartisan issue, and I am deeply disturbed about Mr. OBEY's comments to try to rewrite history here. Some of the language, inflammatory language, that he used is deeply disturbing to me.

Now, if the gentleman wants to talk about his issues and how he feels about the war, that's one thing; but don't allow those emotions to bleed into how we care for America's veterans. That bothers me.

We talk about how we got here. I recall the movie "Born on the 4th of July." What did they depict in the movie "Born on the 4th of July"? They depicted a VA system which bothered many people here in Congress. It was then Ken Keyser who worked for the Clinton administration who then thought that the best way we could improve our VA system is to move more people into the system. They set forth the priorities, but then they opened the system to the nondisabled systems.

When we opened that, we didn't really prepare the system for the number of veterans that came into the system. When I looked back here over the last 6 years, my gosh, we have almost doubled the veterans budget.

We also, as we are coping with dealing with the influx of veterans based on eligibility reform, I almost feel like, on the Veterans' Affairs Committee on a bipartisan basis, we are mechanics looking at different subsets of systems within the VA that need a tremendous amount of work.

It's easy for us to always talk about the health side, but there is such a strong disability backlog too. If it were just money, if we could just throw money on it, and that's what would solve it, Mr. EDWARDS, if that's what you could put in the budget, it would be solved. The reality is that's not what's going to solve it. What's going to solve it will be management practices and accountability. If we don't have that, it's not going to be solved.

The chairman of the committee is now on the floor. When he held a roundtable discussion, he learned that they were giving exams to those who are the case workers out there. When you get only 23 and 27 percent pass rate by the individuals who are actually working on these disability claims, I would say we've got a problem and we have to work cooperatively on those problems.

I want to thank the new majority. I want thank the new majority because you are different from the old majority.

The old majority, when I came here a freshman, and I was in the minority, because that old majority did things a little differently, and those weren't good budgets on behalf of veterans. But when you came now in the new majority, Mr. EDWARDS, I congratulate you, because you have done what you said you were going to do. I want to personally thank you for that.

But I just want you to know this, Mr. EDWARDS, there is much work for all of us, because it's not going to be just money alone.

When Mr. OBEY brought up the issue about the funding shortfall, what I did is I went in and I began to examine the finance modeling and found the errors in the inputs in the stale data in the model, and that's how we made the corrections. So even though we put in the \$1.5 billion, we only spent a third of that, and the other went for carryover.

So there's going to be a lot of management issues, and there's going to be

a lot of oversight that we going to have to continue to do. But as a baseline, let me congratulate you, Mr. EDWARDS and Mr. WICKER, on a very good bill.

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Chairman, I yield myself 1½ minutes.

Let me just take 30 seconds of that and say I thank Mr. BUYER, former chairman of the VA Committee, for emphasizing our work for veterans isn't done when this bill passes. There is a lot of oversight that needs to be done, and we will be working on that on a bipartisan basis.

But let me say I am proud of the new congressional leadership in providing \$6 billion increase over 2007 for VA health care, because you can't repair VA hospitals without funding. You can't hire 1,100 new case workers to reduce the intolerable delay of combat-wounded veterans to get their benefits without money.

Money is a necessary, perhaps not sufficient, solution but absolutely necessary to provide the veterans health care and benefits that they have earned by sacrificing for our country.

Mr. Chairman, I yield the balance of my time to Mr. OBEY.

Mr. OBEY. Mr. Chairman, the gentleman who just spoke has expressed a certain degree of unhappiness with the remarks that I made previously on the floor. I treasure his unhappiness.

The fact is that when Harry Truman was President, he was out giving a speech one day, and someone in the crowd hollered, "Give 'em hell, Harry!" And Truman responded, "I don't give them hell. I just tell the truth and they think it's hell."

The fact is, I am very comfortable with the fact that the previous speaker did not like my comments, because I think maybe that means they hit home. The fact is the previous speaker was the person who was selected by the then Republican Party leadership to replace Mr. Smith after Mr. Smith was, in essence, fired from his job by the majority because he told the truth about the VA health care needs.

So I will be happy to endure the unhappiness of the gentleman with my comments anytime if we can use that unhappiness to get more money for people who sacrificed everything for this country.

Mr. WICKER. Mr. Chairman, I yield 3 minutes to my friend from Florida (Mr. YOUNG).

Mr. YOUNG of Florida. Mr. Chairman, I thank the gentleman for yielding to me, and I want to say that I am very, very proud to be working with Chairman EDWARDS and Ranking Member WICKER as a member of this very important subcommittee.

The Department of Veterans Affairs is going to have much more responsibility as the months go by, probably more than they realize. One of the reasons is that military medicine has gotten so much better. Medicines are better, medical techniques are better, the ability to evacuate a wounded soldier from the battlefield is much better,

and we have intensive care units on our aircraft today so better medical care can be provided to the wounded soldier, marine, and the wounded heroes.

□ 1230

Because of that many of our heroes are living today who would have died in previous wars and previous battles. But also because of that some of them are hurt worse than normal, and the Veterans' Administration is going to eventually have the responsibility once these heroes leave their military medical facilities at Walter Reed or at Bethesda or some of the other military hospitals.

One of the things that this bill does, and it does a lot of good stuff, and I'm strongly in support of this bill, it increases funding for the Inspector General for the Department of Veterans Affairs. And I know that oftentimes we think that the Inspector General just looks at dollars and figures and decides if the money is being spent or accounted for.

The Inspector General from the Department of Veterans Affairs does a really great job, not only in doing that, checking the dollars, but also in checking for fraud. And it is amazing how much fraud the IG has uncovered in the last couple of years, costing upwards of hundred of millions of dollars to the taxpayer, and taking it away from the veteran who needs it and the hospitals and the medical professionals who need this money to care for the veterans.

But also, another part of their responsibility is the care that the veteran receives in the VA hospitals. They look at this very closely, and if and when the medical care in the hospital is not appropriate and not proper, they report this to the proper authorities.

The investment that Chairman EDWARDS has made in the Inspector General's Office in this bill will pay us back many, many times over in what they recover than we have invested. So this is a good bill.

If you wanted me to pick out something that I didn't like about it, I'm sure that I could. But the part that relates to the Department of Veterans Affairs, this is a good bill, and it deserves our support.

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Chairman, let me just first say that there's no Member of Congress who's spent more time visiting our wounded troops in the hospitals or at our veterans hospitals than Mr. YOUNG and his wife, Beverly; and he and his wife are an inspiration to all Members of Congress as we try to work together in support of our troops and our veterans. And I thank you, sir, for your heartfelt and deep commitment to our troops and our veterans and their health.

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER). Mr. FILNER is not only the Chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee in the House, he has been a tremendous champion this year in fighting to see that we received \$11.9

billion increase in funding for veterans since January.

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Chairman, I thank the committee for doing so much for veterans in this bill. And I want to add my thanks to Congressman YOUNG from Florida. He and his wife, Beverly, have been an incredible inspiration. So we want to say on the record from our side of the aisle how much we appreciate you and your wife's efforts on behalf of our veterans. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, what this bill does and what our previous bills that we have passed here, the continuing resolution that we've had for this year, the supplemental for the war, added more than 30 percent to the health care budget from last year for the health care of our veterans. That's an unprecedented increase, and it comes at a time when we have unprecedented needs. So your work, Mr. Chairman, has been incredible for all of the veterans and their families in this Nation.

No matter where we stand on the war, and there's a lot of divisiveness in this House about the war, we are united in saying, through this bill, that when every young man and woman comes back from Iraq or Afghanistan, they are going to get all the love, the care, the attention, the dignity, the honor that a Nation can bestow; and we are committed to that.

And we are committed, not only to those veterans who are just coming back, but to those who are with us from World War II, from Korea, from Vietnam, from the first Persian Gulf war. We're going to take care of them all.

We do not think that the problem with the Veterans' Administration is that there are too many veterans. We think we have to get the resources into the VA, and then have the accountability that it's spent wisely.

We have an administration that says, support the troops, support the troops, support the troops; but when they come home, as we have seen in Walter Reed and other places, too many times they're on their own. They slip through the cracks.

Virtually everyone who comes back from this war has evidence of either brain injury or PTSD, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and we simply don't have the resources to treat them. There are waiting lists. There are people told to call back, go home.

We had a young Marine in Minnesota who went to his hospital because he thought he had PTSD because he was thinking of suicide. What happened? He was told he was 28th on the waiting list, to go home. And he went home and committed suicide. That is a crime and we are not going to commit those crimes on our returning heroes. We are going to look at not only the brain injuries, not only the PTSD, but to make sure the backlog of pension disability claims is taken down to zero, where it's now at 600,000.

We've got a lot of work to do. We've got a lot of work to handle all these heroes from World War II to the present,

and with your budget, Mr. Chairman, we're going to be able to do this. We thank you. And we're going to work to get the accountability and the work done that lets these heroes know that their Nation is worthy of their sacrifice.

Mr. WICKER. Before I yield to my friend from Indiana, I too want to join my colleagues in commending my friend from Florida, BILL YOUNG, and his wife, Beverly, for constantly, consistently visiting our veterans, our wounded veterans at Walter Reed and Bethesda and at veterans facilities, and for day in and day out and week in and week out and year in and year out, being as supportive of our Nation's veterans as any couple probably in the entire United States.

Mr. Chairman, I yield to my friend from Indiana (Mr. BUYER) an additional minute.

Mr. BUYER. Picking up off the comment that Mr. EDWARDS had made in his opening statement about management, I think you're right on point. Good management of the resources and accountability is what's essential.

So when the chairman just spoke in the well and said, well, we don't have the money, that's not entirely correct because the GAO came back in 2005 and 2006 and said, we gave them sufficient resources allocated toward mental health, but they didn't even spend around \$60 million that you had already given them in those cycles.

Mr. EDWARDS, you worked on those budgets. So it's not just giving them the money; that was my point made earlier.

So when Mr. FILNER made the comment, they don't have the money; we had given them the money, then they didn't utilize it. And so I agree with Mr. FILNER when he gets his angst about how it is that you don't spend money we gave you, yet you've got waiting lines.

It goes back then to the management question about the resources in which we get them, and that's where I'd like to work with you and work with the chairman of the committee.

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Chairman, let me just take 1 minute, if I could, to respond.

Again, I would reemphasize, we must work closely together in Congress to see that the VA spends the money we appropriate for them and for our veterans, that they spend it wisely, effectively and efficiently. And we will work very hard on that.

But I don't want it to go unsaid that the VA needs and our veterans deserve the additional funding, the \$6 billion more for VA health care spending, \$6.7 billion more than last year for all veterans programs. The VA and our veterans need and deserve that money. The increased funding in this budget, that I'm proud to say the new Congress has made its top priority, is something that is needed, not only to provide better benefits, reduce waiting times for benefit consideration, reduce waiting

time for doctors appointments, improve mental health care services and PTSD services for our veterans, this money is needed to improve the, frankly, unsafe conditions at some VA hospitals. And construction projects are needed there, so the money is needed. We'll work together on the management and oversight.

Mr. Chairman, I yield 2 minutes to the gentlelady from Kansas (Mrs. BOYDA). Mrs. BOYDA has been a leading and tireless voice in this Congress, supporting full BRAC funding in this bill, as well as the veterans funding in this bill.

Mrs. BOYDA of Kansas. Mr. Chairman, I'd just like to share a couple of freshman stories here. I am one of the new kids. And when I campaigned, I actually campaigned for 3 years. And you can image what I heard about veterans issues. It was about access mainly.

Our veterans hospitals in Kansas are good, but they only had a certain amount of money, and getting access, waiting times, waiting lines was just a tremendous problem.

So when I got here, I went to Chairman FILNER's office with a little bit of a chip on my shoulder, and I said, listen, I need to know what we're going to do for veterans, what's going to happen. And listen, I want to know the truth. Don't tell me something. Don't let me go home to Kansas and then come back and not be truthful.

He said, Mrs. BOYDA, we are going to take care of our veterans.

And then when we did our first continuing resolution and put \$3.5 billion immediately into that pipeline, I heard something that I just absolutely couldn't believe, and that was someone who said, that's just a down payment. So I actually began to have faith that people in Congress do what they promised to do.

Let me tell you another quick story, too, and that was when I spoke with Chairman EDWARDS and he was telling me about what was going on, because I have been a tireless advocate for this. He said, Nancy, we're going to get this done, and we are going to do an historic funding for this, and we're going to get that done by June.

And then the next thing we're going to do is spend the next 6 months on oversight because we have to make sure that those funds are used in a way that makes a difference to our veterans, and we have to make sure that every cent of that that we have appropriated we can do the best we can to make sure that those funds are used appropriately.

So I am thrilled to be here with the new Democratic majority that is keeping its word to veterans, and saying that we're not only funding, but I believe that we will go and do the oversight that's needed to make sure those funds are used for the best benefit of our veterans.

Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman, for your leadership.

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Chairman, I yield myself 2 minutes. And I will yield

to Speaker PELOSI for the remainder of the time that I don't use of this 2 minutes.

For the record, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to read into that record what a number of America's most respected veterans and military organizations have said about this bill.

The American Legion called it "an impressive commitment to this Nation's servicemembers, veterans and their families."

The Independent Budget, made up of numerous veterans organizations across the country, said, "This is a much-needed investment in health care and the benefits delivery system for our Nation's sick and disabled veterans."

The Military Officers Association of America referred to the funding in this bill as "an extraordinary level of funding."

AMVETS, "The level of funding will ensure that returning veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan will continue to receive priority health care and other VA services."

The Disabled American Veterans called it "keeping faith with America's veterans."

Mr. Chairman, several years ago, then Minority Leader PELOSI made a commitment to America's veterans, she said, if she became Speaker, that supporting those who have sacrificed for our country in uniform would be the highest priority of hers and of this Congress. Speaker PELOSI has kept that commitment. And the beneficiaries of that promise kept will be millions of veterans who will receive better health care, who will receive better job training, better homeless care for those 200,000 veterans that tonight, in America, will go to bed without a roof over their heads.

We would not be here today, about to pass the largest increase in VA health care spending in the 77-year history of the Veterans Administration, had it not been for Speaker PELOSI's personal commitment at the Budget Committee level, at the 302(b) allocation level for our subcommittee and specifically pushing this legislation. I salute her, along with the veterans organizations of America, for her leadership on behalf of our veterans, our servicemen and -women, and their families.

Mr. Chairman, I yield the balance of my time to Speaker PELOSI.

Ms. PELOSI. Mr. Chairman, I thank the gentleman for his kind words and for his more than extraordinary leadership on behalf of America's veterans while they are in the service, in terms of the quality of their life which is addressed in this legislation, and when they become veterans, and how he has had the well-being of America's veterans as a priority for so long in his political year.

Mr. Chairman, today is probably one of the top three happiest days of my official life, because today is a day where, under the leadership of Mr. EDWARDS, Mr. SPRATT, Mr. OBEY, Mr.

SKELTON, Mr. MURTHA, this Congress of the United States is able to keep its promises to America's veterans. It's a day of respect for them.

In the military, soldiers say, we will not leave any soldier on the battlefield. We say, when they come home, we will not leave any veteran behind. That is why, under the leadership of Mr. EDWARDS in his capacity as a leader on this issue, and I will add Mr. FILNER's name to those I'm commanding, but a person of the focus and values of Mr. EDWARDS kept this issue front and center.

For the past 4½, 5 years, we have met on a regular basis with the veterans organizations and representatives of veterans from across the country. We asked them what their priorities were, because their needs were so great; and frankly, their concerns were so neglected for the last few years that we said, we cannot try to do everything. What are your priorities? This was when we were in the minority.

Their first priority, the first couple of years there was the concurrent receipt issue, this veterans disability tax, which we made some progress on. And the next term, which was the last term, we were still in the minority. We still took a piece of what their agenda was, and that was survivors' benefits. All of these were important to the veterans, but there were many more concerns that we had.

So it wasn't until the Democrats assumed the majority that we could keep the promise of America to America's veterans. That's why it was so thrilling to be with the representatives of the veterans groups, some of them I will name, the American Legion, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Disabled Veterans of America, the Paralyzed Veterans of America, AMVETS, that's the American Veterans, then the Iraq and Afghan Veterans of America, to be with them and other representatives of veterans a couple of days ago when we stood in front of the Capitol and announced that today, with this vote, under Chairman CHET EDWARDS' leadership, we would be giving the largest increase in the history of our country and in the 77-year history of the Veterans Administration.

Why is that necessary? Because there is a backlog of several hundred thousand cases at the VA. That's an injustice. That's an immorality. And there were needed more case workers to address a 2-year backlog, if you had an issue, you went there and you had to wait 2 years if you were a veteran.

Well, the veterans were there when they were needed. They heeded the call. They came to our defense, and now we're saying, wait 2 years for us to consider your case. Just not right. Just not right.

So in preparation for a possible Democratic majority where we could work in a bipartisan way, the veterans put together a budget, again emphasizing their priorities.

□ 1245

And when they did, we took that budget. Congress worked its will on it through the appropriations process to bring us to the floor today. Every one of us in the committee, it was a bipartisan unanimous vote, 56-0, in the Appropriations Committee.

I hope we will have a similar vote today because, as Mr. EDWARDS said, starting with the budget process under Mr. SPRATT to the larger Appropriations Committee under Chairman OBEY and now to this moment on the floor under Chairman EDWARDS' leadership, we were able to give the biggest possible bipartisan vote to this increase. And it is paid for.

When Democrats took control of the House, we instituted pay-as-you-go, no new deficit spending, no increase to the deficit. So that is why this is especially, especially, important because this says that even within the constraints, those budgetary constraints, veterans aren't the priority. In our budget the two leading priorities were America's children and America's veterans. In the appropriations process, we are able to honor that blueprint set forth in the budget again without adding to the deficit, without increasing the deficit. That makes it harder, but that signaled in a very important way that when we talk about our priorities and we say that veterans are in the forefront of them, they are in the lead in terms of the values that we have, a reflection of America's values that, even though there are difficult budgetary constraints, veterans come first.

This is an issue in urban America. It is a big issue in rural America. In rural America, 75 percent of the people know somebody closely who is serving or has served in Iraq and Afghanistan, and everybody in our country knows many people who have served in the military. Four of my brothers served in the military.

We all have a dedication to our veterans. It is more than, though, just talking about it. We had to act upon those words, act upon those values. And I thank Chairman CHET EDWARDS for giving us that opportunity today to reward our heroes with something that we are giving to them. It is something that they deserve, have been deprived of, but that has come to an end.

So I hope we have a unanimous vote on this to show the bipartisan support for veterans that I know exists in our Congress. I am just very, very proud that we were able to deliver on the promise once we took the majority of the House.

Mr. WICKER. Mr. Chairman, may I inquire as to how much time remains.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman from Mississippi has 11½ minutes remaining, and the time of the gentleman from Texas has expired.

Mr. WICKER. Clearly we are nearing the end of this general debate, and I would at this point yield 1 minute to my friend from Indiana (Mr. BUYER).

Mr. BUYER. Mr. Chairman, the only thing I would note, as I listened to the

Speaker speak in the well, is that when the Republicans presented their budget proposal as an alternative, we spent \$8 billion more than the majority in the 10-year scope, actually in the 5-year budget plan, \$8 billion more. And we did it without increasing taxes.

So what everybody needs to understand here is, yes, we are increasing money here to veterans, but these are also the very same veterans which are about to be taxed.

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

Just in closing, the Speaker of the House just said what a happy day this is for her. It is a happy day for me and for Members on this side of the aisle also, Mr. Chairman.

Why on a bipartisan issue do we have to sound so partisan sometimes in supporting the bill?

The Speaker mentioned that veterans funding had been so neglected for the past few years. I will again point out to Members of the House, Mr. Chairman, that during the period of Republican majority, in working with our friends across the aisle and funding VA, we increased funding by 96 percent during that period, from \$38.2 billion annually to \$74.5 billion. And during the final decades of the Democratic majority, the increase was only half that much.

The Speaker mentioned the concurrent receipt issue. Of course it was during the speakership of Speaker HASTERT that the House of Representatives enacted concurrent receipt legislation. And as a matter of fact, the previous speaker, Mr. BUYER, was the author and prime mover behind that legislation, and he deserves credit.

The point is this is a bipartisan issue. There is bipartisan support. I expect after discussion of a few amendments, Mr. Chairman, that we will have a near unanimous vote in favor of this bill. I will certainly be voting for it, as will the leadership of the Appropriations Committee.

Ms. BORDALLO. Mr. Chairman, I rise today in support of H.R. 2642, the Fiscal Year 2008 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Act. This bill includes many provisions critical to improving the quality of life for our fighting men and women as well as providing long-awaited and substantial increases in funding for veterans services. We continue our important commitment to veterans and servicemembers in this bill.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Chairman EDWARDS and Ranking Member WICKER for the work that they and their staff members have done to include within this bill provisions important to the people of Guam; to servicemembers who serve on Guam, and veterans living on Guam. The work of committee leadership ensures that this Congress will make a meaningful positive impact on our Armed Forces.

The appropriations bill continues Congress's strong support of the military build-up on Guam. The strategic importance of Guam cannot be understated. Guam allows the United States Armed Forces to maintain a strong presence in the Pacific region. The bill goes a

long way to improving critical infrastructure on Guam that is necessary for the build-up to be successful.

To that end, the bill fully funds \$345 million in military construction projects. The bill provides for full funding of several key infrastructure projects for the Navy from improving electrical system security to repairing and upgrading a wastewater treatment plant. The bill also fully funds the critical Kilo Wharf upgrade project. The \$101 million project is strategically critical to United States Naval forces as it is the only dedicated ammunition wharf in the Western Pacific Region.

Important quality of life issues for servicemembers on Guam are also included. The bill fully funds \$45 million for upgrades to the Naval Base Fitness Center. Funds for this project meet Chief of Naval Forces Admiral Mike Mullen's commitment to improving the quality of life for all Naval forces. It also fully funds \$57 million in upgrades to degraded housing on Naval Base Guam. The need for adequate housing facilities is more prescient, as more and more Naval vessels use the base as maintenance and supply center.

I also applaud the Committee's efforts in including report language that directs the Department of Veterans Affairs to report on its plans for activation of 29 previously funded Community-Based Outpatient Clinics. Guam is one of the 29 clinics that is awaiting activation. I am deeply concerned that the Department of Veterans Affairs is not providing the veterans on Guam with the quality care that they deserve for their sacrifices to our great nation. The report language answers the concerns that I have expressed to the Department on multiple occasions. I look forward to hearing the Department's plan for activation of the clinic on Guam.

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. Mr. Chairman, I am so proud of what we are doing on behalf of our veterans today and so I rise in strong support of the Military Construction & Veterans Affairs Appropriations bill.

In addition to the increase in funding—the largest increase in the entire 77-year history of the Veterans Administration—there are many provisions here that will help the over 6,000 veterans of the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Just last week as I was traveling back to Washington, one veteran complained that he was getting no response on his disability claim. I have many other open cases in my office. This bill will reduce the backlog and make good on the promise to take care of any injury related to their military service.

There is a major increase in health care funding, and I will work to ensure that some of it is used to make health care more accessible to Virgin Islands veterans. I also hope we can address the increased reimbursement for travel to and from care. Our veterans have to travel over water and by airplane to get VA provided care. The costs to them and the family member who may have to accompany them is a great burden they should not have to bear.

This bill has many other important provisions, but I only want to highlight one other which is of great concern to me as a physician, and that is the funding for programs to address Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and the other mental health needs of returning men and women of our Armed forces. This is a vital need.

We in the Virgin Islands were able to help our first responders after 9/11 and we want to

do more to help our soldiers transition safely and fully from the din and stress of war back to peacetime. This bill will help us do that.

I want to commend our Speaker for her determination to lead this House and to keep our promise to the men and women who have kept theirs to us—our veterans. I also applaud Chairman CHET EDWARDS on shepherding this landmark bill to final passage, and Chairmen DAVID OBEY and JOHN SPRATT for setting the stage to make this victory for all Americans possible.

Mr. LARSON of Connecticut. Mr. Chairman, I rise in strong support of H.R. 2642, the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Act for fiscal year 2008, the annual spending bill for military construction and veterans' programs.

Today, the House is considering a bill that would appropriate \$109.2 billion, with \$64.7 billion in discretionary spending for military construction and veterans' programs, which is \$4 billion more than the President's fiscal year 2008 budget request. The bill would provide \$43.2 billion for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), which is \$6.7 billion above 2007 and \$3.8 billion over the President's request for veterans' medical care, claims processing personnel, and facility improvements. This includes \$28.9 billion in funding to improve access to medical services for all veterans, which is \$1.7 billion above the President's request. This legislation also defeats the President's ill-advised proposals to nearly double co-pays for prescription drugs for veterans and to increase TRICARE premiums by over \$1,000 a year for military retirees.

The military health care system is understaffed and drowning in a backlog of cases and unable to provide our veterans with the benefits and resources they sacrificed a great deal to earn. In an effort to reduce the 400,000 claim backlog, the bill also includes \$1.6 billion in funding to enable the VA to hire over 1100 more claims processors. This legislation is the largest single increase in the 77-year history of the VA and for the first time in 21 years that the House has exceeded the request of the veterans' Independent Budget.

There are over 251,000 veterans living in Connecticut and I am pleased the 110th Congress has made funding our Nation's military health care system a top priority. Since the previous Congress adjourned without passing a budget, the new Congress passed a Continuing Appropriations Resolution (P.L. 110-5) that provided \$3.4 billion over the fiscal year 2006 funding level to fund the VA in fiscal year 2007. In addition, the Supplemental Appropriations Act (P.L. 110-28) added \$1.8 billion directly targeted at the needs of veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. Part of the cost of war is to care for our servicemen and women when they return home and Congress has an obligation to ensure they receive appropriate care.

I applaud the leadership of Mr. EDWARDS, chairman of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs, and Mr. OBEY, chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, and the members of the committee for their efforts and continued commitment to our Nation's veterans. Today's legislation takes us one step further in providing our veterans with the best health care and resources our country can provide and I encourage my colleagues to join me in voting for it and the President in signing it into law.

Mr. ORTIZ. Mr. Chairman, I rise in support of this bill—engineered by my colleague from Texas Mr. EDWARDS—which funds vital military accounts and provides the largest increase in veterans funding in the history of the VA.

While the central concern for South Texas is a veterans hospital—I understand we must authorize that funding before we can appropriate it. I have talked about this issue with appropriators and authorizers alike . . . and those conversations will continue until we find a resolution to help these veterans get the in patient care they deserve.

The Congress is committed to working in a bipartisan way to ensure that our budget honors the service of our veterans and builds a future worthy of their sacrifice. With passage of this bill, the 110th Congress will have voted for historic increases in veterans' health care and benefits programs, totaling nearly \$12 billion—including the joint resolution and the supplemental—to meet the needs of returning veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan . . . and make up for the Bush Administration's past shortcomings in its treatment of veterans.

This bill will provide veterans with the health care and benefits we promised them, resulting in the hiring of more qualified doctors and nurses to improve medical services to our veterans and to reduce waiting times for doctor appointments, and provide more to help veterans suffering from traumatic brain injury (TBI), post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), mental health care issues, and lost limbs so that they can rebuild their lives.

For the first time, the budget for VA medical care exceeds the budget of the veterans' service organizations by \$294 million. This will ensure quality health care for 5.8 million patients, including about 263,000 Iraq and Afghanistan veterans, which the VA will treat in FY 2008. This significantly reduces the 400,000 claims backlog for veterans waiting for disability and other benefits by adding more than 1,100 new claims processors.

The bill also provides much needed maintenance of VA health care facilities (funding level is \$500 million above the President's request) to prevent another Walter Reed-type scandal from occurring. A recent VA report outlined 1,000 specific problems at VA health facilities around the country, with a backlog of \$5 billion in maintenance.

The enormous number of troops returning home with mental health disorders, including PTSD and traumatic brain injury, resulted in the bill including five polytrauma centers and three Centers of Excellence for Mental Health and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). These centers will be fully operational this year to care for those returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, including those with TBI. A February GAG report noted about one-third of veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan are facing mental health challenges, and up to 300,000 troops are expected to return from Iraq suffering from TBI.

The bill also protects taxpayers and veterans by including solid steps to ensure accountability and stop wasteful spending by increasing funding for the Inspector General for VA to improve services for veterans and their families and to prevent and deter potential waste, fraud and inefficiencies.

To strengthen our military, this bill provides better barracks, housing and training facilities when troops return from combat with an unprecedented \$21.4 billion investment in military construction, family housing, and BRAC—

with \$207 million more than the President's request.

To address end strength, the bill provides funding recommended by my subcommittee to begin the process of adding 65,000 Army, 27,000 Marine, and 9,000 National Guard and Reserve troops.

For BRAC, the bill fully funds the 2005 base realignment and closure process at \$8.2 billion, and supports the relocation of 70,000 troops from bases in Korea and Europe.

All this represents the start we need to pay for a healthy and vital military force to protect our nation today, tomorrow and for the coming decades.

Mr. HARE. Mr. Chairman, I rise in strong support of H.R. 2642, the Fiscal Year 2008 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Act.

I am honored to stand here today as a freshman member of this Democratic Congress as we approve "the largest" funding increase in the 77-year history of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

It is my hope that providing \$6.7 billion above last year's funding will only be the beginning of our commitment to the promises made to our service men and women.

All of us were outraged by the reports of what happened at Walter Reed. Part of the problem is for years the VA has been short-changed on funding, due to understating its budgeting needs instead of proactively planning for the needs of our veterans.

This underfunding has resulted in budget shortfalls, understaffing of vets centers, a huge claims backlog, and inexcusable delays at VA facilities.

This bill represents a change in priorities.

It funds an additional 1,100 claims' processors to address the 600,000 backlog.

It provides \$4.4 billion above 2007 levels for the Veterans Health Administration. This will help the VA treat the more than 5.8 million patients they expect in 2008.

Additionally, the bill increases funding for the VA's repair and maintenance accounts to prevent a VA medical facility from falling into unacceptable levels of disrepair.

I commend my colleagues on the VA Military Construction Appropriations Subcommittee for bringing to the floor a bill that exceeds the recommendations of the veterans' service organizations of the Independent Budget.

We've seen a change in priorities and I am going to continue to support this momentum until all veterans who want access to healthcare in the VA system, have it. I urge all my colleagues to pass this bill that funds critical benefits for our veterans.

Ms. CASTOR. Mr. Chairman, I am proud today to stand with this Congress as it affirms its commitment to the brave men and women who are part of our active and retired military services. Their collective sacrifice and service has been phenomenal, and we must do all we can to ensure that they receive the medical care that they have earned as a result of the sacrifices they have made in service to America. The bill before us provides an historic, substantial boost to the Veterans' Administration, allocating \$43.2 billion—\$3.8 billion more than the President's request and \$6.7 more than the FY 07 allocation—to properly fulfill America's obligation to our servicemen and women and their families.

As a representative of the State with the second highest population of military retirees

and veterans—nearly 2 million people—I know many Florida families stand to benefit greatly. The extra funding for the VA to double its benefits personnel in order to reduce the backlog of more than 400,000 benefit claims will do much to improve health care and efficiency for benefits that are due to many Florida families. The top two busiest VA Health Care centers, Bay Pines in St. Petersburg and Haley VA in Tampa, serve residents in my district. I have walked the halls of both facilities, and encountered active and retired military personnel looking for the best care possible for them and their families. This bill provides resources adequate to the enormously important task of supporting our veterans and their families as they transition back into civilian life. It also expands access to vital services in the areas of greatest concern for veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan: traumatic brain injury, post-traumatic stress disorder, treatment for burns, and amputation. Haley VA has the distinction of being one of a handful of poly-trauma centers, with special designation to handle traumatic brain injuries, and with its partner, the University Of South Florida College Of Public Health, has been on the forefront of discovering the best roads to effective treatment for those suffering with TBI.

Also, this bill represents the recognition that we must confront, not shy away from, the serious issues in veterans care brought to light by the Walter Reed scandal. \$4.1 billion dollars, \$508 million above and beyond the President's request, is set aside for the ongoing maintenance and renovation of existing facilities to make certain they remain capable of delivering our veterans the treatment they deserve and need. It also heavily invests in information technology to better track health records, so that no American is allowed to fall through the cracks.

I urge this Congress to back up the talk about supporting our troops with concrete actions. We have an unwavering obligation as a country to do right by our servicemen and women, whether it be in the solemn purpose with which we must always send them off to war, or in providing the necessary care for them and their families upon their return. Their sacrifice must be respected not just with our words, but with our actions.

Mrs. WILSON of New Mexico. Mr. Chairman, I rise today to offer an amendment on the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Bill for FY 08. My amendment would devote \$2 million dollars from the Department Administration General Operations Expenses Account, of the nearly \$1.6 billion appropriated in this bill, to the Advisory Committee on Women Veterans. The intent of my amendment is that the Advisory Committee on Women Veterans would establish a commission to evaluate and make recommendations for improvements to the VA system so that it can better meet health care needs of women veterans.

In 1978, I purchased a one-way ticket to Colorado Springs, Colorado to enroll at the Air Force Academy. I was in the third class that accepted women into our service academies. I am the only woman veteran serving in the Congress. Women face different obstacles than men when trying to receive care from the VA. To start with, many women who have served in the military don't call themselves "veterans" and many women don't think of the VA as "their" system.

A larger number of women are serving in military and in the future we will see a higher number of women veterans. One in seven Americans deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan is a woman.

My goal in proposing this amendment is to bring together a group of people who can truly devote the time and effort to study the needs and examine the challenges our women veterans face. They then can report to Congress their finding and recommendations so that we, as a body, can evaluate these findings and implement improvements and initiatives to ensure women receive the care they have earned.

I introduced legislation similar to my amendment, H.R. 2394, the Bipartisan Commission on Wounded Women Veterans. This amendment would fund the commission envisioned in H.R. 2394.

I am grateful to all who serve their nation and we as a Congress have a responsibility to ensure they receive the best possible care. In this war on terrorism, the greatest burdens have fallen on the shoulders of a relatively small number of Americans who have volunteered to take great risks on our behalf. Events over the last few years have made a new generation of Americans realize just how precious our freedoms really are. We owe our freedom fighters—past, present, and future—a debt of gratitude for their selflessness and sacrifice. I will continue to fight to ensure that our veterans get the benefits they were promised, the health care they deserve, and the recognition that our Nation owes them.

Thank you for the time and I ask for a yes vote on my amendment.

Mr. REYES. Mr. Chairman, I rise to express my support for this important measure which reflects—in dollars and cents—just a small measure of our appreciation for all that men and women in uniform do in defense of our Nation.

We have an obligation to provide the housing and other facilities in which our military members and their families live and work. This measure includes the funds required to fully fund the President's budget request for military construction projects. The bill provides \$8.2 billion dollars to implement the 2005 BRAC recommendations and \$2.9 billion to replace, rehabilitate, and build housing for troops and their families.

As the representative of Fort Bliss, Texas I have seen the fruits of military construction spending, and I can assure my colleagues that these funds are being wisely used by the Army and the other military services to greatly improve the quality of life for our military members and their families. From a motorpool that allows a young technician to repair vehicles out of the heat and rain to a childcare center where the children of deployed service members can learn and grow, these facilities are more than bricks and mortar. They are an integral part of every soldier's daily life.

This bill provides an unprecedented level of funding for veterans health care which will allow us to begin to address the needs of current veterans who have for years been woefully under-served by the Veterans Administration, VA system. H.R. 2642 will also provide needed funding for men and women returning from combat in Iraq and Afghanistan.

This measure continues our efforts to improve benefits for our Nation's veterans and provides \$43.2 billion for veterans programs—

\$6.7 billion more than was allocated last year and \$3.8 billion more than the White House requested for VA programs. This additional funding will meet shortfalls in the Veterans Health Administration budget and provide needed funds to better address Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, mental health and substance abuse, homeless veterans, and prosthetic research.

These programs and other initiatives funded in the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Act are critical to our troops and their families and to our veterans who sacrificed so much in defense of our Nation and our American values. I urge my colleagues to support this legislation.

Mrs. DRAKE. Mr. Chairman, as has been widely reported, the Department of Veterans Affairs continues to face challenges in improving service delivery to veterans and reducing the existing backlog of benefit claims.

While the VA made progress in fiscal years 2002 and 2003 reducing the size and age of its pending claims inventory, it has regrettably fallen behind in recent years. The VA's inventory of pending claims and their average time pending has increased significantly in the last 3 years and the Department is currently facing over 630,000 open benefit claims.

The VA reduced the average age of its pending claims from 182 days at the end of fiscal year 2001 to 111 days at the end of fiscal year 2003. However, by the end of fiscal year 2006, average days pending had increased to 127 days and is currently reported to be 177 days.

It should be noted that continued increases in the number and complexity of claims being filed have played a contributing role in the current backlog. In its fiscal year 2008 budget justification, the VA identified an increase in claims processing staff as essential to reducing the pending claims inventory and improving timeliness. However, the VA states that the budget request only provides resources to reduce the processing time to 145 days. Furthermore, even as increased funding is appropriated and staffing levels increase, the VA acknowledges that it still must take other actions to improve productivity.

Representatives from the VA have stated that there is a newly implemented strategy to manage the pending inventory and improve response time by getting more out of current resources, increasing staffing, and improving information technology. Given the current claims crisis, I believe that we need to know more about this strategy.

My amendment will require the VA to provide a report to Congress on the status of the number of pending disability benefit claims and the actions taken to reduce processing time for veterans' disability claims. As the House considers FY 2008 funding for the VA, I believe the Congress, the American people, and more importantly, our Nation's veterans are entitled to know how current and future resources will be implemented to address these concerns. This is the least we can do.

I understand that this amendment will be subject to a point of order and I will therefore not offer it. However, the current claims backlog is an issue of importance for our Nation's veterans. It is my hope that this Congress will address this issue in the near future.

Mr. LEWIS of Kentucky. Mr. Chairman, I rise today in strong support of funding for our soldiers, veterans, and military families. Mil-

tary service is part of the proud history of the Second Congressional District of Kentucky. The provisions included in this bill will significantly benefit many of those I am honored to represent.

The Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Act of 2008 contains the largest ever increase in Veterans Health funding: including \$29 billion for new and modified medical services.

If passed, these funds will initiate the opening of two new Community Based Outpatient Clinics in my District, as designated by Secretary Nicholson. These facilities, and dozens of others across the country, will help to ensure that veterans have the highest quality local care possible.

The Second Congressional District is also home to Fort Knox. As a result of the 2005 BRAC proceedings, Fort Knox is transforming over the next few years from an institutional training installation to a multi-functional installation that will include an active force infantry brigade and the site for the Human Resources Command for the Army.

This bill includes \$8.2 billion to support necessary infrastructure preparations at Fort Knox and other BRAC-affected installations working to accommodate new military operations.

Mr. Chairman, I urge my colleagues to support timely funding for our nation's veterans and military installations by voting to approve this bill.

Mr. BUCHANAN. Mr. Chairman, I rise today to urge my colleagues to support the fiscal year 2008 military construction and veterans affairs appropriations bill which includes \$27.8 million dollars to construct a veterans' cemetery in my District.

The funding was part of the President's budget and will allow us to honor our commitment to provide nearly 400,000 veterans living within 75 miles of Sarasota, Florida with a final resting place that honors their military service.

The VA has purchased 245 acres of land in Sarasota County and construction is planned for May 2008. The first burials are anticipated in October of 2008.

With more than 1,800 veterans dying every day in this country, the timely completion of this project is a primary concern for area veterans and is one of my highest priorities.

This funding will help ensure that our goals are met and the veterans who proudly served this Nation and eligible family members can be placed to rest close to home and with the honor and dignity they deserve.

Mr. LANGEVIN. Mr. Chairman, I rise today in support of H.R. 2642, the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2008. This measure shows what a high priority our Nation places on providing for our servicemembers, their families and our veterans.

The new Democratic leadership in Congress has faced many challenges in recent months regarding the treatment of servicemembers and veterans. Earlier this year, we learned about horrific conditions at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center, including overused outpatient housing in disrepair, patients confused about where to go after serious operations, and the tangled bureaucracy confronting servicemembers and their families. It was clear that administrative policies needed to be revised, not only at Walter Reed, but across the system at locations both here and abroad.

It was also clear that increasing the funding level for military health care was a priority. As

a result, Congress passed a supplemental spending bill that contained an additional \$1.8 billion for veterans' health care, and today we will pass a bill that is \$6.7 billion above fiscal year 2007 funds and \$3.8 billion over President Bush's request. The total amount in this bill is even more than what is requested in the Independent Budget, a needs estimate published by four veterans' service groups. If passed, H.R. 2642 will mark the largest annual increase to VA health care funding in over 75 years.

Mr. Chairman, we must ensure that servicemembers wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan have the services they require and as well anticipate the increasing number of returning veterans who have earned their promised benefits. To that end, H.R. 2642 provides \$43.2 billion for veterans medical care to alleviate the backlog of claims processing system and fund improvements for VA facilities. I am also pleased that this measure allots \$600 million for new initiatives for improving mental health and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) centers, \$1.9 billion to improve the electronic health records system, and \$130 million to assist homeless veterans.

After a recent visit to the Providence VA Medical Center, I was impressed with the treatment of veterans, as well as the ongoing innovative research at the facility. I am also optimistic that upcoming construction projects will improve the facility, especially knowing that the VA will play a larger role in the coming years as more servicemembers return from ongoing conflicts. Today's bill provides \$4.1 billion for ongoing maintenance and renovations of existing facilities, which will help Providence attain its goals. I am also pleased that \$15 million is allocated for the Health Care Sharing Incentive Fund, which allows the Department of Defense and VA to increase research, improve access to care, and ensure a seamless transition for our veterans.

H.R. 2642 also includes \$21.4 billion for military construction. This amount is \$5.1 billion above the amount for fiscal year 2007, and will fully fund Base Realignment and Closure. This funding will also help improve training and quality of life facilities for active duty troops and members of the National Guard and Reserves, all of whom are playing critical roles in ongoing conflicts and need our support now more than ever. Finally, this measure includes \$2.8 billion to help increase the size of the Army, Marine Corps, the National Guard and Reserves over the next five years.

Mr. Chairman, we must maintain strong support for our men and women in uniform and all those who have bravely served our nation, and H.R. 2642 will do just that. May we all keep those currently serving abroad in our thoughts and wish them a safe return home.

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

The CHAIRMAN. All time for general debate has expired.

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

No amendment to the bill may be offered except those specified in the previous order of the House of today, which is at the desk.

The Clerk will read.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 2642

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in

Congress assembled, That the following sums are appropriated, out of any money in the Treasury not otherwise appropriated, for military construction, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2008, and for other purposes, namely:

TITLE I

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, ARMY

For acquisition, construction, installation, and equipment of temporary or permanent public works, military installations, facilities, and real property for the Army as currently authorized by law, including personnel in the Army Corps of Engineers and other personal services necessary for the purposes of this appropriation, and for construction and operation of facilities in support of the functions of the Commander in Chief, \$4,070,959,000, to remain available until September 30, 2012: *Provided*, That of this amount, not to exceed \$481,468,000 shall be available for study, planning, design, architect and engineer services, and host nation support, as authorized by law, unless the Secretary of Defense determines that additional obligations are necessary for such purposes and notifies the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress of the determination and the reasons therefor.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, NAVY AND MARINE CORPS

(INCLUDING RESCISSION OF FUNDS)

For acquisition, construction, installation, and equipment of temporary or permanent public works, naval installations, facilities, and real property for the Navy and Marine Corps as currently authorized by law, including personnel in the Naval Facilities Engineering Command and other personal services necessary for the purposes of this appropriation, \$2,125,138,000, to remain available until September 30, 2012: *Provided*, That of this amount, not to exceed \$110,167,000 shall be available for study, planning, design, and architect and engineer services, as authorized by law, unless the Secretary of Defense determines that additional obligations are necessary for such purposes and notifies the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress of the determination and the reasons therefor: *Provided further*, That of the funds appropriated for "Military Construction, Navy and Marine Corps" under Public Law 108-132, \$5,862,000 are hereby rescinded.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, AIR FORCE
(INCLUDING RESCISSION OF FUNDS)

For acquisition, construction, installation, and equipment of temporary or permanent public works, military installations, facilities, and real property for the Air Force as currently authorized by law, \$927,428,000, to remain available until September 30, 2012: *Provided*, That of this amount, not to exceed \$51,587,000 shall be available for study, planning, design, and architect and engineer services, as authorized by law, unless the Secretary of Defense determines that additional obligations are necessary for such purposes and notifies the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress of the determination and the reasons therefor: *Provided further*, That of the funds appropriated for "Military Construction, Air Force" under Public Law 108-324, \$5,319,000 are hereby rescinded.

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Chairman, I move to strike the last word.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman from Texas is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Chairman, I will not use all 5 minutes.

And I think, as my colleagues have noticed, my comments have been very bipartisan today. I am proud that the bill that we put together was supported on a unanimous bipartisan basis in the committee. I am also proud as a Democrat that the new Democratic leadership, led by Speaker PELOSI, has made funding for veterans health care and benefits a top priority in this Congress.

I would just point out, in response to some of the comments made, that the first comments made referencing Republicans or Democrats were made by the minority in today's debate when the comment was made that Republicans have primarily supported veterans. And in comparisons of past increases between Republican and Democratic Congresses, I am not going to get into all that.

I would like to point out for the record that under the previous leadership of the Congress, the concurrent receipt problem wasn't even brought to the floor of the House until, led by Democrats, we almost had 218 signatures on a discharge position to override the previous Speaker of the House, who had not let the concurrent receipt bill get to the floor of the House.

But having said that fact, I am here to say we are proud to work with Mr. WICKER and work with our colleagues to see that we do have a historic increase in veterans health care spending in this bill, unprecedented in the history of the VA and in the history of our Nation. I am glad to see that the administration has reversed its threat to veto this bill because they were concerned it might spend too much on veterans and our military families. I am glad they recognize the error of their ways, and I commend them for pulling off of that veto threat.

So I just would reiterate what I again today have been saying, and that is I am proud to have worked on a bipartisan basis with my colleague Mr. WICKER and members of our subcommittee and others in this House to see that we got this historic bill on the floor.

□ 1300

The CHAIRMAN. The Clerk will read. The Clerk read as follows:

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

For acquisition, construction, installation, and equipment of temporary or permanent public works, installations, facilities, and real property for activities and agencies of the Department of Defense (other than the military departments), as currently authorized by law, \$1,806,928,000, to remain available until September 30, 2012: *Provided*, That such amounts of this appropriation as may be determined by the Secretary of Defense may be transferred to such appropriations of the Department of Defense available for military construction or family housing as the Secretary may designate, to be merged with and to be available for the same purposes, and for the same time period, as the appropriation or fund to which transferred: *Provided further*, That of the amount appropriated, not to exceed \$154,728,000 shall be

available for study, planning, design, and architect and engineer services, as authorized by law, unless the Secretary of Defense determines that additional obligations are necessary for such purposes and notifies the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress of the determination and the reasons therefor: *Provided further*, That of the funds appropriated for "Military Construction, Defense-Wide" under Public Law 110-5, \$7,592,000 are hereby rescinded.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, ARMY NATIONAL GUARD

For construction, acquisition, expansion, rehabilitation, and conversion of facilities for the training and administration of the Army National Guard, and contributions therefor, as authorized by chapter 1803 of title 10, United States Code, and Military Construction Authorization Acts, \$439,291,000, to remain available until September 30, 2012.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, AIR NATIONAL GUARD

For construction, acquisition, expansion, rehabilitation, and conversion of facilities for the training and administration of the Air National Guard, and contributions therefor, as authorized by chapter 1803 of title 10, United States Code, and Military Construction Authorization Acts, \$95,517,000, to remain available until September 30, 2012.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, ARMY RESERVE

For construction, acquisition, expansion, rehabilitation, and conversion of facilities for the training and administration of the Army Reserve as authorized by chapter 1803 of title 10, United States Code, and Military Construction Authorization Acts, \$154,684,000, to remain available until September 30, 2012.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, NAVY RESERVE

For construction, acquisition, expansion, rehabilitation, and conversion of facilities for the training and administration of the reserve components of the Navy and Marine Corps as authorized by chapter 1803 of title 10, United States Code, and Military Construction Authorization Acts, \$69,150,000, to remain available until September 30, 2012.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, AIR FORCE RESERVE

(INCLUDING RESCISSION OF FUNDS)

For construction, acquisition, expansion, rehabilitation, and conversion of facilities for the training and administration of the Air Force Reserve as authorized by chapter 1803 of title 10, United States Code, and Military Construction Authorization Acts, \$39,628,000, to remain available until September 30, 2012: *Provided*, That of the funds appropriated for "Military Construction, Air Force Reserve" under Public Law 109-114, \$3,069,000 are hereby rescinded.

NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION SECURITY INVESTMENT PROGRAM

For the United States share of the cost of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization Security Investment Program for the acquisition and construction of military facilities and installations (including international military headquarters) and for related expenses for the collective defense of the North Atlantic Treaty Area as authorized by section 2806 of title 10, United States Code, and Military Construction Authorization Acts, \$201,400,000, to remain available until expended.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. HAYES

Mr. HAYES. Mr. Chairman, I offer an amendment.

The CHAIRMAN. The Clerk will designate the amendment.

The text of the amendment is as follows:

Amendment offered by Mr. HAYES:

Page 7, line 12, insert after the dollar amount the following: “(reduced by \$30,000,000)”.

Page 10, line 24, insert after the dollar amount the following: “(increased by \$30,000,000)”.

The CHAIRMAN. Pursuant to the order of the House of today, the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. HAYES) and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from North Carolina.

Mr. HAYES. I want to thank Chairman EDWARDS and the ranking member, my friend, Mr. WICKER, for allowing me the time.

Mr. Chairman, I bring an amendment to the floor today because I feel the Base Realignment and Closure, BRAC, implementation process needs more funding than is being provided.

Mr. Chairman, the fiscal year 2007 continuing resolution did not adequately meet the needs of BRAC implementation. Though we came back and put a \$3.1 billion allocation for BRAC in the supplemental and we funded the President's fiscal year 2008 request in the bill, I do not believe we are doing all we should do in terms of funding this priority.

I realize the President's budget and supplemental request were based on the best estimates at the time, but there is no doubt that these figures were low. The Department of Defense currently estimates it will take \$30.8 billion from 2006 to 2011 to complete the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure round.

As the chairman and the ranking member pointed out in this bill, the current BRAC estimate is \$8 billion higher than that given by DOD only a year ago. I share the concern of the committee that even with this large increase, the projected funding estimate does not fully take into account construction and inflation costs and is lower than what will be actually required.

My home district, Fort Bragg, the epicenter of the universe, is facing these miscalculations today. As part of the BRAC 2005 plan for Fort Bragg, it was named the Joint Mobilization Center; however, no funding to house servicemembers going through the process of mobilization was involved.

The garrison is currently housing these mainly National Guard and Reserve members in the 82nd Airborne barracks, while the 82nd is deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan. When the 82nd returns, Fort Bragg will be forced to house those going through the Joint Mobilization Center in World War II-era barracks which are completely inadequate.

As part of the BRAC 2005 recommendations, Pope Air Force Base will be realigned to become part of Fort Bragg. This means that Bragg will take over the airfield at Pope, but there is no money currently programmed for the new control tower or the fire and rescue station that will be

necessary to support carrying out this realignment. Fort Bragg and Pope are but one example of this trend. No doubt these kinds of BRAC-related, unplanned expenses for military construction needs are prevalent at installations across the country.

The BRAC process was designed to increase the efficiency and increase the effectiveness of combat capability of our forces. Underfunding, even slightly, will affect our Nation's combat capability first. In the midst of this global war on terror, we need to be very careful not to underfund our combat capability, either indirectly or inadvertently.

Although I greatly respect and appreciate the chairman and ranking member's funding of the Base Realignment and Closure program, I strongly believe that this crucial national security area needs more focus. We need to search for ways to implement it.

To this end, my amendment reprograms \$30 million from NATO Security Investment to the Department of Defense. As you know, the NSIP is designed to be our contribution to construction of support facilities at NATO bases. While this is important, NATO is forward deployed, and it does not always provide us with a swift return on our investments in terms of combat capability.

In the past, NATO fought primarily from fixed bases in forward areas, but now it will operate from deployed locations. Infrastructure provided in NSIP, while important in previous NATO strategy, is somewhat less now. Conversely, BRAC and global rebasing moves direct American forces from Europe to home stations here in the U.S. Security requirements in Europe are decreasing while security requirements in the U.S., as well as readiness requirements at home stations, are going up as new units are reformed here at home.

The money could be better spent in the BRAC program with a focus on improving our quick reaction and Special Operations Forces. It will increase our Nation's combat power, fighting the continued war against terrorists, and it will improve the combat power of NATO.

I urge you to vote in favor of my amendment and join me in support of Base Realignment and Closure implementation.

I urge my colleagues to vote “yes” on this amendment.

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

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

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman from Texas is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. EDWARDS. Let me just say that I have great respect for Mr. HAYES's support of the military. He and I have worked together over the years in support of our veterans and our troops; his record is clear on that. I sympathize with his interest and support his inter-

est in seeing that we fully fund BRAC. I have been one of those, along with Mrs. BOYDA and others on your side of the aisle, that have worked hard to try to fully fund BRAC.

The opposition I have to this amendment, Mr. Chairman, is not in the good-faith effort to increase funding for BRAC, even though we fully fund it by \$8.2 billion. My opposition to this amendment comes from the fact that the gentleman would cut by 15 percent President Bush's request for the NATO Security Investment program. Now, maybe a lot of Americans aren't familiar with that program, but that program has provided infrastructure investment in Iraq to support U.S. forces in our fight in Iraq. The NATO Investment program has provided funding for our troops in Afghanistan. We are working with NATO forces to defend our national security interests in Afghanistan.

The cut of \$30 million proposed by the gentleman, I think, would unintentionally do great harm to the interests of our troops in Iraq and Afghanistan and throughout the world where we are working with NATO forces.

Let me give you some specifics of how this money is used. In the past, we have used \$9 million for the restoration of water distribution system at the Royal Air Forces base in Lakenheath in the United Kingdom. We have three Air Force F-15 squadrons there. We have used this fund to provide \$25 million for a medical treatment facility at Aviano Air Base in Italy. At Aviano, we have two U.S. Air Force F-16 squadron stations. And again, as I mentioned, we've used this money to support needed NATO infrastructure that helps U.S. forces in Iraq and Afghanistan.

So I would like to offer to the gentleman a good-faith effort, as we move to conference committee, to work with Mr. WICKER and work on a bipartisan basis to see if we can find additional funding for BRAC. I want additional funding for BRAC, but let's not undermine President Bush's commitments to NATO, our Nation's commitments to NATO, and unintentionally undermine important infrastructure programs that do support our troops that are risking their lives in Afghanistan and Iraq, even as we speak today.

Mr. WICKER. Will the gentleman yield?

Mr. EDWARDS. I would be glad to yield.

Mr. WICKER. I thank my friend, the chairman of the subcommittee, for yielding.

I would simply join my chairman in his offer to continue working with Mr. HAYES with regard to this effort. Certainly, no one has been a stronger advocate for the men and women at Fort Bragg, and also Pope Air Force Base and the families in that surrounding area, than has Robin Hayes of North Carolina.

I appreciate the sense of the amendment. I suspect that it will not pass

today, Mr. Chairman, but I do want to work with Chairman EDWARDS to see if we can accommodate the gentleman from North Carolina's needs as we move forward in the process.

Mr. EDWARDS. I would absolutely look forward to working and looking through every nook and cranny in the budget to see if we can squeeze out additional funding for BRAC. I agree with the gentleman from North Carolina that the Department of Defense has underestimated the full cost of BRAC, and we need to watch that very carefully as well.

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

Mr. HAYES. Mr. Chairman, may I inquire as to how much time is remaining?

The CHAIRMAN. Each side has 1 minute remaining.

Mr. HAYES. I thank very much the chairman. People who know Chet Edwards and Robin Hayes clearly understand our love for the military. And I appreciate Ranking Member WICKER's comments. When all is said and done, they have tough decisions to make, but there is no place like home. Home is Fort Bragg, and I hope that the Members will support my amendment.

Again, I thank Chairman EDWARDS and Ranking Member WICKER, and I look forward to working with them however this comes out, because this process is not going to end this morning or tomorrow. And again, I thank you for the time and look forward to working with you. I hope the membership will support my amendment.

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

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Chairman, I do look forward to working with Mr. HAYES to see if we can find additional funding for BRAC.

I will just finish by saying that right now home for many American forces is Iraq, it's Afghanistan, it's with NATO forces throughout the world defending our families and our homes. That is why I simply must oppose this, reluctantly, but strongly oppose this amendment because of the source of the funding. If we can find a better source of the funding, I would be glad to support the gentleman.

But I must oppose the amendment because it would undermine our commitment to NATO and vital infrastructure programs and investments that are so very important to our servicemen and -women serving in Iraq, Afghanistan and throughout the world today.

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

The CHAIRMAN. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. HAYES).

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

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

The CHAIRMAN. Pursuant to clause 6 of rule XVIII, further proceedings on

the amendment offered by the gentleman from North Carolina will be postponed.

The Clerk will read.

The Clerk read as follows:

FAMILY HOUSING CONSTRUCTION, ARMY

For expenses of family housing for the Army for construction, including acquisition, replacement, addition, expansion, extension, and alteration, as authorized by law, \$419,400,000, to remain available until September 30, 2012.

FAMILY HOUSING OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE, ARMY

For expenses of family housing for the Army for operation and maintenance, including debt payment, leasing, minor construction, principal and interest charges, and insurance premiums, as authorized by law, \$742,920,000.

FAMILY HOUSING CONSTRUCTION, NAVY AND MARINE CORPS

For expenses of family housing for the Navy and Marine Corps for construction, including acquisition, replacement, addition, expansion, extension, and alteration, as authorized by law, \$298,329,000, to remain available until September 30, 2012.

FAMILY HOUSING OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE, NAVY AND MARINE CORPS

For expenses of family housing for the Navy and Marine Corps for operation and maintenance, including debt payment, leasing, minor construction, principal and interest charges, and insurance premiums, as authorized by law, \$371,404,000.

FAMILY HOUSING CONSTRUCTION, AIR FORCE

For expenses of family housing for the Air Force for construction, including acquisition, replacement, addition, expansion, extension, and alteration, as authorized by law, \$362,747,000, to remain available until September 30, 2012.

FAMILY HOUSING OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE, AIR FORCE

For expenses of family housing for the Air Force for operation and maintenance, including debt payment, leasing, minor construction, principal and interest charges, and insurance premiums, as authorized by law, \$688,335,000.

FAMILY HOUSING OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE, DEFENSE-WIDE

For expenses of family housing for the activities and agencies of the Department of Defense (other than the military departments) for operation and maintenance, leasing, and minor construction, as authorized by law, \$48,848,000.

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE FAMILY HOUSING IMPROVEMENT FUND

For the Department of Defense Family Housing Improvement Fund, \$500,000, to remain available until expended, for family housing initiatives undertaken pursuant to section 2883 of title 10, United States Code, providing alternative means of acquiring and improving military family housing and supporting facilities.

CHEMICAL DEMILITARIZATION CONSTRUCTION, DEFENSE-WIDE
(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

For expenses of construction, not otherwise provided for, necessary for the destruction of the United States stockpile of lethal chemical agents and munitions in accordance with the provisions of section 1412 of the Department of Defense Authorization Act, 1986 (50 U.S.C. 1521), and for the destruction of other chemical warfare materials that are not in the chemical weapon stockpile, as currently authorized by law,

\$86,176,000, to remain available until September 30, 2012: *Provided*, That such amounts of this appropriation as may be determined by the Secretary of Defense may be transferred to such appropriations of the Department of Defense available for military construction as the Secretary may designate, to be merged with and to be available for the same purposes, and for the same time period, as the appropriation to which transferred.

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BASE CLOSURE ACCOUNT 1990

For deposit into the Department of Defense Base Closure Account 1990, established by section 2906(a)(1) of the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Act of 1990 (10 U.S.C. 2687 note), \$270,689,000, to remain available until expended.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. BLUMENAUER

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Chairman, I offer an amendment.

The CHAIRMAN. The Clerk will designate the amendment.

The text of the amendment is as follows:

Amendment offered by Mr. BLUMENAUER:

Page 10, line 17, insert after the dollar amount the following: "(increased by \$50,000,000)".

Page 10, line 24, insert after the dollar amount the following: "(reduced by \$201,000,000)".

The CHAIRMAN. Pursuant to the order of the House of today, the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. BLUMENAUER) and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Oregon.

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Chairman, I yield myself 2 minutes.

Mr. Chairman, first, let me begin by expressing my deep appreciation to the subcommittee for their work in providing an increase over the President's request for funding base cleanup. And particularly what we're talking about here are the legacy locations, places that have been closed in previous BRAC cycles, 1995, 1993, 1991, 1988. However, as we consider this appropriations act, I am concerned that we continue to dramatically underfund our commitment to communities impacted by these past BRAC rounds.

□ 1315

These communities are ones that have been penalized twice. They are penalized when the base is closed, and second, they are penalized because they are unable to make use of the land left behind because of hazardous contamination caused by unexploded ordnance.

According to the most recent Defense Environmental Programs' annual report, there is an estimated \$3.5 billion backlog for environmental cleanup of these bases. This represents over 140,000 acres of land that remain unusable by local communities for economic development across this country.

At the current levels, Mr. Chairman, we are facing people who went through the trauma of base closure in 1988, for instance, in Sacramento; they are going to wait over 60 years to be cleaned up.

I appreciate the words of the subcommittee Chair and ranking member

in terms of what they are trying to do with the difficult issues regarding BRAC, and I appreciate there is a very generous number that have been established, maybe not completely adequate, to try and deal with the people who were just whacked in the last round of closure. But, for heaven's sake, we need to keep our commitments to the communities that have worked in good faith, that had their bases closed 5 years, 10 years, 15 years ago, and still are awaiting our meeting, our commitment to them.

I strongly urge support of the amendment that I have introduced with Ms. GINNY BROWN-WAITE.

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

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman from Texas is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Chairman, while I cannot support this amendment, I want to thank Mr. BLUMENAUER and Mr. FARR for having led the fight in Congress to bring to every Member's attention the terribly important need to better fund the cleanup of past military sites that have been closed as a result of base realignment and closing process.

There is a \$3.5 billion backlog for the BRAC 1990 round 17 years ago. For those communities that have been a partner in defending our Nation, we owe it to them morally to see that we provide the adequate funds to allow those sites to be cleaned up so they can be utilized in a productive manner on behalf of their communities.

The reason I can't support the amendment and will oppose it is because of the outlay technicalities, the gentleman actually has to cut \$200 million from the BRAC 2005 account in order to fund additional \$50 million for the BRAC 1990 account. So that outlay problem could create great problems by cutting funding for BRAC 2005 in order to help the cleanup of BRAC 1990. We could inadvertently make it more difficult to have barracks ready for troops coming back from Iraq and Afghanistan to their homes here in the United States. It might be more difficult to have military training facilities, necessary at new Army bases, built. So, I oppose this.

But even as I oppose this amendment, I want to thank the gentleman. He has done every community in this country a service, along with Mr. FARR. Every community that has continued waiting 17 years after the 1990 BRAC round has suffered from the fact that the Congress and the administrations have not adequately funded this. It is time we work with the administration and ask them to increase that funding.

Because of the Members' strong support, Mr. BLUMENAUER and Mr. FARR, we have provided \$271 million for the 1990 BRAC round, and that is an increase of \$50 million, or a 23 percent increase over the administration's budget request, recognizing that budget request, in my personal opinion, was inadequate.

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

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Chairman, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from California (Mr. FARR).

Mr. FARR. Mr. Chairman, I thank the gentleman for yielding. I want to first of all compliment the chairman for adding an additional \$50 million.

What every Member of Congress ought to worry about is that we have so many bases that have been closed in the United States that have not been able to finish their cleanup. That means that they can't do economic development. They just sit there with fences around them because they have unexploded ordnances. It is what they call "warm basing" a property. Mayor and city councils and local government folks are furious about this.

There is a \$3.5 billion cleanup necessary. What Mr. BLUMENAUER is saying is, let's just put \$50 million more towards that. That will go a long way toward getting those high-priority communities cleaned up.

Frankly, there is no movement that can be taken until this is done, because the only government that can clean up unexploded ordnances is the Federal Government. You can't delegate it out. It can't be a State or local issue.

If you want to do economic development in your States and home communities which have been affected by these numerous base closings over the years, for those of you that have base closures, just the recent base closure, there is a separate account. But the reason we have to put more money into this is, there are only two ways of getting money into there, either from sales of property or from direct appropriations. The sales of property haven't filled up this account. So the only way, if we are going to address the unexploded ordnance cleanup, to amend the bill is to add an additional \$50 million. It is urgent for economic development at the local level. It is good government.

Mr. Chairman, I ask for an "aye" vote.

Mr. BLUMENAUER. May I inquire as to how much time remains.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman from Oregon has an additional 1½ minutes.

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Chairman, I move to strike the last word.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman from Texas is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Chairman, I yield to the gentleman from Florida (Mr. CRENSHAW), a leader on our Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs.

Mr. CRENSHAW. Mr. Chairman, I thank the gentleman for yielding.

Mr. Chairman, I want to rise very briefly in opposition. I share the same concern that we all share about these unexploded ordnance sites. The safety of our citizens is important, and I think our subcommittee has recognized that by stating very clearly in very strong language that the Department

of Defense should make this a priority, that we should get rid of this unacceptable backlog.

But I don't think we can take money out of the 2005 round of BRAC to solve the problem. That would be like robbing Peter to pay Paul. The 2005 round of BRAC has been put together. There is already some concern that it may not be fully funded, so if we take one penny out of that pot of money and spend it somewhere else, we could upset a very delicate balance.

We have to remember we have made a commitment to our men and women in uniform. For instance, I know in my community, they are building a \$129 million hangar to house all the P-3s that will come down from Maine. If there is not enough money to do that, what happens to those planes? They are stranded. What happens to the sailors that are coming? They are stranded.

So while I share everyone's concern in dealing with this backlog, I think it is inappropriate and I think it is wrong to take money which would upset that kind of balance. We have to remember not only do we care about our communities, but we care about our commitment to our men and women in uniform.

Therefore, I would rise in opposition and urge my colleagues to vote "no" on this amendment.

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Chairman, I yield the balance of my time to the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. BLUMENAUER).

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Chairman, I appreciate what my friend from Florida said, and I have no interest in robbing Peter to pay Paul. But let's take it down to a very specific example that you are familiar with in Jacksonville. You had a base closed, Cecil Naval Air Station, in a prior round. Under the current schedule, this facility is not scheduled to be cleaned up until 2026, another 19 years.

Now, you are right, we have put a significant amount of money into the 2005 round of BRAC closures. We put \$5 billion in the supplemental. And you have put in this bill which I appreciate, almost \$8.2 billion. But where I take modest exception with the gentleman is that you can't spend it. The payout rate is about 10 percent. I am seeking to transfer 2 percent away from areas that you can't spend this year or next year or the year after that.

But I will distribute a list of people who have been waiting in some cases since 1988. They have plans ready to go. They are ready to clean up. If you talk to the companies that are the ordnance contractors, they are ready to go. They will clean this up. But we have got to stop the fits and the starts, where we don't follow through on our commitments.

With all due respect, if I had a facility in the 2005 BRAC cycle, I would like this Congress to start meeting its commitments from 1988 and 1990 and 1992 and 1995, because if we don't, subsequent Congresses are going to play the

same game. Because you can't spend this \$13 billion, it will be dragged on and dragged out, and it will ultimately be diverted. Then we will be here, or some of you will be here, 10 years from now, and people will be wondering why the 2005 round of BRAC is waiting, like Mather Air Force Base, for 60 years, or why people in El Toro are waiting for 30 years.

With all due respect, I would hope that the subcommittee would build on its good work, but look at the payout rate for the \$13 billion you have for 2005, which we estimate maybe will be spent, 10 percent.

Join with me in shifting a modest 2 percent of that money, so that we can keep our commitments to people who have been waiting since 1988, since 1990, 1993 and 1995.

I deeply appreciate the work that the subcommittee has done, and I appreciate Mr. EDWARDS, you have been encouraging and helping the work that I have done in the past on this with Mr. FARR. And it is important that you put \$50 million in above the administrations request but I hope we can work to keep the commitment to the people.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman's time has expired.

At this point, the gentleman from Texas has 2½ minutes. The gentleman from Oregon has 1½ minutes.

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Chairman, I yield 1 minute to the gentleman from California (Mr. FARR).

Mr. FARR. Mr. Chairman, I want to just reiterate on what Mr. BLUMENAUER indicated. This isn't a "rob Peter to pay Paul" case. But if you are from the Jefferson Proving Ground, you have been waiting a long time. If you are from Fort Ord, California, where I am from and why I am really interested in this, we closed in the 1992 round, and we are doing massive economic development, and it is foreclosed if you can't get into cleaning up the unexploded ordnance. Fort Meade, Fort McClellan, Savannah Army Depot, the list goes on and on. These are the kinds of projects that are out there, ready to go. Just take the projects off the shelf, fund them and get it done.

I am on this committee and I am very sympathetic. I am very appreciative of what the chairman has done, increasing the account by \$50 million. We are going to have an amendment in a minute to cut it, which would be the worst thing we could ever do for all these reasons. Mr. BLUMENAUER is trying to increase it by \$50 million so we could actually have enough money to get some of these projects started. I think it is good government. It is promises made, promises kept, and that is what we ought to do.

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

Mr. BLUMENAUER. I think I have 1½ minutes left?

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman is recognized for 1½ minutes.

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Chairman, my Republican cosponsor is stuck in

traffic, and I wanted GINNY to have a chance to speak on this. Evidently, she is not going to make it.

Mr. Chairman, I do think this is very important in terms of our keeping our commitments. I appreciate the work that the subcommittee is doing in this broad range of areas, but I would hope that you would work with us, because you cannot spend the \$13.5 billion. The adoption of this amendment will have no effect on BRAC cleanup for the 2005 round for years to come, if at all.

But failure, failure for Congress to keep our commitments to these legacy BRAC programs, not only does it penalize these people who have been waiting in line for, in some cases, 19 years, but it makes it more likely, frankly, that people who are in the 2005 cycle are going to end up having Congress do to them what pass Congresses have done to the legacy BRAC.

□ 1330

I appreciate the work of the subcommittee, and I look forward to working with you, and echo my friend from California that it would be the worst of all possible worlds if somehow the next amendment, taking money away from these critical bases, was somehow diverted for another use. But I hope that we spare ourselves that problem by adopting the amendment before us.

Ms. GINNY BROWN-WAITE of Florida. Mr. Chairman, as a Co-Chair of the Unexploded Ordnances Caucus, I strongly support this amendment. Anyone who lives on or near a site containing disposed munitions can attest how unsettling this can be.

In Florida, thousands of my constituents have moved to an area on or adjacent to an old military gunnery. Unfortunately, inspections have found rockets, mortars, and grenades, putting people at substantial risk. In fact, one piece of live ordnance was found less than six inches beneath a child's backyard trampoline.

This is not a problem confined to a few areas—this is a nationwide issue. Across the country, from Representative EARL BLUMENAUER's district in Oregon, to Brooksville, Florida, many sites face a similar dilemma. Some people are literally sitting on ticking time bombs.

Congress has an opportunity to prevent the worst from happening. Jurisdiction over cleanup at these older sites falls under two major accounts—the Formerly Used Defense Sites account within the Defense Appropriations bill, and the BRAC 1990 account within this legislation. Our amendment would redirect funds from the BRAC 2005 account, which is set to see a large increase over its previous year funding, to cleanup efforts at these older sites, where people are increasingly taking up residence.

Listen up America! The Federal Government has an obligation to clean up its mess. I urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to support this commonsense amendment and put public safety first.

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

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

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

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

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

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. PRICE OF GEORGIA

Mr. PRICE of Georgia. Mr. Chairman, I offer an amendment.

The CHAIRMAN. The Clerk will designate the amendment.

The text of the amendment is as follows:

Amendment offered by Mr. PRICE of Georgia:

Page 10, line 17, after the dollar amount, insert "(reduced by \$50,000,000)".

Page 27, line 6, after the dollar amount insert "(increased by \$22,000,000)".

The CHAIRMAN. Pursuant to the order of the House of today, the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. PRICE) and the gentleman from Texas (Mr. EDWARDS) each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Georgia.

Mr. PRICE of Georgia. Mr. Chairman, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I thank the Chair, and I thank the leadership for the opportunity to present this amendment.

This amendment is very simple. It transfers \$50 million from the 1990 BRAC account and puts \$22 million into the Veterans Health Administration and Medical Services account. The proposal for the 1990 BRAC account is \$50 million above the Department of Defense request. As has been talked about with the previous amendment, it is nigh impossible to be spending more than the request.

The money that is in the request is used for environmental cleanup associated with previous BRAC-based closings, and my amendment would make the 1990 BRAC account reflect the Defense Department request and place \$22 million of these funds in health care for our veterans. The amendment as scored by CBO is outlay neutral which is the reason for the difference in the figures.

While cleaning up after base closings is indeed important, the unrequested money, as has been mentioned, would be very difficult to spend and would be better spent, I believe, by providing better health care for our returning service men and women.

The conflict we are in has left many soldiers with lifelong injuries, and veterans are acquiring lasting health care. As a physician, I am well aware of the fact that traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress disorder are the signature conditions from our current conflict. As we are learning more about traumatic brain injury and PTSD, we find that more and more of our soldiers are suffering from these injuries.

I believe it is imperative that we ensure that as much funding as possible

is available to go for important veterans health care. I believe this amendment to be a fiscally responsible amendment that ensures that our veterans are taken care of in the finest possible manner. I urge adoption of the amendment.

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

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

Mr. Chairman, I am proud of the fact that under the new leadership in the Congress, in a period of 6 months, we will have increased veterans health care spending by over \$10 billion compared to the funding level that existed in December of 2006.

Virtually every major veterans organization in America has applauded this bill for its \$6 billion increase in veterans health care spending.

I salute any Member of this House who has worked or is working or will work to improve funding for veterans health care, but I must say to the gentleman, and perhaps in fairness to him he spoke to other Members of the House, but when I was working as chairman on the Subcommittee on Veterans Funding for a \$3.4 billion increase in VA health care spending for the 2007 continuing resolution, I didn't hear from the gentleman.

When as chairman I worked to add \$1.8 billion in the Iraq war supplemental for VA health care programs, I didn't hear from the gentleman.

When Mr. WICKER and I worked together on a bipartisan basis to put together the largest increase in VA health care spending in the 77-year history of the VA, I didn't hear from the gentleman any requests for an additional \$22 million for VA medical services.

Here at the relatively last moment we get this amendment. While it is well intentioned and I salute and respect the gentleman for trying to increase funding for VA health care, we have been working for 6 months to provide more health care funding for the VA than any previous Congress in the history of the country. And with Mr. WICKER's bipartisan leadership, we have accomplished that so far.

The problem I have with this amendment is that it takes \$50 million out of the BRAC 1990 account. Now, in this bill we provide \$3.8 billion above the President's request for VA health care and benefits programs and only \$207 million above the President's request for BRAC and military construction together.

I think it is very modest to ask for, given there is a \$3.5 billion backlog to clean up former military sites all across America, in States such as California, Texas. And in a number of other States, Alabama, Alaska, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, this BRAC 1990 money is needed to help these communities get

back on their feet and take this former military land and use it for the benefit of their communities and for economic growth in their communities.

So given we have had a \$3.8 billion increase in veterans health care spending above the President's request in this bill, I think it is more than fair that we add an additional \$50 million to a BRAC 1990 program that needs \$3.5 billion.

So I am going to oppose the gentleman's amendment and encourage him to work with our committee on a bipartisan basis in the months ahead, just as the Members of the committee worked on a bipartisan basis to provide historic increases in veterans health care funding.

Mr. Chairman, I yield the balance of my time to Mr. BLUMENAUER.

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the gentleman's courtesy, and I am really bitterly disappointed that we would have somebody come before us to break the commitment that we have to the previous BRAC-round cleanups, communities across the country who are going to wait up to 60 years to have their bases cleaned up, to take that funding and further reduce it. I think this is a very cruel cut.

If you wanted to do something, you've got \$13 billion in the 2005 BRAC account that is only going to be spent a maximum of 10 percent. Why in heaven's name would we reach back and penalize people who have been waiting in some cases since 1988 to have the Federal Government keep its commitment to base closure and cleanup. I think this is cruel. I think it is unjustified. I think that it is unfair to make these communities that have dealt with unexploded ordnances and military toxins and have land that is not available for reuse and penalize them for a small amount of veterans health.

I respectfully request that we reject this amendment.

Mr. PRICE of Georgia. Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the chairman's comments, and I applaud the work he has done to increase funding for veterans health care, sincerely. I don't recall, specifically, requests to the committee; but I am certainly on record in multiple areas across this Congress in urging increased funding for health care. As a physician, I appreciate the need for increased funding for health care across all areas of our budget.

My understanding regarding this provision in the bill is that the \$50 million increase over the DOD request is, as I understood it, money that would not be able to be spent in fiscal year 2008. Consequently, that was the reason we requested or proposed in this amendment that the money come from that. So removing \$50 million from there, based on outlays by CBO, would stipulate that \$22 million was available; and it is my respected request to my colleagues that we place that money for veterans health care for the obvious benefits to all.

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

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Chairman, I move to strike the last word.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Chairman, I yield to the gentleman from California (Mr. FARR).

Mr. FARR. Mr. Chairman, I would just like to respond to the gentleman from Georgia about his amendment.

First of all, I think it is an ill-conceived amendment, and here's why.

In order to build veterans facilities on former military property, you have to have that property cleaned and cleared and transferred. I happen to represent a base where we have that problem. We have to clear the area. So if you want to provide health care for your communities, you have to do this clearance.

Your statement that this money couldn't be spent is totally false. These are projects ready to go. It is the newest BRAC round that can't be spent until 2008 because they have to have all their plans in place.

You are cutting \$50 million out of something that is very critical for a lot of communities and can do a lot of good, and you are adding it to a program where we just put in \$3.4 billion. \$3.4 billion. So \$50 million more in that account is not going to help.

Frankly, we have already raised that account in committee with strong bipartisan support by \$1.7 billion over what the President asked for. So you are going to steal from essentially accounts that are critical and put it into an account that has been plussed-up and is fat. The consequences are going to be that people who are wanting to provide health care services for veterans in their community won't be able to build that facility or get that facility refurbished because the environmental cleanup hasn't been done because we didn't have enough money in the old account. And the only way we can get that money in the account, as I said previously, is to appropriate it.

I think this is a very reckless amendment. I would prefer that we even add more, but that was opposed. But this one, I would hope that you might withdraw your amendment because you are going to do more harm than good.

Mr. PRICE of Georgia. Would the gentleman yield?

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

Mr. PRICE of Georgia. I appreciate the chairman yielding.

I would hope that we wouldn't impugn an individual's motives for bringing amendments forward. My motive is sincere. I believe it is appropriate to increase funding for veterans health care as much as possible, and it was my understanding, and we can disagree about whether or not the funds would be available to be spent in fiscal year 2008, and we may have a legitimate disagreement about that, but I would hope that we wouldn't impugn an individual's motives.

Mr. EDWARDS. Reclaiming my time, I certainly don't question the gentleman's motives. Could I ask the gentleman where did the \$22 million figure come from.

We increased VA health care spending in this bill by \$3.8 billion above what President Bush asked for. That is a \$6 billion increase in VA health care spending over last year. That level of funding has been saluted by every national veterans organization, including the American Legion, Military Officers Association of America, AMVETS, National Association for Uniformed Service, Disabled American Veterans, and dozens of others. Where did the gentleman at the last minute come up with the \$22 million figure?

We haven't had this conversation at any time during the first 6 months of this year when we were working on adding \$10 billion, and it was done on a bipartisan basis, to VA health care funding.

Where did the \$22 million figure come from, if I can ask the gentleman?

Mr. PRICE of Georgia. Mr. Chairman, will the gentleman yield?

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

Mr. PRICE of Georgia. I appreciate the gentleman yielding, and I commend you for the increase in health care spending.

The \$22 million comes from removing the \$50 million that the Defense Department didn't request in the account, and then it works out to be \$22 million based on outlays.

Mr. EDWARDS. Right. You take \$50 million in order to add \$22 million, but did the gentleman meet with Veterans Administration leaders, perhaps the Secretary of Health for the VA, and did they request this additional \$22 million?

Was there a specific project that wasn't being funded or a particular need that wasn't being met by the \$6 billion increase in VA health care spending this year that caused the gentleman to ask specifically for a \$22 million increase?

Mr. PRICE of Georgia. Mr. Chairman, will the gentleman yield?

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

Mr. PRICE of Georgia. I think I mentioned in my comments that the increase in traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress syndrome that we are seeing with the conflict that we are currently in obviously warrants as much funding as we can make available to our veterans who are serving us so proudly.

Mr. EDWARDS. And I agree with the gentleman. That is why we provided over \$600 million more than the administration request to improve mental health care, traumatic brain injury and PTSD services.

Reclaiming my time, Mr. Chairman, I respect the gentleman's intentions in this effort. I would simply say that we have provided a historic increase in VA health care spending in this bill. That

level of funding has been supported by virtually every major veterans organization in America, and we ought not to have to gut another important program for the gentleman's last-minute amendment.

□ 1345

The CHAIRMAN. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. PRICE).

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

Mr. PRICE of Georgia. Mr. Chairman, I demand a recorded vote.

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

The Clerk will read.

The Clerk read as follows:

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BASE CLOSURE ACCOUNT 2005

For deposit into the Department of Defense Base Closure Account 2005, established by section 2906A(a)(1) of the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Act of 1990 (10 U.S.C. 2687 note), \$8,174,315,000, to remain available until expended.

ADMINISTRATIVE PROVISIONS

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

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

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

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

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Chairman, I move to strike the last word, and I yield to the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. BISHOP).

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Mr. Chairman, thank you very much for yielding.

Mr. Chairman, the prevalence of HIV/AIDS among veterans who access the VA health care system is markedly higher than that of the general population. Furthermore, barriers within this system contribute to already late diagnoses of HIV among veterans. Early diagnosis is crucial because the sooner an HIV-infected person begins treatment, the more manageable and the more cost effective their treatment will be.

I speak today as a member of the subcommittee with concern about the impact of HIV/AIDS on veterans, not only in Georgia, but throughout the Southeast and every major city around the Nation.

The need for action on this issue, Mr. Chairman, is exemplified by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's recent Heightened Response to HIV/AIDS in African American Communities initiative. These actions follow the September 2006 release of the CDC's revised HIV testing guidelines, which advise HIV testing become a routine part of medical care.

The VA is the largest integrated health care system in the United States and, therefore, the largest provider of HIV care in the country. However, VA's current HIV testing policy is based on an outdated testing model which is inconsistent with the CDC guidelines.

Compared to the general population, the prevalence of HIV infections is higher among those accessing the VA health care system. A recent study that was conducted by a VA researcher found that at the time of diagnosis 55 percent of HIV-positive veterans had already developed Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, or AIDS, which takes roughly 10 years to develop after it's initially contracted.

Even more disturbing is the fact that most of these veterans had accessed the VA health care system on an average of six times before they were ever diagnosed with this disease. This outdated VA HIV testing policy denies veterans sensible and what is now recommended as standard access to HIV screening in other health care systems.

I applaud the chairman for his leadership in making health care for veterans a priority in the VA appropriations bill. Mr. Chairman, I'm hoping that we can work together to further explore this important issue and address it in an appropriate way as we move forward on the VA Appropriations measure for fiscal 2008.

At this point, I'd like to ask the chairman of the subcommittee if he would be so kind as to yield to Mr. JACKSON from Illinois to speak to the issue of HIV prevalence among veterans.

Mr. EDWARDS. Let me say that I thank both the gentleman from Illinois and the gentleman from Georgia for their leadership on this important issue. I look forward to working with them and the Veterans' Affairs Committee and our subcommittee to address the needs and pursue the solutions that you have proposed.

Mr. Chairman, I yield to the gentleman from Illinois.

Mr. JACKSON of Illinois. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, let me first thank my friend from Georgia (Mr. BISHOP) for his remarks and for his leadership in bringing this topic to the attention of our colleagues. I would also like to recognize the timeliness of his comments, as National HIV Testing Day is on June 27.

The gravity of this issue cannot be understated, and I hope to work with Mr. BISHOP and lend my support to address the veterans who suffer from this interminable disease.

Chicago is the epicenter of HIV/AIDS in Illinois. Roughly 70 percent of reported AIDS cases in the State are in Chicago. Minorities account for approximately 69 percent of the city's total population, but represent 81 percent recently diagnosed AIDS cases. Minorities constitute 20 percent of veterans in Illinois; yet the trend of HIV/AIDS among the State population and the higher prevalence of HIV/AIDS among veterans in general demonstrates minority veterans are disproportionately affected by this disease.

HIV/AIDS has had a significant impact on veterans across the country. Combating the spread of this disease through testing and education is not only important to our communities, but vital for the health of all Americans.

I want to thank the chairman for yielding me the time and thank Mr. BISHOP for his leadership.

Mr. EDWARDS. I want to thank Mr. JACKSON and Mr. BISHOP for your leadership on this. By exercising early intervention, we can save the lives of thousands of America's veterans and prevent them from having HIV or AIDS. It will be a tremendous service to those who have served our country in uniform, and I look forward to working with both gentlemen as we go to conference committee and as we work with the Veterans' Affairs Committee to address this serious national problem.

The CHAIRMAN. The Clerk will read. The Clerk read as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

SEC. 110. None of the funds made available in this title may be used to initiate a new in-

stallation overseas without prior notification to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress.

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

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

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

SEC. 114. Not more than 20 percent of the funds made available in this title which are limited for obligation during the current fiscal year shall be obligated during the last two months of the fiscal year.

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 115. Funds appropriated to the Department of Defense for construction in prior years shall be available for construction authorized for each such military department by the authorizations enacted into law during the current session of Congress.

SEC. 116. For military construction or family housing projects that are being completed with funds otherwise expired or lapsed for obligation, expired or lapsed funds may be used to pay the cost of associated supervision, inspection, overhead, engineering and design on those projects and on subsequent claims, if any.

SEC. 117. Notwithstanding any other provision of law, any funds made available to a military department or defense agency for the construction of military projects may be obligated for a military construction project or contract, or for any portion of such a project or contract, at any time before the end of the fourth fiscal year after the fiscal year for which funds for such project were made available, if the funds obligated for such project: (1) are obligated from funds available for military construction projects; and (2) do not exceed the amount appropriated for such project, plus any amount by which the cost of such project is increased pursuant to law.

SEC. 118. The Secretary of Defense is to provide the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress with an annual report by February 15, containing details of the specific actions proposed to be taken by the Department of Defense during the current fiscal year to encourage other member nations of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Japan, Korea, and United States allies bordering the Arabian Sea to assume a greater share of the common defense burden of such nations and the United States.

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 119. In addition to any other transfer authority available to the Department of Defense, proceeds deposited to the Department of Defense Base Closure Account established by section 207(a)(1) of the Defense Authorization Amendments and Base Closure and Realignment Act (10 U.S.C. 2687 note) pursuant to section 207(a)(2)(C) of such Act, may be transferred to the account established by section 2906(a)(1) of the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Act of 1990 (10 U.S.C. 2687 note), to be merged with, and to be available for the same purposes and the same time period as that account.

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 120. Subject to 30 days prior notification to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress, such additional amounts as may be determined by the Secretary of Defense may be transferred to: (1) the Department of Defense Family Housing Improvement Fund from amounts appropriated for construction in "Family Housing" accounts, to be merged with and to be available for the same purposes and for the same period of time as amounts appropriated directly to the Fund; or (2) the Department of Defense Military Unaccompanied Housing Improvement Fund from amounts appropriated for construction of military unaccompanied housing in "Military Construction" accounts, to be merged with and to be available for the same purposes and for the same period of time as amounts appropriated directly to the Fund: *Provided*, That appropriations made available to the Funds shall be available to cover the costs, as defined in section 502(5) of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974, of direct loans or loan guarantees issued by the Department of Defense pursuant to the provisions of subchapter IV of chapter 169 of title 10, United States Code, pertaining to alternative means of acquiring and improving military family housing, military unaccompanied housing, and supporting facilities.

SEC. 121. None of the funds made available in this title may be obligated for Partnership for Peace Programs in the New Independent States of the former Soviet Union.

SEC. 122. (a) Not later than 60 days before issuing any solicitation for a contract with the private sector for military family housing the Secretary of the military department concerned shall submit to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress the notice described in subsection (b).

(b)(1) A notice referred to in subsection (a) is a notice of any guarantee (including the making of mortgage or rental payments) proposed to be made by the Secretary to the private party under the contract involved in the event of—

(A) the closure or realignment of the installation for which housing is provided under the contract;

(B) a reduction in force of units stationed at such installation; or

(C) the extended deployment overseas of units stationed at such installation.

(2) Each notice under this subsection shall specify the nature of the guarantee involved and assess the extent and likelihood, if any, of the liability of the Federal Government with respect to the guarantee.

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 123. In addition to any other transfer authority available to the Department of Defense, amounts may be transferred from the accounts established by sections 2906(a)(1) and 2906A(a)(1) of the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Act of 1990 (10 U.S.C. 2687 note), to the fund established by section 1013(d) of the Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Development Act of 1966 (42 U.S.C.

3374) to pay for expenses associated with the Homeowners Assistance Program. Any amounts transferred shall be merged with and be available for the same purposes and for the same time period as the fund to which transferred.

SEC. 124. Notwithstanding this or any other provision of law, funds made available in this title for operation and maintenance of family housing shall be the exclusive source of funds for repair and maintenance of all family housing units, including general or flag officer quarters: *Provided*, That not more than \$35,000 per unit may be spent annually for the maintenance and repair of any general or flag officer quarters without 30 days prior notification to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress, except that an after-the-fact notification shall be submitted if the limitation is exceeded solely due to costs associated with environmental remediation that could not be reasonably anticipated at the time of the budget submission: *Provided further*, That the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller) is to report annually to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress all operation and maintenance expenditures for each individual general or flag officer quarters for the prior fiscal year.

SEC. 125. None of the funds made available in this title under the heading "North Atlantic Treaty Organization Security Investment Program", and no funds appropriated for any fiscal year before fiscal year 2008 for that program that remain available for obligation, may be obligated or expended for the conduct of studies of missile defense.

AMENDMENT NO. 8 OFFERED BY MR. FRANKS OF ARIZONA

Mr. FRANKS of Arizona. Mr. Chairman, I offer an amendment.

The CHAIRMAN. The Clerk will designate the amendment.

The text of the amendment is as follows:

Amendment No. 8 offered by Mr. FRANKS of Arizona:

Page 19, beginning on line 15, strike section 125.

The CHAIRMAN. Pursuant to the order of the House of today, the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. FRANKS) and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Arizona.

Mr. FRANKS of Arizona. Mr. Chairman, in an age of sophisticated missile development and rampant nuclear proliferation, the United States must continue to invest its attention and resources in developing and fielding defenses to stay ahead of the ominous threat of ballistic missiles.

It is critical that the United States continue to work with our friends and allies who wish to cooperate in our mission to develop a robust ballistic missile defense against our common enemies.

The United States is currently working with NATO and negotiating with European countries about the possibility of placing a ballistic missile interceptor site in Europe. This is an example of a missile defense opportunity that could offer protection for the U.S. homeland and our European friends from a perilous threat that we share, ballistic missiles potentially carrying nuclear warheads, being launched from rogue nations such as Iran.

Mr. Chairman, incidentally, Iran is projected to have missiles capable of reaching the United States homeland within 7 years.

As it currently stands, this bill prohibits funds made available under the NATO Security Investment Program from being obligated or expended to conduct studies on missile defense. My amendment would strike this section. Mr. Chairman, in the midst of the current debate regarding the need for greater international support of missile defense, we must not arbitrarily prevent our allies from joining us to pursue these vital and common goals.

For the sake of defending our cities and our freedom, I encourage our colleagues to support our Nation's policy to build a robust, layered ballistic missile defense; to support our allies against common threats; and to support this amendment.

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

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Chairman, I move to strike the last word.

Mr. Chairman, I just want to make a few points about this amendment, and I will be glad to accept the amendment when I'm completed. Let me just make a few points that are clear, though.

Section 125 prohibits the use of funds appropriated to the NATO Security Investment Program for studies of missile defense. The history of this is that in the fiscal year 2004 Military Construction bill, it was a Republican majority that put this language into the bill which has been repeated year after year without any controversy or serious discussion. It grew out of concerns that large sums of these NATO funds were being spent on expensive studies.

I do want to emphasize and clarify that this provision relates to the studies for a NATO missile defense system that is not related to the proposal by the administration to pursue and place a missile defense site in Poland and in the Czech Republic. That is a U.S. initiative, not a NATO initiative, and I want Members to understand that distinction.

I also want to make it clear that I believe NATO Security Investment Program funds should focus primarily on building current NATO infrastructure, including critical facilities in the NATO mission in Afghanistan. Because these funds are limited, I think they should be wisely and directed to where they have the greatest impact in support of our military troops around the world.

With that being said, I will accept the gentleman's amendment.

Mr. FRANKS of Arizona. Mr. Chairman, I thank the gentleman.

I would only add that it is vitally important from our perspective that NATO countries be encouraged to cooperate with the things that we're doing there and some of the countries that we're working with for the European missile site. We understand that everything you said is correct. We also

believe that it doesn't make sense to single out missile defense as the only study that would be prohibited under this section.

And there may come a day when we will have to apologize to the American public for putting so much emphasis on building expensive missile defense capabilities, and if that happens, I will be willing to stand here and do that, but it would be far harder for me to apologize to the American people for failing to do everything that we could on every front to protect the homeland and our European allies and our soldiers and warfighters abroad from the most dangerous offensive weapons that have ever come upon humanity.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back my time.

The CHAIRMAN. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. FRANKS).

The amendment was agreed to.

□ 1400

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Chairman, I move to strike the last word.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman from Texas is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Chairman, I yield to the gentleman of South Carolina (Mr. BROWN) for the purpose of a colloquy.

Mr. BROWN of South Carolina. Mr. Chairman, I would like to discuss a very serious battle our veterans are waging here at home, a battle against ALS, better known as Lou Gehrig's disease.

Several independent and government studies have found that military veterans are at a greater risk of dying from Lou Gehrig's disease than those who have never served in the military. In fact, veterans are at a 60 percent greater risk to develop ALS. Lou Gehrig's disease is a horrific disease that robs a person of the ability to control their muscles.

Unfortunately, I have met firsthand and have knowledge of the true nature of ALS and its impact on veterans. I have watched the disease attack a good friend of mine, Tom Mikolajcik, a retired Air Force brigadier general. He was diagnosed with ALS in 2003. Since then I have seen the disease take a once-powerful man and rob him of nearly all of his physical abilities.

Mr. Chairman, only certain veterans with ALS who served in theatre during the 1991 Persian Gulf War are currently presumed to be eligible for service-connected benefits, and there are significant research needs related to the causes and treatment of ALS. As such, we must begin to take the steps necessary to not only discover why our veterans are at greater risk of ALS and to find treatments for the disease but also to help ensure that they have timely access to needed VA benefits.

I hope that you and the committee will work in conference and ensure the resources of the VA are directed towards meeting the research and benefit needs of all veterans who are diagnosed with ALS.

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Chairman, reclaiming my time, let me thank the gentleman for bringing this important problem and issue before the House. It is something we have a responsibility to deal with. I am proud to say that Mr. WICKER and I worked with the Members of our subcommittee to ensure that we had \$69 million increase in this bill to increase VA health care research funding above the President's request.

I think we have had the VA research budget at a stable number for a number of years. I think, given our war in Iraq and Afghanistan and the challenges we face trying to support our veterans from past combat, as you have pointed out, this additional research money is much needed and very well deserved.

While it hasn't been the tradition of the Congress to try to earmark funds, we have made this a peer review process to let the VA in its peer review process determine what are the highest priority needs for research. I, for one, would certainly hope that it would take a serious look at the challenge of Lou Gehrig's disease and its impact on veterans who have been exposed to various chemical agents in their service.

I would point out, as the gentleman well knows, that right now the Bronx VA Medical Center has worked on research to improve the identification of this disease. With the gentleman's leadership, we will do even more.

The CHAIRMAN. The Clerk will read. The Clerk read as follows:

SEC. 126. Whenever the Secretary of Defense or any other official of the Department of Defense is requested by the subcommittee on Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies of the Committee on Appropriations of the House of Representatives or the subcommittee on Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies of the Committee on Appropriations of the Senate to respond to a question or inquiry submitted by the chairman or another member of that subcommittee pursuant to a subcommittee hearing or other activity, the Secretary (or other official) shall respond to the request, in writing, within 21 days of the date on which the request is transmitted to the Secretary (or other official).

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Chairman, I move to strike the last word.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman from Texas is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Chairman, at this time I would like to yield to the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. BISHOP), a senior member of the Military Construction and Veterans' Affairs Appropriations Subcommittee, someone who has fought long and hard in this House on behalf of our servicemen and -women and their families and our veterans. I offer him an opportunity to talk about provisions of the bill.

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. I thank the gentleman, our subcommittee chairman, for his tremendous work and bringing our bill to the floor.

Mr. Chairman, I am very pleased to rise in full support of our FY 2008 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies appropriations bill.

As a member of the subcommittee, I am extremely proud of the work that the subcommittee and members on both sides of the aisle have done in crafting a bill which truly supports America's servicemen and -women and their families by boosting military construction funding so that they can have more effective training facilities, better housing, health care and day-care facilities, providing an unprecedented \$21.4 billion investment in military construction, family housing and BRAC, or nearly \$207 million more than the President's request.

Just as important, I am extremely proud to join my subcommittee colleagues in recommending a historic expansion in support and resources for our Nation's veterans. This bill includes the largest single increase in the 77-year history of the Veterans Administration, increasing the VA budget by \$6.7 billion above the 2007 level and \$3.8 billion above the President's request.

For the first time in history, funding for VA medical care exceeds the budget of the veterans service organization's independent budget that has been going on now for decades. This will ensure quality health care for 5.8 million patients, including about 263,000 Iraq and Afghanistan veterans, who the VA will treat, expectantly, in FY 2008.

This bill will provide veterans with health care and benefits that we have promised them, resulting in the hiring of more qualified doctors and nurses to improve medical services to our veterans and to reduce the waiting times for doctor appointments and to provide more help to veterans suffering from traumatic brain injury, PTSD, mental health care issues and lost limbs to rebuild their lives. This is truly an accomplishment that all of us, as Members of this august body, should be very proud of.

Of note, our bill also provides funding that gives much-needed nonrecurring maintenance of the VA health care facilities, \$500 million above the President's request to prevent a Walter Reed-type situation from occurring in the VA medical system. It will significantly reduce the 400,000 claims backlog of veterans that are waiting for disability and other benefit determinations.

It will provide for better barracks, housing, training facilities for our troops when they return from combat through an unprecedented \$24.4 billion investment in military construction, family housing and BRAC, \$207 million more than the President's request.

It provides funds to grow our military forces to begin the process of supporting an additional 65,000 Army, 27,000 Marine and 9,000 National Guard troops that will increase our ultimate end strength.

I have the privilege and the honor of representing Fort Benning and Marine Corps Logistics Base, Albany, and the men and women who work, live and train at this great military facility, who are defending and serving our

great Nation with dignity, honor and distinction.

As such, I was very pleased that our subcommittee saw fit to include full funding for the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure Account, which is also known as BRAC, at the level of \$8.2 billion. This level of funding will be critically important to military facilities, such as Fort Benning, which are expected to see and experience significant new personnel as a result of BRAC and the global repositioning of our forces around the world.

While we in the Columbus area continue to have some concerns with respect to what impact the BRAC process may have on our local school systems in terms of potential dramatic increases in school enrollment, we continue to be encouraged by the interest and support shown by our colleagues on the subcommittee, particularly Mr. EDWARDS, our chairman.

Finally, I would like to recognize and thank the staff of the subcommittee, Carol Murphy, Mary Arnold, Walter Hearne, Tim Bishop and Donna Shabaz, majority staff; Liz Dawson, Deana Baron and Jamie Swafford, minority staff; and, of course, Michael Reed on my staff for their hard work.

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Chairman, I ask unanimous consent that the remainder of title I and all of title II be considered as read, printed in the RECORD, and open to amendment at any point.

I believe this has been cleared with the minority leadership.

The CHAIRMAN. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Texas?

There was no objection.

The text of that portion of the bill is as follows:

SEC. 127. Amounts contained in the Ford Island Improvement Account established by subsection (h) of section 2814 of title 10, United States Code, are appropriated and shall be available until expended for the purposes specified in subsection (i)(1) of such section or until transferred pursuant to subsection (i)(3) of such section.

SEC. 128. None of the funds made available in this title, or in any Act making appropriations for military construction which remain available for obligation, may be obligated or expended to carry out a military construction, land acquisition, or family housing project at or for a military installation approved for closure, or at a military installation for the purposes of supporting a function that has been approved for realignment to another installation, in 2005 under the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Act of 1990 (part A of title XXIX of Public Law 101-510; 10 U.S.C. 2687 note), unless such a project at a military installation approved for realignment will support a continuing mission or function at that installation or a new mission or function that is planned for that installation, or unless the Secretary of Defense certifies that the cost to the United States of carrying out such project would be less than the cost to the United States of canceling such project, or if the project is at an active component base that shall be established as an enclave or in the case of projects having multi-agency use, that another Government agency has indicated it will assume ownership of the completed project. The Secretary of Defense may not transfer funds

made available as a result of this limitation from any military construction project, land acquisition, or family housing project to another account or use such funds for another purpose or project without the prior approval of the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress. This section shall not apply to military construction projects, land acquisition, or family housing projects for which the project is vital to the national security or the protection of health, safety, or environmental quality: *Provided*, That the Secretary of Defense shall notify the congressional defense committees within seven days of a decision to carry out such a military construction project.

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 129. During the 5-year period after appropriations available in this Act to the Department of Defense for military construction and family housing operation and maintenance and construction have expired for obligation, upon a determination that such appropriations will not be necessary for the liquidation of obligations or for making authorized adjustments to such appropriations for obligations incurred during the period of availability of such appropriations, unobligated balances of such appropriations may be transferred into the appropriation "Foreign Currency Fluctuations, Construction, Defense", to be merged with and to be available for the same time period and for the same purposes as the appropriation to which transferred.

SEC. 130. None of the funds in this title shall be used for any activity related to the construction of an Outlying Landing Field in Washington County, North Carolina.

TITLE II

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

VETERANS BENEFITS ADMINISTRATION

COMPENSATION AND PENSIONS

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

For the payment of compensation benefits to or on behalf of veterans and a pilot program for disability examinations as authorized by section 107 and chapters 11, 13, 18, 51, 53, 55, and 61 of title 38, United States Code; pension benefits to or on behalf of veterans as authorized by chapters 15, 51, 53, 55, and 61 of title 38, United States Code; and burial benefits, the Reinstated Entitlement Program for Survivors, emergency and other officers' retirement pay, adjusted-service credits and certificates, payment of premiums due on commercial life insurance policies guaranteed under the provisions of title IV of the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (50 U.S.C. App. 541 et seq.) and for other benefits as authorized by sections 107, 1312, 1977, and 2106, and chapters 23, 51, 53, 55, and 61 of title 38, United States Code, \$41,236,322,000, to remain available until expended: *Provided*, That not to exceed \$25,033,000 of the amount appropriated under this heading shall be reimbursed to "General operating expenses" and "Medical administration" for necessary expenses in implementing the provisions of chapters 51, 53, and 55 of title 38, United States Code, the funding source for which is specifically provided as the "Compensation and pensions" appropriation: *Provided further*, That such sums as may be earned on an actual qualifying patient basis, shall be reimbursed to "Medical care collections fund" to augment the funding of individual medical facilities for nursing home care provided to pensioners as authorized.

READJUSTMENT BENEFITS

For the payment of readjustment and rehabilitation benefits to or on behalf of veterans as authorized by chapters 21, 30, 31, 34, 35, 36, 39, 51, 53, 55, and 61 of title 38, United States Code, \$3,300,289,000, to remain available until

expended: *Provided*, That expenses for rehabilitation program services and assistance which the Secretary is authorized to provide under subsection (a) of section 3104 of title 38, United States Code, other than under paragraphs (1), (2), (5), and (11) of that subsection, shall be charged to this account.

VETERANS INSURANCE AND INDEMNITIES

For military and naval insurance, national service life insurance, servicemen's indemnities, service-disabled veterans insurance, and veterans mortgage life insurance as authorized by title 38, United States Code, chapters 19 and 21, \$41,250,000, to remain available until expended.

VETERANS HOUSING BENEFIT PROGRAM FUND
PROGRAM ACCOUNT

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

For the cost of direct and guaranteed loans, such sums as may be necessary to carry out the program, as authorized by subchapters I through III of chapter 37 of title 38, United States Code: *Provided*, That such costs, including the cost of modifying such loans, shall be as defined in section 502 of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974: *Provided further*, That during fiscal year 2008, within the resources available, not to exceed \$500,000 in gross obligations for direct loans are authorized for specially adapted housing loans.

In addition, for administrative expenses to carry out the direct and guaranteed loan programs, \$154,562,000, which may be transferred to and merged with the appropriation for "General operating expenses".

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION LOANS PROGRAM
ACCOUNT

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

For the cost of direct loans, \$71,000, as authorized by chapter 31 of title 38, United States Code: *Provided*, That such costs, including the cost of modifying such loans, shall be as defined in section 502 of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974: *Provided further*, That funds made available under this heading are available to subsidize gross obligations for the principal amount of direct loans not to exceed \$3,287,000.

In addition, for administrative expenses necessary to carry out the direct loan program, \$31,000, which may be transferred to and merged with the appropriation for "General operating expenses".

NATIVE AMERICAN VETERAN HOUSING LOAN
PROGRAM ACCOUNT

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

For administrative expenses to carry out the direct loan program authorized by subchapter V of chapter 37 of title 38, United States Code, \$628,000, which may be transferred to and merged with the appropriation for "General operating expenses": *Provided*, That no new loans in excess of \$30,000,000 may be made in fiscal year 2008.

GUARANTEED TRANSITIONAL HOUSING LOANS
FOR HOMELESS VETERANS PROGRAM ACCOUNT

For the administrative expenses to carry out the guaranteed transitional housing loan program authorized by subchapter VI of chapter 37 of title 38, United States Code, not to exceed \$750,000 of the amounts appropriated by this Act for "General operating expenses" and "Medical administration" may be expended.

VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION
MEDICAL SERVICES

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

For necessary expenses for furnishing, as authorized by law, inpatient and outpatient care and treatment to beneficiaries of the Department of Veterans Affairs and veterans described in section 1705(a) of title 38, United

States Code, including care and treatment in facilities not under the jurisdiction of the Department, and including medical supplies and equipment, food services, and salaries and expenses of health-care employees hired under title 38, United States Code, and aid to State homes as authorized by section 1741 of title 38, United States Code; \$28,906,400,000, plus reimbursements, of which not less than \$2,900,000,000 shall be expended for specialty mental health care; not less than \$130,000,000 shall be expended for the homeless grants and per diem program; not less than \$428,873,754 shall be expended for the substance abuse program; and not less than \$100,275,000 shall be expended for blind rehabilitation services: *Provided*, That of the funds made available under this heading, not to exceed \$1,100,000,000 shall be available until September 30, 2009: *Provided further*, That, notwithstanding any other provision of law, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall establish a priority for the provision of medical treatment for veterans who have service-connected disabilities, lower income, or have special needs: *Provided further*, That, notwithstanding any other provision of law, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall give priority funding for the provision of basic medical benefits to veterans in enrollment priority groups 1 through 6: *Provided further*, That, notwithstanding any other provision of law, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs may authorize the dispensing of prescription drugs from Veterans Health Administration facilities to enrolled veterans with privately written prescriptions based on requirements established by the Secretary: *Provided further*, That the implementation of the program described in the previous proviso shall incur no additional cost to the Department of Veterans Affairs: *Provided further*, That for the DOD-VA Health Care Sharing Incentive Fund, as authorized by section 8111(d) of title 38, United States Code, a minimum of \$15,000,000, to remain available until expended, for any purpose authorized by section 8111 of title 38, United States Code.

MEDICAL ADMINISTRATION

For necessary expenses in the administration of the medical, hospital, nursing home, domiciliary, construction, supply, and research activities, as authorized by law; administrative expenses in support of capital policy activities; and administrative and legal expenses of the Department for collecting and recovering amounts owed the Department as authorized under chapter 17 of title 38, United States Code, and the Federal Medical Care Recovery Act (42 U.S.C. 2651 et seq.); \$3,635,600,000, plus reimbursements, of which \$250,000,000 shall be available until September 30, 2009.

MEDICAL FACILITIES

For necessary expenses for the maintenance and operation of hospitals, nursing homes, and domiciliary facilities, and other necessary facilities of the Veterans Health Administration; for administrative expenses in support of planning, design, project management, real property acquisition and disposition, construction, and renovation of any facility under the jurisdiction or for the use of the Department; for oversight, engineering, and architectural activities not charged to project costs; for repairing, altering, improving, or providing facilities in the several hospitals and homes under the jurisdiction of the Department, not otherwise provided for, either by contract or by the hire of temporary employees and purchase of materials; for leases of facilities; and for laundry services, \$4,100,000,000, plus reimbursements, of which \$250,000,000 shall be available until September 30, 2009: *Provided*, That \$300,000,000 for non-recurring maintenance provided under this heading shall be allocated in a

manner not subject to the Veterans Equitable Resource Allocation.

MEDICAL AND PROSTHETIC RESEARCH

For necessary expenses in carrying out programs of medical and prosthetic research and development as authorized by chapter 73 of title 38, United States Code, \$480,000,000, plus reimbursements, to remain available until September 30, 2009.

DEPARTMENTAL ADMINISTRATION

GENERAL OPERATING EXPENSES

For necessary operating expenses of the Department of Veterans Affairs, not otherwise provided for, including administrative expenses in support of Department-Wide capital planning, management and policy activities, uniforms, or allowances therefor; not to exceed \$25,000 for official reception and representation expenses; hire of passenger motor vehicles; and reimbursement of the General Services Administration for security guard services and the Department of Defense for the cost of overseas employee mail, \$1,598,500,000: *Provided*, That expenses for services and assistance authorized under paragraphs (1), (2), (5), and (11) of section 3104(a) of title 38, United States Code, that the Secretary of Veterans Affairs determines are necessary to enable entitled veterans: (1) to the maximum extent feasible, to become employable and to obtain and maintain suitable employment; or (2) to achieve maximum independence in daily living, shall be charged to this account: *Provided further*, That the Veterans Benefits Administration shall be funded at not less than \$1,324,957,000: *Provided further*, That of the funds made available under this heading, not to exceed \$75,000,000 shall be available for obligation until September 30, 2009: *Provided further*, That from the funds made available under this heading, the Veterans Benefits Administration may purchase (on a one-for-one replacement basis only) up to two passenger motor vehicles for use in operations of that Administration in Manila, Philippines.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SYSTEMS

For necessary expenses for information technology systems and telecommunications support, including developmental information systems and operational information systems and pay and associated cost for operations and maintenance associated staff; for the capital asset acquisition of information technology systems, including management and related contractual costs of said acquisitions, including contractual costs associated with operations authorized by chapter 3109 of title 5, United States Code, \$1,859,217,000, to remain available until September 30, 2009: *Provided*, That none of these funds may be obligated until the Secretary of Veterans Affairs submits to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress, and such Committees approve, a plan for expenditure that: (1) meets the capital planning and investment control review requirements established by the Office of Management and Budget; (2) complies with the Department of Veterans Affairs enterprise architecture; (3) conforms with an established enterprise life cycle methodology; and (4) complies with the acquisition rules, requirements, guidelines, and systems acquisition management practices of the Federal Government: *Provided further*, That within 30 days of the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress a reprogramming base letter which provides, by project, the costs included in this appropriation.

NATIONAL CEMETERY ADMINISTRATION

For necessary expenses of the National Cemetery Administration for operations and

maintenance, not otherwise provided for, including uniforms or allowances therefor; cemeterial expenses as authorized by law; purchase of one passenger motor vehicle for use in cemeterial operations; and hire of passenger motor vehicles, \$170,000,000, of which not to exceed \$7,800,000 shall be available until September 30, 2009.

OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

For necessary expenses of the Office of Inspector General in carrying out the provisions of the Inspector General Act of 1978 (5 U.S.C. App.), \$76,500,000, of which \$3,630,000 shall remain available until September 30, 2009.

CONSTRUCTION, MAJOR PROJECTS

For constructing, altering, extending, and improving any of the facilities, including parking projects, under the jurisdiction or for the use of the Department of Veterans Affairs, or for any of the purposes set forth in sections 316, 2404, 2406, 8102, 8103, 8106, 8108, 8109, 8110, 8122, and 8162 of title 38, United States Code, where the estimated cost of a project is equal to or less than the amount set forth in section 8104(a)(3)(A) of title 38, United States Code, \$615,000,000, to remain available until expended, along with unobligated balances of previous "Construction, minor projects" appropriations which are hereby made available for any project where the estimated cost is equal to or less than the amount set forth in such section: *Provided*, That funds in this account shall be available for: (1) repairs to any of the non-medical facilities under the jurisdiction or for the use of the Department which are necessary because of loss or damage caused by any natural disaster or catastrophe; and (2) temporary measures necessary to prevent or to minimize further loss by such causes: *Provided further*, That within 30 days of enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress a reprogramming base letter which provides, by project, the costs included in this appropriation.

GRANTS FOR CONSTRUCTION OF STATE EXTENDED CARE FACILITIES

For grants to assist States to acquire or construct State nursing home and domiciliary facilities and to remodel, modify, or alter existing hospital, nursing home, and domiciliary facilities in State homes, for furnishing care to veterans as authorized by sections 8131 through 8137 of title 38, United States Code, \$165,000,000, to remain available until expended.

GRANTS FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF STATE VETERANS CEMETERIES

For grants to assist States in establishing, expanding, or improving State veterans cemeteries as authorized by section 2408 of title 38, United States Code, \$37,000,000, to remain available until expended.

ADMINISTRATIVE PROVISIONS

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 201. Any appropriation for fiscal year 2008 for "Compensation and pensions", "Re-adjustment benefits", and "Veterans insurance and indemnities" may be transferred as necessary to any other of the mentioned appropriations: *Provided*, That before a transfer may take place, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall request from the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress the authority to make the transfer and such Committees issue an approval, or absent a response, a period of 30 days has elapsed.

SEC. 202. Appropriations available in this title for salaries and expenses shall be available for services authorized by section 3109 of title 5, United States Code, hire of passenger motor vehicles; lease of a facility or land or both; and uniforms or allowances therefore, as authorized by sections 5901 through 5902 of title 5, United States Code.

SEC. 203. No appropriations in this title (except the appropriations for "Construction, major projects", and "Construction, minor projects") shall be available for the purchase of any site for or toward the construction of any new hospital or home.

SEC. 204. No appropriations in this title shall be available for hospitalization or examination of any persons (except beneficiaries entitled to such hospitalization or examination under the laws providing such benefits to veterans, and persons receiving

CONSTRUCTION, MINOR PROJECTS

For constructing, altering, extending, and improving any of the facilities, including parking projects, under the jurisdiction or for the use of the Department of Veterans Affairs, including planning and assessments of needs which may lead to capital invest-

such treatment under sections 7901 through 7904 of title 5, United States Code, or the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5121 et seq.)), unless reimbursement of the cost of such hospitalization or examination is made to the “Medical services” account at such rates as may be fixed by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

SEC. 205. Appropriations available in this title for “Compensation and pensions”, “Re-adjustment benefits”, and “Veterans insurance and indemnities” shall be available for payment of prior year accrued obligations required to be recorded by law against the corresponding prior year accounts within the last quarter of fiscal year 2007.

SEC. 206. Appropriations available in this title shall be available to pay prior year obligations of corresponding prior year appropriations accounts resulting from sections 3328(a), 3334, and 3712(a) of title 31, United States Code, except that if such obligations are from trust fund accounts they shall be payable only from “Compensation and pensions”.

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 207. Notwithstanding any other provision of law, during fiscal year 2008, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall, from the National Service Life Insurance Fund (38 U.S.C. 1920), the Veterans’ Special Life Insurance Fund (38 U.S.C. 1923), and the United States Government Life Insurance Fund (38 U.S.C. 1955), reimburse the “General operating expenses” account for the cost of administration of the insurance programs financed through those accounts: *Provided*, That reimbursement shall be made only from the surplus earnings accumulated in such an insurance program during fiscal year 2008 that are available for dividends in that program after claims have been paid and actuarially determined reserves have been set aside: *Provided further*, That if the cost of administration of such an insurance program exceeds the amount of surplus earnings accumulated in that program, reimbursement shall be made only to the extent of such surplus earnings: *Provided further*, That the Secretary shall determine the cost of administration for fiscal year 2008 which is properly allocable to the provision of each such insurance program and to the provision of any total disability income insurance included in that insurance program.

SEC. 208. Amounts deducted from enhanced-use lease proceeds to reimburse an account for expenses incurred by that account during a prior fiscal year for providing enhanced-use lease services, may be obligated during the fiscal year in which the proceeds are received.

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 209. Funds available in this title or funds for salaries and other administrative expenses shall also be available to reimburse the Office of Resolution Management of the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Office of Employment Discrimination Complaint Adjudication under section 319 of title 38, United States Code, for all services provided at rates which will recover actual costs but not exceed \$32,067,000 for the Office of Resolution Management and \$3,148,000 for the Office of Employment and Discrimination Complaint Adjudication: *Provided*, That payments may be made in advance for services to be furnished based on estimated costs: *Provided further*, That amounts received shall be credited to “General operating expenses” for use by the office that provided the service.

SEC. 210. No appropriations in this title shall be available to enter into any new lease of real property if the estimated annual rental is more than \$300,000 unless the Secretary

submits a report which the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress approve within 30 days following the date on which the report is received.

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

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

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

SEC. 213. Amounts made available under “Medical services” are available—

- (1) for furnishing recreational facilities, supplies, and equipment; and
- (2) for funeral expenses, burial expenses, and other expenses incidental to funerals and burials for beneficiaries receiving care in the Department.

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 214. Such sums as may be deposited to the Medical Care Collections Fund pursuant to section 1729A of title 38, United States Code, may be transferred to “Medical services”, to remain available until expended for the purposes of that account.

SEC. 215. Notwithstanding any other provision of law, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall allow veterans who are eligible under existing Department of Veterans Affairs medical care requirements and who reside in Alaska to obtain medical care services from medical facilities supported by the Indian Health Service or tribal organizations. The Secretary shall: (1) limit the application of this provision to rural Alaskan veterans in areas where an existing Department of Veterans Affairs facility or Veterans Affairs-contracted service is unavailable; (2) require participating veterans and facilities to comply with all appropriate rules and regulations, as established by the Secretary; (3) require this provision to be consistent with Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services activities; and (4) result in no additional cost to the Department of Veterans Affairs or the Indian Health Service.

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

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

SEC. 217. None of the funds available to the Department of Veterans Affairs, in this or any other Act, may be used to replace the current system by which the Veterans Integrated Service Networks select and contract for diabetes monitoring supplies and equipment.

SEC. 218. None of the funds made available in this Act may be used to implement any policy prohibiting the Directors of the Veterans Integrated Service Networks from conducting outreach or marketing to enroll new veterans within their respective Networks.

SEC. 219. The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress a quarterly report on the financial status of the Veterans Health Administration.

SEC. 220. Amounts made available for the “Information technology systems” account may be reprogrammed between projects: *Provided*, That no project may be increased or decreased by more than \$1,000,000 of cost before the Secretary submits to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress a reprogramming request and the Committees issue an approval, or absent a response, a period of 30 days has elapsed.

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 221. Any balances in prior year accounts established for the payment of benefits under the Reinstated Entitlement Program for Survivors shall be transferred to and merged with amounts available under the “Compensation and pensions” account, and receipts that would otherwise be credited to the accounts established for the payment of benefits under the Reinstated Entitlement Program for Survivors program shall be credited to amounts available under the “Compensation and pensions” account.

SEC. 222. Amounts made available for the “Construction, minor projects” account may be reprogrammed between projects: *Provided*, That no project may be increased or decreased by more than \$1,000,000 of cost before the Secretary submits to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress a reprogramming request and the Committees issue an approval, or absent a response, a period of 30 days has elapsed.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. MORAN OF KANSAS

Mr. MORAN of Kansas. Mr. Chairman, I offer an amendment.

The CHAIRMAN. The Clerk will designate the amendment.

The text of the amendment is as follows:

Amendment offered by Mr. MORAN of Kansas:

Page 27, line 6, after the dollar amount, insert “(increased by \$125,000,000)”.

Page 28, line 22, after the dollar amount, insert “(reduced by \$125,000,000)”.

The CHAIRMAN. Pursuant to the order of the House of today, the gentleman from Kansas (Mr. MORAN) and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Chairman, I reserve a point of order on the gentleman’s amendment.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman from Texas reserves a point of order.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Kansas.

Mr. MORAN of Kansas. Mr. Chairman, I commend the committee’s work in regard to the funding levels that are here before us in this Veterans Administration and Military Quality of Life appropriation bill.

I am pleased to be here in support of this legislation, but I do have an amendment. My amendment would transfer \$125 million from veterans health administration accounts to the medical services account, and the purpose of doing so is to increase the amount of mileage reimbursement that disabled veterans receive for travel for medical services.

Currently, and, in fact, since 1978, our veterans have received 11 cents per mile. One would think that to be a misstatement on our part. I think it's very hard to believe that since 1978 we have not increased that reimbursement rate.

Because of funding constraints and priorities, I'm not asking that it be increased to what most of us would think is appropriate. Amendments have been offered in support on this House floor that have been demonstrated for the 48½ cents allowed by IRS regulations.

On the floor today is the gentleman from Georgia who offered an amendment that passed unanimously by voice vote earlier this session that would increase the rate, authorize the increased rate to 48½ cents. My amendment today appropriates the money, provides the money necessary to double the mileage reimbursement rate for disabled veterans from 11 cents per mile to 22 cents per mile.

A reasonable reimbursement rate is awfully important. This bill, in my opinion, goes a long way toward increasing the likelihood that veterans will have access to medical care and services that they so desperately need and so sincerely desire and deserve.

Those of us, however, who come from places in which it's a long distance to receive that service, to receive those benefits, are very concerned that there are people who are slipping through the cracks, as we have heard in other instances, within the VA system, because they cannot afford to make the trip to see the physician, to be seen at the hospital, to receive the services that they are entitled to.

I represent a district approximately the size of the State of Illinois. There is no VA hospital within the district. So my veterans must travel significant distances in order to receive care and treatment, and we know what has occurred in regard to the cost of travel with gas prices where they are today, as compared to where they were in 1978 when 11 cents per mile was established.

This concept is supported by our veterans service organization. I am a member of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee. I have chaired the health care subcommittee. This has been an issue we have dealt with for a long time, and I have seen amendments offered in previously years often stuck on a point of order or for me to withdraw them.

Today, I think it's important that we move forward, particularly at a time when we were increasing the amount of money available within the VA funding stream. If we don't do it now, when will

we do it? I offered this amendment, a similar amendment, in 2003, and most years since. It's always going to be next year.

With the levels of funding that are provided for in the underlying appropriation bill, it seems important for us, to me, for us not to sidestep this issue for another year.

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

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Chairman, I withdraw my reservation, and I rise in opposition to the amendment.

The CHAIRMAN. The reservation is withdrawn.

The gentleman from Texas is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Chairman, in all due respect, I had not seen this amendment until 2 minutes ago.

I wish we had an opportunity to sit down, as our subcommittee has been doing for the last 6 months on a bipartisan basis, to see if the legitimate needs that the gentleman from Kansas has raised could have been dealt with through our subcommittee process.

The problem with what the gentleman has proposed in this amendment, while it might sound like we are cutting medical administration overhead at the central office in Washington, D.C., the gentleman may or may not know that the VA Medical Administration account funds employees with their feet on the ground, in the hospitals all across America, including in the gentleman's home State.

So, perhaps, unintentionally, I assume unintentionally, this amendment would cut funding needed to fund security at our VA hospitals, it would cut funds needed to provide patient medical information, transcription of patient records, financial management services at our VA hospitals and third-party collection activities.

□ 1415

So, unintentionally, by cutting this funding, it could make it more difficult to even bring third-party funding into the VA system and into the Treasury. So for those reasons, I must rise in opposition to this amendment.

I would be happy to sit down and work on a bipartisan basis to try to find a way to increase the miles reimbursement rate for veterans. I completely agree with the gentleman that the miles reimbursement rates are inadequate.

And I would like to think, given that we increased the medical services account for 2008 by \$3.4 billion over the 2007 level, and given that we increased it by \$1.7 billion over the President's request for medical services, my hope would be that the VA could seriously look at using those significant increases in funding to address the shortfall that the gentleman has mentioned.

I'm not sure what the authorizing process is. Since this amendment was one I'd never seen prior to, now 4 or 5 minutes ago, I'm not sure if there's a need to authorize funding for this if

that authorization has passed both the House and the Senate. I think it might have been in the Wounded Warrior legislation. But there might be an authorization question. Perhaps not.

But I would like to request the gentleman draw down the amendment. He doesn't have to, but I'd be happy to work in good faith, as we've been working all year long, to address legitimate needs. And the gentleman has pointed out a legitimate need.

But I want to be clear. I strongly oppose this amendment because it could hurt medical services provided to veterans by cutting out funding needed to staff our VA hospitals. The source of this money wouldn't be cutting out the Washington, D.C., office staff; it would be cutting out employees that are serving vital roles in our veterans hospitals in the gentleman's home State as well as mine.

Mr. MORAN of Kansas. Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the comments offered by the gentleman from Texas (Mr. EDWARDS). I will have to admit to him that my amendment is not unintentional, and so his assumption that the offset that I'm providing is an unintentional offering on my part is not true. I'm aware of where the money comes from and still believe that this is a high priority. And, in fact, this bill, the medical administration account, receives a 14½ percent, \$458 million, increase over last year's funding levels, and \$193 million more than the President requested in fiscal year 2008. And, in fact, our authorizing committee, both the minority and majority views, accepted those, the President's recommendation, as our suggested funding levels.

So again, in searching year after year for a place from which this money can come, it is not without concern that we have chosen these accounts. But this is the year in which there is a 14.5 percent increase in those funds. And even if my amendment would be adopted, it would still allow for a 10.6 percent increase in those administrative accounts.

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

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Chairman, if I could use my remaining time, I'd like to just say to the gentleman, I appreciate his bringing this serious problem before the House. I wish, in hindsight, he'd brought it to us earlier than 5 or 10 minutes ago. I hope we could work together to try to find a way to address the needs he's mentioned.

But, my colleagues, let me reemphasize two points. He may know the source of the funding, but I'm not sure he intended to actually cut out funding, which this amendment would do, that is needed to hire VA employees to man our VA hospitals to see our veterans get the service that they desperately need and deserve.

In addition, we've had lengthy discussion, including from the Republican leadership, about the importance of oversight of this additional funding,

this historic level of funding we're putting into the VA this year. If we cut out the accounts that the gentleman's trying to cut out in this amendment, that undermines the entire effort that was discussed so eloquently by my Republican colleagues, that we've got to have enough money to have oversight to see that these new dollars are spent wisely and for the highest priority.

So, if the gentleman persists in offering the amendment and having a vote on it, I would ask my colleagues, on a bipartisan basis, in all due respect, to reject it and allow us to then work together in the months ahead to find an appropriate way to more adequately fund reimbursement rates for America's veterans.

I believe, personally and strongly, that this amendment would do harm to medical care to veterans, not intentionally, because the gentleman is a strong supporter of veterans. But nevertheless, it would do harm to service to veterans and undermine our ability to have strong oversight on the historic increases in VA funding that we provide in this bill.

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

The CHAIRMAN. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Kansas (Mr. MORAN).

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

Mr. MORAN of Kansas. Mr. Chairman, I demand a recorded vote.

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

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Chairman, I move to strike the last word.

Mr. Chairman, I yield to the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. BARROW) for the purpose of a colloquy.

Mr. BARROW. Mr. Chairman, this is an important bill that addresses the needs of our veterans who've been neglected for too long now. Taking care of our veterans is important at any time, but it's particularly important in a time of war. So I want to thank you, Mr. Chairman, and your staff for your hard work on this bill.

I recently conducted a tour of veterans service organizations all across my district, and one of the things I heard over and over again was the growth in demand for veterans services in the future, and that's what I'd like to discuss with you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, community-based outpatient clinics play a vital role in meeting the health care needs of our veterans, especially in the rural parts of our country. My district, a 17-county area centered on Statesboro, Georgia, contains some 34,000 veterans. And I ask for your commitment, Mr. Chairman, to work in conference with the other body to look at this area and evaluate the need and determine the feasibility of a community-based outpatient clinic in Statesboro, Georgia.

Mr. EDWARDS. Reclaiming my time, Mr. Chairman, let me thank the gentleman for his focus on the importance of VA outpatient clinics.

In my 16 years in Congress, I think one of the most important improvements made in VA care to veterans, particularly in rural areas, is the creation and development and expansion of VA outpatient clinics, particularly for those veterans that live a long way from VA hospitals.

I'll be happy to work with the gentleman as we go to conference, and to work with the Veterans Administration as well, to put the facts together to see if we can provide funding for a Statesboro clinic. And I know the gentleman will be a strong advocate on its behalf.

For the record, I will say we have not, as a procedure in the past, earmarked specific funding for specific outpatient clinics. But the gentleman has spoken very strongly and eloquently about the need for his clinic, and we will work with him and the VA to see if we can provide the funding.

And I will say that the bill that the gentleman has strongly supported provides, as we previously said, an enormous increase in VA medical services funding, far above, \$1.7 billion above the President's request, \$6 billion in total VA medical care funding over fiscal year 2007. So I hope the VA will make a high priority out of expanding these clinics where they are needed.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MRS. CAPITO

Mrs. CAPITO. Mr. Chairman, I offer an amendment.

The CHAIRMAN. The Clerk will designate the amendment.

The text of the amendment is as follows:

Amendment offered by Mrs. CAPITO:

Page 28, line 22, after the dollar amount, insert "(increased by \$5,000,000)(decreased by \$5,000,000)".

The CHAIRMAN. Pursuant to the order of the House of today, the gentlewoman from West Virginia (Mrs. CAPITO) and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from West Virginia.

Mrs. CAPITO. Mr. Chairman, I rise today to offer a bipartisan amendment highlighting the importance and need for an Office of Rural Health within the Department of Veterans Affairs.

I'd like to commend the chairman and the ranking member for their good, solid, hard work on this bill and the tribute it pays to America's veterans. I would also like to thank Mr. SALAZAR of Colorado and Mr. SMITH of Nebraska for their work on this bipartisan amendment.

I was pleased that language was included in the legislation that was signed into law by the President last year calling on the Department of Veterans Affairs to create an Office of Rural Health within the Office of the Under Secretary for Health. However, the Department has yet to make any progress towards establishing this very important office.

This is a simple amendment that should encourage the Department to make the Office of Rural Health fully operational as expeditiously as possible, and provide them with the resources needed to do so by rerouting \$5 million in the Medical Services Account to help fund the Office of Rural Health, thus making it revenue neutral.

Rural Americans face different and unique challenges than our fellow citizens who reside in urban and suburban areas, and this is no different for our veterans and their ability to seek the services and the treatments that they need. For some rural veterans, a simple trip to the doctor can often involve hours of travel to reach the appropriate facility within the veterans health facilities health system.

It is my hope that the Office of Rural Health will shed light on many of these challenges, and will be a resource with many new and creative ideas for methods to help our rural veterans receive their much-deserved benefits in a manner that is efficient, and allowing them to stay as close to home as possible.

One of the great challenges we are beginning to face is the number of servicemen and -women returning from Iraq and Afghanistan who have sustained a traumatic brain injury. The Department of Veterans Affairs has four large polytrauma centers, in Richmond, Tampa, Minneapolis and Palo Alto, California. These facilities provide first-class treatment for veterans suffering polytrauma, and also provide inpatient rehabilitation services.

Despite the services provided at these facilities, many veterans will eventually return to their homes in the rural areas of America, but they will still need care and treatment. The Office of Rural Health will be the basis for new ways to provide rural veterans with polytrauma with the care that they need.

Another development within the Department of Veterans Affairs that has been going on for a while are the Community-Based Outpatient Clinics, or CBOCs. Often serving rural areas, CBOCs are a tremendous asset to the delivery of care for veterans, allowing them to seek treatment closer to their home. Unfortunately, underserved areas still remain in the rural areas. Again, the Office of Rural Health will be an excellent resource for new ways to provide primary outpatient care.

Mr. Chairman, I urge passage of this commonsense amendment so that the rural veterans concerns can be appropriately addressed.

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

The CHAIRMAN. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas for 5 minutes.

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Chairman, I want to thank the gentlelady for bringing to the attention of the House, once again, the importance of providing quality veterans care to the men and

women who served our Nation and happen to live in small, rural communities, areas perhaps in many cases far away from veterans hospitals. I think the community clinics have been one great, great addition to the VA health care system over the last 2 decades.

And let me point out, for the RECORD, before I will express that I will support this amendment, that Mr. UDALL of New Mexico and Mr. LATHAM, in our full Appropriations Committee, added language on this issue which I know the gentlelady and I will both support; and it says this: "The committee notes that the Public Law 109-461 directed the establishment of an Office of Rural Health within the Office of Under Secretary for Health. To date, after more than 6 months, there has been no action taken to implement the provision regarding the Office of Rural Health. The Committee urges the Department to move forward in an expeditious manner."

□ 1430

With that, I would like to express my support for the amendment.

Mrs. CAPITO. Mr. Chairman, I would like to yield 1½ minutes to my colleague from Colorado (Mr. SALAZAR).

Mr. SALAZAR. Mr. Chairman, I thank the gentlewoman for yielding. And I would also like to thank the chairman of the committee for expressing his support for this amendment.

At the end of the 109th Congress, the Veterans Benefits, Health Care, and Information Technology Act of 2006 was signed into law. This legislation created the Office of Rural Health within the VA and tasked the office with conducting research into issues affecting rural veterans, as well as developing and refining policies and programs to improve care and services for rural veterans.

Unfortunately, as the chairman has clearly stated, since this legislation has been signed into law establishing the Office of Rural Health, no action has been taken. Just yesterday in the Veterans' Affairs Health Subcommittee, I asked the VA Under Secretary to give me an update, and he confirmed that as of this date a director has not even been hired yet.

This amendment would simply allocate \$5 million from the same account within Medical Services to establish this office.

The care our Nation provides rural veterans in return for protecting our country should not suffer because some have chosen to live in rural America. We owe them no less for their sacrifice.

For the 25 percent of all veterans who live in rural areas, and the nearly 45 percent of all recruits coming from rural America, I urge you to strongly support this amendment, and I commend the chairman for supporting this amendment.

Mrs. CAPITO. Mr. Chairman, I, too, would like to thank the Chair for his support of this amendment.

Mr. Chairman, I yield the balance of my time to the gentleman from Ne-

braska (Mr. SMITH), one of the cosponsors of this amendment.

Mr. SMITH of Nebraska. Mr. Chairman, I thank Congresswoman CAPITO.

I appreciate your support for this amendment, the Capito-Smith-Salazar amendment. And I don't want to be repetitive because many good points were offered by the chairman of the committee as well as others. So I just want to add my support and certainly state that it is unfortunate that nearly 6 months since the legislation was signed into law for the Office of Rural Health, little action has been taken. So I believe this is a good step forward for those in rural America because they should not have to suffer simply because they live in rural America.

The CHAIRMAN. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentlewoman from West Virginia (Mrs. CAPITO).

The amendment was agreed to.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MS. CORRINE BROWN OF FLORIDA

Ms. CORRINE BROWN of Florida. Mr. Chairman, I offer an amendment.

The CHAIRMAN. The Clerk will designate the amendment.

The text of the amendment is as follows:

Amendment offered by Ms. CORRINE BROWN of Florida:

Page 30, line 14, after the dollar amount, insert "(reduced by \$40,000,000)".

Page 33, line 14, after the dollar amount, insert "(increased by \$40,000,000)".

The CHAIRMAN. Pursuant to the order of the House of today, the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. CORRINE BROWN) and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Florida.

Ms. CORRINE BROWN of Florida. Mr. Chairman, first of all, I want to thank Speaker PELOSI, Chairman OBEY, and Chairman EDWARDS for bringing this bill to the floor. The motto of the former Veterans Secretary, my friend Jessie Brown, was "putting veterans first."

Well, the leadership they have shown, bringing the largest increase in the history of veterans funding to the floor, over \$7 billion, I have got to thank you, sir. I have served on this committee for 15 years, and for 15 years we have struggled to put the veterans first. And I am so pleased that the House of Representatives under your leadership has finally put the veterans first.

Mr. Chairman, I rise on my amendment to bring attention to a travesty occurring in my district. A travesty not just affecting my district, but this regional hospital affects Florida and Georgia.

The Gainesville VA Medical Center is 40 years old and looks every day of it. There are five beds to a room, no shower, and no place for families.

This facility received one of the highest rates of returning Afghanistan and Iraq veterans and is being shortchanged by a lack of proper facilities. The bed tower project includes 228 sin-

gle-patient bedrooms for surgical, medical, and psychiatric patients. This includes extra space for support of the psychiatric care inpatient program. Finally, the building itself was required to be structurally strengthened to protect it from potential terrorist attack since we are part of the national emergency response system. The current design will be completed in June 2007 and will be ready to be released for bid in September 2007.

Since the approval by the National CARES Commission and initial funding allocation, much has changed in the construction world. The dual impacts of Hurricane Katrina and the construction boom in China have caused the costs of all construction in the U.S. to rise.

The total estimated construction cost is over \$103 million. The original projection was \$64 million for construction. That leaves a shortfall of about \$40 million.

Every month of delay costs about \$1.1 million. An additional \$40 million is needed in order to complete the project.

The men and women returning to Florida and southern Georgia will be greatly impacted, and I would like to work with the committee to resolve this matter.

Mr. Chairman, do I have the word of the chairman to look into this matter?

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Chairman, will the gentlewoman yield?

Ms. CORRINE BROWN of Florida. I yield to Chairman EDWARDS.

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Chairman, let me first thank the gentlewoman for her kind words about our work on this bill and, more importantly, for her 15 years of leadership on the Veterans' Affairs Committee on behalf of our veterans not only in Florida but on behalf of veterans all across the country.

Because of the concerns raised by the gentlewoman, we increased the major construction project account in this bill by \$683 million above the President's request because the reality is it is not just the VA system. It is the DOD health care system. It is construction all across America that is facing huge increases in costs, and obviously the Gainesville Florida hospital is a terribly important health care facility in our national VA health care system. And I look forward to working with the gentlewoman to see that we have enough funding to see that that additional funding is possible. And we will work with the VA as we go to conference and beyond on that issue.

Ms. CORRINE BROWN of Florida. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And once again thank you for your leadership.

Mr. Chairman, I ask unanimous consent to withdraw my amendment.

The CHAIRMAN. Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from Florida?

There was no objection.

AMENDMENT NO. 1 OFFERED BY MR. GARRETT OF NEW JERSEY

Mr. GARRETT of New Jersey. Mr. Chairman, I offer an amendment.

The CHAIRMAN. The Clerk will designate the amendment.

The text of the amendment is as follows:

Amendment No. 1 offered by Mr. GARRETT of New Jersey:

Page 30, line 14, after the dollar amount, insert “(reduced by \$10,000,000)”.

Page 36, line 11, after the dollar amount, insert “(increased by \$10,000,000)”.

The CHAIRMAN. Pursuant to the order of the House of today, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. GARRETT) and the gentleman from Texas (Mr. EDWARDS) each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New Jersey.

Mr. GARRETT of New Jersey. Mr. Chairman, first of all, I wish to rise to say that I appreciate the work of both the Chair and ranking member with regard to their work on behalf of veterans of this country.

The amendment that is before us is an amendment to seek increase in funds for the State veterans homes. It does so in the amount of \$10 million. There are 126 facilities, veterans homes, across the 50 States and Puerto Rico. These are State veterans homes and they care for nearly 30,000 of our Nation's heroes. The number of veterans that are going to be requiring care is large and is going to continue to grow through the year 2020. And the conflict today is leading to more veterans that will need special care throughout the rest of their lives.

As many of our veterans move into these extended care facilities, we must continue here in this House to ensure that the facilities are both safe and comfortable for the residents. As you may know, there is an extensive list of backlogged projects just waiting for the funds, many of them in the area of critical health and safety needs. Of the \$500 million of projects waiting for Federal funds, nearly half are classified as priority one.

We must also see that these facilities are able to provide for high quality of life as well for those individuals who have made great sacrifices in the past years for our Nation. These are homes, as I said before, for our heroes. They are not simply institutions that we are funding. If we are not able to fund the priority one projects that I am worried about, these homes will be inadequate and we will not be honoring our veterans.

The staff at these homes work hard to honor our veterans and work with them to provide that they have, for the remaining years of their lives, a comfortable environment. I have had the opportunity to spend some time in these veterans home, particularly the Paramus Veterans Home in my district in Bergen County, and I particularly had the chance to visit with the people who live there and the staff and their friends and relatives who come along. In addition to that, there are local veterans service organizations that have worked hard to secure State matching funds for these essential projects as

well at this facility, just as their counterparts are doing the same sort of thing all across this country in their homes as well.

Finally, I would like to point this out, that our colleagues in the Senate Appropriations Committee just this week approved \$250 million for this account. So including my amendment here would still mean that we are falling short of where the Senate is by around \$75 million; so I therefore believe that this \$10 million is well called for.

While this backlog is much greater than what this amendment can provide, I wanted to call attention to this difficulty these homes currently are facing and have been facing for some period of time, and I hope that we can work together now to find a way to honor these vets and make sure that they receive the best care and the best quality of life in their remaining days.

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

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Chairman, I do want to thank the gentleman from New Jersey for his support for state-extended care facilities, and I agree with him that the President's budget for this account was, in my words, woefully underfunded, and it is because of the importance of these extended care facilities that in our subcommittee we provided a 95-percent increase over the President's request for that. The President has requested \$85 million; we fund it at \$165 million.

The reason I oppose this amendment and would ask my colleagues to do the same is that the gentleman, in order to provide additional funding, cuts \$10 million out of the funding account that is necessary to meet one of the veterans service organizations' highest priorities this year, and that is reduce the terrible backlog of 400,000 veterans waiting to get their claims reviewed by VA caseworkers. And with the funding we provided in that account in this bill, if we don't reduce it in this or other amendments, we are going to be able to hire 1,100 new VA caseworkers in order to reduce that backlog. Right now that backlog is averaging 177 days, and many veterans are having to wait longer than that, including combat veterans, to get their earned benefits approved and started.

The gentleman in no way would want to or intend to cut the funding to try to help our veterans get their benefits more quickly. But the reality is that taking \$10 million out of that very account, the very account that the VAV, the VFW, the American Legion, and others emphasized to us all year long, we have to reduce the terrible backlog in veterans benefits claims processing. All the groups supported that additional funding. And that is why I would ask, with all due respect, that our colleagues on a bipartisan basis respect that 95 percent increase we provided in this bill for state-extended care facilities and let's not cut one of the top two priorities of veterans service organiza-

tions this year all across the Nation, and that is, reduce the 400,000 claims backlog of veterans benefits.

Mr. GARRETT of New Jersey. Mr. Chairman, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. EDWARDS. I will be glad to yield to the gentleman.

Mr. GARRETT of New Jersey. As you know, this is not an issue that is new. I actually brought this up and talked about this back early in the year in the Budget Committee, and we had a discussion on it at that time.

Just a question to you: That account you are referencing where we are drawing the money from has grown as well, has it not?

Two questions. And the second question is there are other aspects of that account other than just that provision that you are referencing; so does it necessarily mean, in your opinion, that if we do withdraw some funds from the fairly large account that it will have a detrimental effect on the area that you are specifying, one which I agree with?

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Chairman, reclaiming my time, we can't say on the floor at this moment exactly what the VA would do, but what I could say for a fact is this \$10 million comes out of the account. It is used and intended to fund an additional 1,100 VA claims caseworkers, and I am afraid if you start cutting that account, the VA will obviously have to cut funding out of our intended plans to increase those numbers.

We still have a long way to go in this process. Who knows, as we look carefully at various projects in military construction and the VA side, where we might find additional money. And I think the committee has shown its good intention by increasing President Bush's request for this program by 95 percent. We understand it is an important need, and the gentleman has spoken out on it earlier this year and in the past.

I would just say to our colleagues, not this year, not now, not today. Let's not cut \$10 million out of an account that the veterans service groups say we desperately need funded in order to reduce the backlog for 400,000 veterans to get their benefits started. Many of these veterans need their benefits started as soon as possible. Many of them are living day to day, week to week; and the earlier we can get them their benefits, the quicker they go on with rebuilding their lives. And for that reason, I must oppose the gentleman's amendment.

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

Mr. GARRETT of New Jersey. Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the gentleman's comments. And we are on the same page as far as both aspects that we wish the Department to deal with.

On this amendment, I think your comment was “just not this year.” And obviously as a Member who has been here 4 years now fighting, as you have also, probably before me, but myself here on this floor fighting for these

veterans homes, fighting literally for the ones back in my districts as well for the veterans there and seeing just the smallest improvements in just a certain number of the safety areas. And there are other area safety areas that would seem to me to need improvements in and health areas as well, and we just can't get the funds.

□ 1445

And the quality of life even goes beyond those issues as far as what these gentlemen need in these homes.

So I bring this amendment to the floor today for that reason, firstly. And secondly, also from a pragmatic point of view that this will go to the Senate and, as I did make the reference, that the Senate has already marked it up even significantly higher than what the gentleman has already done.

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

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

The CHAIRMAN. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. GARRETT).

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

Mr. GARRETT of New Jersey. Mr. Chairman, I demand a recorded vote.

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

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Chairman, I move to strike the last word.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman from Texas is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Chairman, I would like to yield time to the gentleman from Rhode Island, a valued and important member of our sub-committee who, I must say, giving credit where credit is due, has been an eloquent and powerful speaker on behalf of the need to increase funding for mental health care services for our vets, drug and alcohol treatment programs for our vets, as well as increasing funding for homeless veterans. The product of his hard work and dedication is very obvious in this bill.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I yield to the gentleman from Rhode Island (Mr. KENNEDY).

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. Chairman, I don't want anyone to mistake, after hearing the previous debate or any one of these amendments, what the big picture is here today. The success story today, the take-away message today is that this bill is the biggest increase in veterans health care in the history of the veterans health care system, the biggest increase in the 77-year history of the veterans health care system; and it has happened under the chairmanship of CHET EDWARDS.

Every amendment here is talking about nickels and dimes compared to the overwhelming increase in billions of dollars, billions of dollars that are

going into this veterans health care system that has never seen such an infusion of dollars. We're not talking about a little bit of money here, a little bit of money there, and that's often what ends up happening. We're talking about money for this program or that program. We are talking about billions of dollars that have never been even seen in this kind of fashion in any kind of veterans health care program before.

And so what we are doing here is raising the bar for generations to come because what we're doing now is layering the bar up. So from now on, the floor is 20 stories higher than it was the day before. And from now on, whenever another veterans budget comes up, it is going to start from the top floor and move even higher.

I want everyone to know that this is a monumental day. This budget exceeds even the proposed budget of all the veteran service organizations, even the VFW, the American Legion, the Paralyzed Veterans of America; this is even more than they have asked for.

And I want to say on behalf of the mental health needs of our veterans, we are doing all that we need to do and more to try to make sure that their needs are met. And we should do so, because the suffering that these veterans have had to undergo as a result of this war has been unbearable. And we, as a Nation, owe it to make sure that not only do their outward physical wounds get met and treated, but their inward psychological wounds get tended to as well. And this bill does that.

I want to thank the chairman for his work to make sure that not only their outward wounds, but their inward wounds get addressed as well. And I commend him for his leadership. He ought to feel very proud to be chairman on such an historic bill such as this, and I thank him for his leadership.

Mr. EDWARDS. I want to thank the gentleman not only for his kind words and for his eloquent and powerful words on behalf of our veterans, but even more importantly, for his deeds, not just this year, but for every year you've been in Congress. Millions of veterans are living a better life today because of that leadership. I thank you for that.

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

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MRS. WILSON OF NEW MEXICO

Mrs. WILSON of New Mexico. Mr. Chairman, I offer an amendment.

The CHAIRMAN. The Clerk will designate the amendment.

The text of the amendment is as follows:

Amendment offered by Mrs. WILSON of New Mexico:

Page 31, line 6, after "Philippines", insert "Provided further, That of the funds made available under this heading, \$2,000,000 is for the Advisory Committee on Women Veterans under section 542 of title 38, United States Code".

The CHAIRMAN. Pursuant to the order of the House of today, the gentle-

woman from New Mexico (Mrs. WILSON) and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from New Mexico.

Mrs. WILSON of New Mexico. Mr. Chairman, I rise today to offer an amendment to the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations bill this year.

My amendment would designate and devote \$2 million from the Department of Administration general operations expenses account. This is a very large account. The President requested \$1.4 billion for that account. This body is appropriating \$1.6 billion for that account, and what it does is fence that money and say that \$2 million of this must be devoted and appropriated to the Advisory Committee on Women Veterans.

The intent of this amendment is that the Advisory Committee on Women Veterans would undertake a special effort, through a task force or special commission, to study and make recommendations on the health care needs of women veterans. All of us are concerned about whether the veterans health care system is meeting the needs of this newest generation of veterans. But there is a special category of veterans that I think sometimes gets overlooked.

In 1978, I got a one-way ticket to Colorado Springs, Colorado, in the third class with women at the United States Air Force Academy. And I walked up a ramp, and over that ramp was a big sign in aluminum letters that said, "Bring Me Men." That sign stayed there for 20 years after women were admitted to the Air Force Academy. It's gone now, but some of us as women veterans feel that maybe the VA hospitals have a similar sign over their doors, if not literally, then certainly figuratively.

I am the only woman veteran serving in the Congress. And women veterans face different obstacles than men and have different health care needs than men when they start to get care from the VA. To start with, many women don't even consider themselves or call themselves veterans, and they don't think of the VA as their system.

A larger number of women are serving in the military, and in the future we are going to see higher numbers of women veterans, and they will face different problems and challenges as they age. One in seven veterans of the current war on terrorism, one in seven Americans who are deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan is a woman, and yet the VA health care system is very oriented towards the health care needs of men.

Just let me give you one example. If you are a veteran and you go to the VA for a clinic on PTSD, if everyone else in that group is a guy, are you really getting the care that is appropriate to you? A lot of women veterans don't feel comfortable in those settings. They are not sure that the OB/GYN care is what

they need. If they face osteoporosis, they're not sure that the VA is where they should be. Or if they face problems with cancers particular to women, is the VA going to meet their needs?

My goal in proposing this amendment is to get the VA to bring together a group of people who can truly devote the time and effort needed to study the needs of women veterans and examine the care that is available to our women veterans and the challenges that we face so that they can report their findings to Congress and to the VA so that we as a body can evaluate and adjust the system so that all of our veterans get the care that they have earned.

I am very grateful, and I think all Americans are, to those who serve our Nation, and we have a responsibility to make sure that they receive the best possible care. The burdens of this war on terrorism has fallen on the shoulders of a relatively small number of Americans who have volunteered to take great risks on our behalf. We owe them, our veterans past, present and future, a debt of gratitude for their selflessness and for their service. We need to make sure that our veterans get the benefits they were promised, the health care they deserve, and the recognition that our Nation owes them.

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

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Chairman, I move to strike the last word.

I want to thank the gentlelady for her strong voice on behalf of women veterans. I had the honor of working in the Texas State Senate under then Lieutenant Governor Bill Hobby, whose mother, Oveta Culp Hobby, played a leading role in heading the WACs in World War II.

When I was first elected to the House in 1990, the famous, some would say infamous, but the wonderful and always famous Sarah McClendon, the White House reporter, who I think at one point was second in line in seniority at the White House and was an outspoken advocate on behalf of women veterans. And I thank the gentlelady for continuing in the tradition of Ms. Hobby and Ms. McClendon.

There is no doubt that the VA has come a long way in its history in trying to improve care to women veterans, but we have yet a long way to go. And for that reason, I will support this amendment.

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

Mrs. WILSON of New Mexico. I thank my colleague for his support of this effort. I look forward to working with him to make sure that the VA undertakes this effort and takes it seriously, and we get some good, solid recommendations that all of us can work on.

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

The CHAIRMAN. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentlewoman from New Mexico (Mrs. WILSON).

The amendment was agreed to.

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Chairman, I move to strike the last word and would be glad to yield to the gentleman from North Carolina.

Mr. McHENRY. I want to thank my colleague from Texas for putting together a great bill. I know he has been a long-time advocate of the best care possible for our veterans in this country. And as a military general, I want to commend him for the great work he has done on a bipartisan basis. And I thank you for that, Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, I rise today to bring attention to the shortcomings of the Department of Veterans Affairs in addressing the infrastructure needs of community-based outpatient clinics. These clinics provide convenient care to our veterans on an outpatient basis.

There are currently 64 pending clinics that have received approval from the VA either in fiscal year 2007 or fiscal year 2008. One of those clinics is set to be established in my district in Hickory, North Carolina. When opened, this clinic will serve approximately 10,000 veterans on an outpatient basis annually. However, since the VA Mid-Atlantic Health Care Network announced last June that the clinic in Hickory would open in January of this year, there has been nothing but delay after delay after delay. Now, veterans in western North Carolina are frustrated with these delays, as many of us are, and there seems to be this common issue throughout the system.

This particular clinic has been in the works in some way or another for roughly 12 years, Mr. Chairman. The time is up for delays, and veterans of these 64 regions are entitled to answers.

Last month, my two North Carolina colleagues in the Senate and I formally requested an update about the status of the outpatient clinic in Hickory. Unfortunately, we have yet to receive a response to our inquiry. Our veterans, I believe, deserve better.

I would ask that as this bill moves forward to the Senate and to conference, the chairman and the ranking member work to get answers from the Department of Veterans Affairs, answers to why we have these continued delays for pending outpatient clinics. Veterans in Hickory, North Carolina, and across the country have sacrificed too much for our country and deserve to have, at the very least, convenient health care. They deserve a proper explanation and progress report as well.

I also want to finish by commending the chairman for his, again, hard work on increasing funding for our veterans. I know that on both sides of the aisle we are very pleased with the work you've done, both the chairman and the ranking member, and we are looking forward to passage.

□ 1500

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Chairman, reclaiming my time, let me thank the gentleman for his kind comments and

say that while I don't know specifically where the Hickory Outpatient Clinic stands in the list of priorities for the VA, for the very reasons the gentleman mentioned about the importance of these clinics we have report language in this bill to require the VA to report back to us the status of these clinics.

I think it is pretty clear the reason the VA hasn't funded many of these clinics, and there are 717 that have been funded, is simply that they didn't have enough money to fund the clinics. That is one reason we worked so hard this year in this Congress to provide an increase in VA care funding that is unprecedented in our Nation's history. If you count the 2007 continuing resolution plus the Iraq war supplemental plus this bill, if it passes today and becomes law, we will have provided in this Congress this year in the last 6 months an \$11.9 billion increase in VA discretionary spending, 90 percent of which goes to VA medical care.

I hope that with passage of this bill, and now the administration has agreed not to veto it, we will perhaps have enough money to fund some of the clinics that have not been funded.

We will look forward to working with the gentleman. He deserves an answer from the VA. I don't know why the gentleman hasn't gotten an answer back from the VA. I encourage you to keep calling them or talking to them until they do answer you.

Again, I can't answer specifically on where Hickory does stand or should stand in the process. That should be a process based on the reality of the veterans' needs, comparing one community to another. But I sure look forward to working with our colleagues to see that we have enough funding in this bill to increase the number of VA clinics that we can build around the country.

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

The CHAIRMAN. The Clerk will read. The Clerk read as follows:

TITLE III
RELATED AGENCIES
AMERICAN BATTLE MONUMENTS COMMISSION
SALARIES AND EXPENSES

For necessary expenses, not otherwise provided for, of the American Battle Monuments Commission, including the acquisition of land or interest in land in foreign countries; purchases and repair of uniforms for caretakers of national cemeteries and monuments outside of the United States and its territories and possessions; rent of office and garage space in foreign countries; purchase (one-for-one replacement basis only) and hire of passenger motor vehicles; not to exceed \$7,500 for official reception and representation expenses; and insurance of official motor vehicles in foreign countries, when required by law of such countries, \$43,470,000, to remain available until expended.

FOREIGN CURRENCY FLUCTUATIONS ACCOUNT

For necessary expenses, not otherwise provided for, of the American Battle Monuments Commission, \$11,000,000, to remain available until expended, for purposes authorized by section 2109 of title 36, United States Code.

UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS FOR
VETERANS CLAIMS
SALARIES AND EXPENSES

For necessary expenses for the operation of the United States Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims as authorized by sections 7251 through 7298 of title 38, United States Code, \$21,397,000, of which \$1,300,000 shall be available for the purpose of providing financial assistance as described, and in accordance with the process and reporting procedures set forth, under this heading in Public Law 102-229.

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE—CIVIL
CEMETERIAL EXPENSES, ARMY
SALARIES AND EXPENSES

For necessary expenses, as authorized by law, for maintenance, operation, and improvement of Arlington National Cemetery and Soldiers' and Airmen's Home National Cemetery, including the purchase of two passenger motor vehicles for replacement only, and not to exceed \$1,000 for official reception and representation expenses, \$30,592,000, to remain available until expended. In addition, such sums as may be necessary for parking maintenance, repairs and replacement, to be derived from the Lease of Department of Defense Real Property for Defense Agencies account.

ARMED FORCES RETIREMENT HOME
TRUST FUND

For expenses necessary for the Armed Forces Retirement Home to operate and maintain the Armed Forces Retirement Home—Washington, District of Columbia and the Armed Forces Retirement Home—Gulfport, Mississippi, to be paid from funds available in the Armed Forces Retirement Home Trust Fund, \$55,724,000.

ARMED FORCES RETIREMENT HOME
FEDERAL FUND PAYMENT

For payment to the "Armed Forces Retirement Home", \$800,000, to remain available until expended.

TITLE IV
GENERAL PROVISIONS

SEC. 401. No part of any appropriation contained in this Act shall remain available for obligation beyond the current fiscal year unless expressly so provided herein.

SEC. 402. Such sums as may be necessary for fiscal year 2008 pay raises for programs funded by this Act shall be absorbed within the levels appropriated in this Act.

SEC. 403. None of the funds made available in this Act may be used for any program, project, or activity, when it is made known to the Federal entity or official to which the funds are made available that the program, project, or activity is not in compliance with any Federal law relating to risk assessment, the protection of private property rights, or unfunded mandates.

SEC. 404. No part of any funds appropriated in this Act shall be used by an agency of the executive branch, other than for normal and recognized executive-legislative relationships, for publicity or propaganda purposes, and for the preparation, distribution or use of any kit, pamphlet, booklet, publication, radio, television, or film presentation designed to support or defeat legislation pending before Congress, except in presentation to Congress itself.

SEC. 405. All departments and agencies funded under this Act are encouraged, within the limits of the existing statutory authorities and funding, to expand their use of "E-Commerce" technologies and procedures in the conduct of their business practices and public service activities.

AMENDMENT NO. 13 OFFERED BY MRS.
BLACKBURN

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. Chairman, I offer an amendment.

The CHAIRMAN. The Clerk will designate the amendment.

The text of the amendment is as follows:

Amendment No. 13 offered by Mrs. BLACKBURN:

In section 405 (page 48, beginning on line 11), strike "encouraged" and insert "directed".

The CHAIRMAN. Pursuant to the order of the House today, the gentlewoman from Tennessee (Mrs. BLACKBURN) and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Tennessee.

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

Mr. Chairman, American businesses in the private sector continue to advance the use of information and e-commerce technology to strengthen their bottom line and increase customer service. However, too many government agencies continue to use antiquated operating systems that do not use taxpayer dollars efficiently or create optimal conditions for customer service.

Right here in the House of Representatives, we offer Americans e-commerce services in the form of "Write Your Rep." I am sure most of my colleagues and their staff use this program, and they use it with efficiency. It helps us to stay in touch.

I have a military post in my district, Fort Campbell. It is located in Montgomery County, Tennessee. I also have 60,000 veterans that are there. One of the things we find is that many times our agencies, working with these constituents, continue to do business on antiquated systems that don't optimize efficiently.

That is why I am offering this amendment today. Increasing the use of e-commerce technology and procedures in the bureaucracy will allow critical agencies funded under this act to operate more efficiently. But, more importantly, it will allow our members of the military and our veterans to gain access to records, especially health records, that they need in a timely manner.

I want to thank the chairman for recognizing this important business objective. The underlying legislation takes a step forward to the goal by encouraging the agencies to expand the use of e-commerce.

My amendment, however, is an important step further. It would direct the agencies funded under H.R. 2642 to expand the use of e-commerce technologies in the conducting of their business practices within the limits, within the limits, of the existing statutory and funding.

It is a straightforward, simple amendment. As we know, the bureaucracy is not going to do this on their own. They need the oversight from Congress.

If successful, we have got three points we hope it would achieve: num-

ber one, lead to greater transparency in agency asset and records management; number two, enhance governmental reform and efficiency; and, number three, spur agencies to build best practices and conduct themselves in a more businesslike manner.

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Chairman, if the gentlewoman will yield, I think this is a good amendment, and I will support it. I think there will be broad bipartisan support for your amendment, because it is well thought out and it is a positive thing to do. We will support it.

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. Chairman, reclaiming my time, I thank the chairman for thinking about the records process with our veterans and our military.

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

The CHAIRMAN. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentlewoman from Tennessee (Mrs. BLACKBURN).

The amendment was agreed to.

The CHAIRMAN. The Clerk will read. The Clerk read as follows:

SEC. 406. None of the funds made available in this Act may be transferred to any department, agency, or instrumentality of the United States Government except pursuant to a transfer made by, or transfer authority provided in, this or any other appropriations Act.

SEC. 407. Unless stated otherwise, all reports and notifications required by this Act shall be submitted to the Subcommittee on Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies of the Committee on Appropriations of the House of Representatives and the Subcommittee on Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies of the Committee on Appropriations of the Senate.

SEC. 408. The Director of the Congressional Budget Office shall, not later than February 1, 2008, submit to the Committees on Appropriations of the House of Representatives and the Senate a report projecting annual appropriations necessary for the Department of Veterans Affairs to continue providing necessary health care to veterans for fiscal years 2009 through 2012.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MRS. MUSGRAVE

Mrs. MUSGRAVE. Mr. Chairman, I offer an amendment.

The CHAIRMAN. The Clerk will designate the amendment.

The text of the amendment is as follows:

Amendment offered by Mrs. MUSGRAVE:

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

SEC. _____. None of the funds appropriated or otherwise made available in this Act may be used for any action that is related to or promotes the expansion of the boundaries or size of the Pinon Canyon Maneuver Site in southeastern Colorado.

The CHAIRMAN. Pursuant to the order of the House of today, the gentlewoman from Colorado (Mrs. MUSGRAVE) and the gentleman from Texas (Mr. EDWARDS) each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Colorado.

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

Mr. Chairman, I would like to commend the chairman for his work on

this bill, and I would like to commend the ranking member for the yeoman's job that you have done, for the work you have had before you. I very much appreciate it.

In Colorado, we have a very unique situation. We have a maneuver site that the United States Army uses, and it is 236,000 acres presently. The Army is wanting to expand this by 418,000 additional acres.

If you drive in that area of our State, you will see this sign. This was created by a high school teacher from La Junta: "Our land is our life. It is not for sale."

As a very strong supporter of the United States military, but also a very strong supporter of our private property rights, I am opposed to this expansion, and my amendment would say that no funds in this bill would be used for the expansion.

A month ago in Colorado, our Democratic Governor, Bill Ritter, signed into law a bill to withdraw the State's consent to give up any land that the United States Army might acquire through condemnation. So there is a very strong message that comes from our State legislature, from our house and senate and from our Governor. But the most poignant opposition that I hear about is from the farmers and ranchers, many of them who have been there for five generations who will lose their land, who will lose their way of life.

When you look at the opposition to the Pinon Canyon expansion, it goes on and on. But, interestingly enough, it is very diverse. The opposition comes from the National Cattlemen's Beef Association. It comes from property rights groups. But it also comes from groups such as the Sierra Club, Colorado Springs Chapter. This is all over the political spectrum that this expansion is opposed.

As we think about what could happen in that area, it is interesting to look at the National Trust for Historic Preservation issues and their 2000 list of America's most endangered places: "Pinon Canyon, Colorado. In Southeastern Colorado, under uninterrupted blue skies, Pinon Canyon is an area of scenic buttes, river valleys, family ranches and historic and archeological sites that span 11,500 years. The area is threatened by the United States Army's plan to expand its maneuver training ground by as much as 418,000 acres, a move that could lead to forced condemnation of private lands and damage or destroy historic Santa Fe Trail monuments, ranches and historic and prehistoric archeological sites."

That is what is at stake in southeastern Colorado. As we look at how much land the government already owns, in the red area you can see how much of our State is already government land in Colorado. The expansion of the Pinon Canyon maneuver site would be as large as the State of Rhode Island. It is striking.

Mr. Chairman, I yield the balance of my time to the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. SALAZAR).

Mr. SALAZAR. Mr. Chairman, I thank the gentlelady from Colorado.

Mr. Chairman, today I rise as a proud veteran, as a son of a veteran and the father of a veteran. I am honored to be the only veteran of the Colorado delegation.

As an Army man, today I am saddened to rise in opposition to the Army's plan to condemn nearly half a million acres of privately owned ranches and farms in my district.

Pinon Canyon currently has a 235,000-acre training facility which Fort Carson utilizes in southeastern Colorado. Now the Army is seeking to expand the Pinon Canyon site by an additional 418,000 acres, utilizing condemnation as a power to do so. The Army's plans include taking this land by condemnation. If the Army succeeds, Fort Carson and Pinon Canyon combined will be larger than the State of Rhode Island.

Opposition to the expansion is unified, as the gentlewoman from Colorado stated. But when the Army acquired the original Pinon Canyon land in 1982, they promised local landowners that it would never be expanded. Now they are planning to take even more. The loss of 400,000 acres of ranch land, Mr. Chairman, would devastate the economy of southeast Colorado.

The BRAC decision of 2005 stated that the Army did not need additional space. In 1970, the Army first looked at condemning land in El Paso County, which is now in Mr. LAMBORN's district for the original Pinon Canyon. Many residents from El Paso County fought against the possible land grab in their own backyard, and the site was eventually moved to southeast Colorado.

I would ask my fellow Members, if you can't support this in your backyard, please don't support it in my district.

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

Mr. Chairman, let me say this is with mixed feelings: I want to make it clear that I think the Army has responsibility to these communities in Colorado to sit down with them, work with them and work with the landowners, because it is my understanding that at one point the Army made the statement that it would not exercise eminent domain.

I also want to clarify that there is no money in this bill to allow for any acquisition of any land. The money in this bill could be used by the Army to pursue plans to later acquire land.

I respect Mrs. MUSGRAVE and Mr. SALAZAR for their opposition, and I say that with great respect to you, Mr. SALAZAR, knowing of your service and your family's service to our Nation's military. The reason I personally oppose this amendment is that the Army sees Fort Carson as an important part of growing the Army, of bringing troops back from Germany and South

Korea, of implementing the BRAC process, and the Army has identified up to 5 million acres worldwide that they need for additional training operations.

□ 1515

Fort Carson is one of the tremendous beneficiaries of the BRAC 2005 process, getting two additional brigades that are moving from Fort Hood as well as additional forces there. So I am going to oppose the amendment because I believe it would stop even the planning process for even a smaller amount, much smaller than 418,000 acres. I understand why the gentlewoman and the gentleman are opposing what the Army's intentions are, but at least let's clarify that there is no money in this bill for land acquisition.

I yield to Mr. SALAZAR.

Mr. SALAZAR. I agree there is no money for actual land acquisition, but there is money for the planning process. Do you agree with me that in the 2005 BRAC decision that the Army clearly stated they did not need any additional land in Colorado when they moved the troops from Fort Hood to Colorado to Fort Carson? Is that correct?

Mr. EDWARDS. Reclaiming my time, actually, this is the first BRAC round, in 2005, that I actually voted against. One of the reasons was that I felt the Army was making some decisions that weren't in the best interests of the taxpayers and the Army. But the Army made their decisions. The BRAC recommendations were passed by the Congress, and now they are being implemented. I do have some concerns despite my opposition to BRAC 2005 that if we totally stop the planning for this expansion, we could seriously impact the training of forces during a critical time in the Army's history.

I respect the gentleman's position, and I am going to encourage the Army to sit down and meet with both Members who are sponsoring this amendment, and perhaps the gentlelady and gentleman can win this vote.

But if not, I am still going to encourage the Army to sit down and deal with the landowners and the people of Colorado, and the two of you in particular, to try to address this problem and the concerns, the legitimate concerns that you have raised.

Mr. WICKER. Mr. Chairman, I move to strike the requisite number of words.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman from Mississippi is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. WICKER. Mr. Chairman, for a different perspective, I yield to the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. LAMBORN).

Mr. LAMBORN. Mr. Chairman, I thank the ranking member for yielding me this time.

I rise today in opposition to this amendment which would cut off all funding to study an expansion of the Pinon Canyon maneuver site. This amendment would stop the Army from

providing the soldiers with much-needed additional training space, an action which could have serious negative consequences for the Army and for the brave men and women serving our Nation.

By prohibiting these funds, the Army would not even be able to study the area and complete an environmental impact statement. The purpose of an EIS is to assess the environmental, economic and other impacts of a proposed action before a Federal action is even taken up.

Private property rights are deeply important to me. Any option to increase the size of the PCMS should be thoroughly studied, and if plans for the expansion were to go forward, it should occur to the greatest extent possible, if not completely through willing sellers.

The type of enemy we are now facing overseas is much different than during the Cold War. PCMS contains terrain much like areas such as Iraq and Afghanistan. We are fortunate as a country to have this training area, but the Army has outgrown it. It would be a shame to not even study the possibility of using an existing facility that could easily be transformed into a 22nd-century facility. During the Cold War, divisions consisting of approximately 20,000 soldiers fought in relatively small areas in Europe. Consequently, training could be conducted in areas of approximately 22,000 acres or 5 by 7 miles. Today, brigade-size formations of approximately 3,500 soldiers must now operate in and control areas of approximately 615,000 acres, or 31 by 31 miles.

While Army units have gotten smaller, the battlefield has gotten larger. We owe our soldiers proper training for the conditions they will experience in other combat theaters. Not allowing the soldiers to train adequately puts them in harm's way.

The Army is simply asking for an opportunity to study an expansion. To deny them this opportunity would be to substitute political pressure for the considered judgment of our military commanders who are charged with training and protecting our troops.

It is unrealistic and irresponsible to think other public lands in Colorado or the West, such as roadless wilderness areas or national parks, could be used as a substitute. No critic of PCMS has come forward with a responsible and specific alternative. The longer distances involved would also make that difficult.

Over 200 soldiers from Fort Carson have died in Iraq and Afghanistan fighting terrorism. The soldiers and commanders at Fort Carson know what it takes to wage war in the 21st century, and they are serious about it. It would truly be a shame if they don't have the proper training facilities so that they can succeed. The Army should at least be given a chance to study the issue and present their findings.

I strongly urge my colleagues to oppose this amendment.

Mrs. MUSGRAVE. Would the gentleman yield?

Mr. WICKER. Mr. Chairman, I yield to the gentlewoman from Colorado (Mrs. MUSGRAVE), but I would express to all of my colleagues, though, that we are receiving calls from people who have made airline plans and are hoping to get back to their districts and to their homes for Father's Day. Mindful of that, I am happy to yield to the gentlelady.

Mrs. MUSGRAVE. Mr. Chairman, I would just like to point out that my son-in-law served in Afghanistan, and I would like to commend Mr. SALAZAR, his father and his son for their service to this great Nation and point out that in the 1970s the land was thought about in the Colorado Springs area in El Paso County, and the landowners there fought it.

And so when anyone would imply that Mr. SALAZAR and I, Mr. Chairman, are responding to political pressure, what we are doing is standing up for private property rights and balancing that with our concern that our soldiers have the proper training.

It is like Mr. SALAZAR said, you oppose it in your own yard, but it is okay for someone else. I am standing up for those ranchers. You might as well cross southeastern Colorado off the map if this expansion goes forward. So I respectfully look at the opinion of my friend from Colorado and I do say, though, that in this country the government owns enough land. There are alternatives to this that would be satisfactory in balancing our support for private property rights and our support for our troops.

Mr. UDALL of Colorado. Mr. Chairman, I support this amendment.

Passage of this amendment will not stop the proposed expansion of the Army's Pinon Canyon Maneuver Site in southeastern Colorado, but it will delay consideration of the Army's plans until two very important questions can be answered: (1) What are the Army's real training needs, and (2) will the Army assure Coloradans that it will not resort to condemnation to acquire land?

Before giving the Army money to take the first steps toward expanding these training grounds, we should be convinced that there is a real military need for the Army to acquire an additional 418,000 acres. I have kept an open mind on this question and that is why, along with the Chairman and Ranking Member of the Readiness Subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee, I have asked the Government Accountability Office to report to Congress on whether this expansion is the right way to meet the Army's training requirements and what other alternatives the Army should consider.

More important, it is abundantly clear to me that there is no support—even among proponents of an expansion—for the Army's use of eminent domain to acquire any land. But so far, the Army has been reluctant to give the State of Colorado and the landowners in the area a commitment that it will not resort to condemnation. For me, that commitment is essential, and unless and until the Army makes clear it will not use condemnation, I believe

Congress should not allow the expansion process to go forward.

The CHAIRMAN. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentlewoman from Colorado (Mrs. MUSGRAVE).

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

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

The CHAIRMAN. Pursuant to clause 6 of rule XVIII, further proceedings on the amendment offered by the gentlewoman from Colorado will be postponed.

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Chairman, I move to strike the last word.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman from Texas is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Chairman, Mr. WICKER and I would not want to cut off any Member from expressing his or her heartfelt views on important issues in this bill, but we would like to bring to the attention of the House and our colleagues that there are a number of colleagues trying to catch airplanes to get back home for Father's Day weekend. There are a number of amendments that are subject to a point of order. I would like to respectfully request Members on those amendments to keep your remarks to 2 minutes. I will reserve my right to exercise a point of order. If we take too much time, we might have to go ahead and exercise those points of order.

If we could proceed ahead expeditiously, I would appreciate that.

AMENDMENT NO. 3 OFFERED BY MR. HALL OF NEW YORK

Mr. HALL of New York. Mr. Chairman, I offer an amendment.

The CHAIRMAN. The Clerk will designate the amendment.

The text of the amendment is as follows:

Amendment No. 3 offered by Mr. HALL of New York:

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

SEC. _____. None of the funds made available in this Act may be used to provide to any officer of the Department of Veterans Affairs who is appointed by the President, and with the consent of the Senate, or to any Deputy Under Secretary or Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs a performance award under section 5384 of title 5, United States Code, or a performance-based cash award under section 4505a of such title.

The CHAIRMAN. Pursuant to the order of the House of today, the gentleman from New York (Mr. HALL) and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New York.

Mr. HALL of New York. Mr. Chairman, my amendment makes a small change to funding at the Department of Veterans Affairs. It would prohibit any funding to be spent for performance bonuses to senior level staff at the Department for fiscal year 2008.

This amendment would effectively mean no person in a Presidential-appointed position or Secretary-level position would receive a performance bonus during the coming fiscal year.

As I begin, let me state that the Department of Veterans Affairs has done a very good job in many areas for our Nation's veterans. In fact, its health care system is rated amongst the very best in the country, and the demand of veterans to get into the system speaks to the high level of care that it provides.

However, there remains a significant need for improvement in many areas. In the last 3 years, the VA has underestimated its health care budget by nearly \$1 billion. It has roughly 600,000 veterans claims backlogged and veterans currently waiting an average of 177 days before receiving a decision on their claim.

Furthermore, according to a draft Inspector General's report, the VA is significantly overstating its success in getting patients timely appointments with VA doctors. The number of claims pending before the Department has steadily increased over the last 5 years. The current wait time is nearly 2 months longer than what Secretary Nicholson suggested in front of our Veterans Affairs Subcommittee would be acceptable to him, which was 125 days rather than the 177 currently being suffered by our veterans. That is nearly a 2-month difference.

The Secretary himself called this "unacceptable." However, the awards for bonuses last year ranged up to and included a number of members of high management at the VA of \$33,000 in annual bonus. Their award bonuses were because of evaluations of outstanding and excellent. In fact, 87 percent of the senior staff were called "outstanding" or "excellent" in performance. One of those who got the \$33,000 bonus had only served in his position from February 2006 until September 2006. So an outstanding performance for 6 months earned that individual a \$33,000 bonus; this at a time when our veterans are waiting 177 days average to have their claims for disability heard. And if they go to an appeal, it is an average of 2 years to wait for that appeal to be heard. This simply makes no sense. It is either unacceptable or it is outstanding, but it can't be both.

I am sure that most of the staff at the Department is dedicated and hard-working and the service they provided in often excellent, but in other areas it is unsatisfactory. Our veterans deserve accountability from the VA. Yet Secretary Nicholson himself has signed off on all of these bonuses, making only one change since 2004.

Veterans in my district and across the country were outraged when The Washington Post and the Army Times broke this story a couple of months ago. The VA Committee and the Subcommittee on Oversight invited Secretary Nicholson to testify this week and explain the bonuses. However, he

decline and decided instead to send a substitute who admitted to knowing very little about the issue.

I understand that the chairman wants to study and best address this issue; and I would prefer that rather than eliminating bonuses altogether that we have them tied to performance, as bonuses should be. So if the chairman agrees, I would like to work with him and other Members on a separate piece of legislation to add accountability to the bonus process to the Department.

As in private industry, bonuses at the VA should be tied to performance, and I believe all of us want to see that happen, want to see the backlog reduced, and want to see our veterans get their claims processed promptly.

Mr. Chairman, I yield to the chairman.

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Chairman, I want to thank Mr. HALL for his strong leadership; first, on trying to see that this Congress, which we are going to do in this bill, provides the funding to reduce the terrible backlog of veterans cases pending. As he mentioned, there are over 400,000-plus veterans waiting for their cases to be considered.

And, secondly, for bringing to the attention of the Congress the problems raised by the bonuses given to a number of VA employees at a time when so many veterans are waiting for their benefits.

I thank the gentleman for agreeing to withdraw the amendment. We have every intention of working with him and the Veterans' Affairs Committee on which he serves as a subcommittee chairman to address the inequities of this situation.

Mr. HALL of New York. Mr. Chairman, with the chairman's agreement, I ask unanimous consent to withdraw the amendment.

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

Mr. BUYER. Mr. Chairman, reserving the right to object, this amendment is either ill-conceived or politically conceived in that the Deputy Secretary is the gentleman who came to the committee to testify, and that was by agreement at the committee.

So to say that the administration sent someone who was uninformed is not a good way to address this to our colleagues.

□ 1530

That was by agreement of the committee, and it was the Deputy Secretary of the VA who came in and who testified, and as a matter of fact, his testimony, that I will share with all my colleagues, is that he testified just last week during the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee hearing on the SEC bonuses, at which the author of this amendment was present and he said, by statute, senior executive presidentially appointed and Senate-confirmed appointees are not eligible for performance bonuses.

Did you hear that? They're not eligible for bonuses. So what we have here is, the gentleman's brought an amendment that is either redundant, multiplicitous or unnecessary.

With that, I withdraw my reservation of objection.

The CHAIRMAN. Without objection, the amendment is withdrawn.

There was no objection.

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Chairman, I move to strike the last word.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman from Texas is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Chairman, I yield to the gentleman from New York (Mr. HALL).

Mr. HALL of New York. Mr. Chairman, thank you for agreeing to allow the amendment to be withdrawn.

For the record, I would like to say that Under Secretary Mansfield, under oath this week at the Subcommittee on Oversight hearing, at least six times answered that he did not know the information and would have to go back and respond in writing. And one of those times specifically had do with an individual who was identified by the Congressional Research Service as being a presidential appointee who is among those receiving bonuses.

So at least in one case that may need to be clarified.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MS. JACKSON-LEE OF TEXAS

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Chairman, I offer an amendment.

The CHAIRMAN. The Clerk will designate the amendment.

The text of the amendment is as follows:

Amendment offered by Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas:

Page 49, after line 11, insert the following new section:

SEC. 409. (a) The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall increase the number of medical centers specializing in post-traumatic stress disorder in underserved urban areas, which shall include using the services of existing health care entities.

(b) At least one of the existing health care institutions used by the Secretary pursuant to subsection (a) shall be—

(1) located in an area defined as a HUBzone (as that term is defined in section 3(p) of the Small Business Act (15 U.S.C. 632(p)) on the basis of one or more qualified census tracts;

(2) located within a State that has sustained more than five percent of the total causalities suffered by the United States Armed Forces in Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom, as May 1, 2007; and

(3) have at least 20 years experience and significant expertise in providing treatment and counseling services with respect to substance abuse, alcohol addiction, and psychiatric or stress-related disorders to populations with special needs, including veterans and members of the Armed Forces serving on active duty.

The CHAIRMAN. Pursuant to the order of the House of today, the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON-LEE) and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Texas.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Chairman, let me offer my appreciation to the full Committee on Appropriations, both the chairman and ranking member, and to this subcommittee. I've seen enormous commitment to bipartisanship between Mr. EDWARDS and, of course, Mr. WICKER. But my good colleague and friend from Texas has outdone himself, and this particular veterans appropriation, the Military Construction Veterans Affairs appropriation, signifies nothing but joy for Americans and veterans all across this country.

Might I just cite the fact that this bill moves above the President's budget in medical services, making it \$28.9 billion; moves above the President's request on homeless vets, \$130 million; moves above the President's request on medical facilities, \$4.1 billion; and moves above it on extended care facilities, \$165 million.

Many of us have risen to the floor today to talk about post-traumatic stress. I just wanted to remind my colleagues of the kind of horror and nightmare that many of our soldiers and returning soldiers and veterans live with, suffering from PTSD. It is simply to acknowledge the fact that over and over again you relive the tragedy of the experience, whether it's small arms fire, whether it's IEDs, whether it's seeing your comrade fall in battle in front of you, whether it's seeing his body implode, you know that you're reliving it, and the number one basis of PTSD is military and combat exposure.

Just for the record, let me acknowledge that 94 percent of the soldiers in Iraq reported receiving small arms fire; 86 percent of soldiers in Iraq reported knowing someone who was seriously injured or killed. This is a major issue and it is a major part of the lives of our soldiers.

Mr. Chairman, my amendment simply was to do this: It was to provide more medical centers in places like rural areas or small cities to be able to be utilized for PTSD. I know Chairman EDWARDS knows this issue because it was his leadership that generated the change of the Waco veterans hospital into a mental health facility. I want that to continue to stand, and I want to thank him for the increased dollars he's put in for PTSD.

But, Mr. Chairman, I have a veterans advisory committee that's indicated that we need centers around the Nation, smaller centers maybe in small hospitals, that would respond to veterans and returning soldiers, maybe even to the extent of reimbursing them by being in those particular centers.

Let me close by simply saying that this bill is comprehensive. I look forward to working with the chairman on more permanent housing for the disabled, as we work toward more PTSD facilities, even though we have a great amount of resources here, more adjusted housing, if you will, for those who are coming back so they're not living alone.

I want to take special privilege to acknowledge the DeGeorge in my community for my homeless vets, a facility for homeless vets, DeGeorge at Union Station and U.S. Vets. All of them confront veterans and returning soldiers with PTSD. If we expand these facilities so that rural and small cities and even inner city areas, which is what my amendment is focused on, everybody would have the opportunity to be able to access help with PTSD.

I would ask my colleagues to consider as we move toward conference to be able to work on this issue in an expanded way.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Chairman, I rise to speak in strong support of the bill and in favor of my amendment. I also rise to express my sincere appreciation to Mr. EDWARDS, the chairman of the Appropriations I subcommittee on Veterans Affairs and Military Construction, and the Chairman of the Veterans Affairs Committee, Mr. FILNER, for all they have done and continue to do to make real President Lincoln's admonition that "we care for him who has borne the battle, and for his widow and orphan."

In particular, I wish to commend Chairman EDWARDS, for the leadership, commitment, and foresight he has demonstrated on the issue of PTSD and the overall mental health of our nation's veterans. On February 28, 2007, he announced that \$3 million has been made available for the Waco VA PTSD program in 2006 which is now available so that researchers at Fort Hood, Texas A&M, Baylor, the Temple VA, and the Waco VA hospital work towards realizing their goal of making the Waco VA, in conjunction with Ft. Hood and the Temple VA, a world-class PTSD and mental health care research center.

Like Mr. EDWARDS and Mr. Filner, I am committed to improving the lives of thousands of veterans who have risked their lives for our nation, and I believe my amendment plays a crucial role in ensuring that veterans suffering from PTSD receive the medical treatment they desperately need.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for this opportunity to explain my amendment to H.R. 2642, the Veterans Affairs and Military Construction Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year of 2008. As a Member of Congress from Texas, a state which has sustained more casualties in the ongoing conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq than all but one other, I am pleased to offer this amendment. This amendment is intended to address the urgent need for more post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) treatment and counseling facilities servicing veterans living in some of the more distressed areas of our country.

Mr. Chairman, according to Webster's, dignity is "the quality or condition of being esteemed, honored or worthy." We can never do enough to honor our wounded veterans. Studies have shown that 30 percent of troops deployed to Iraq suffer from depression, anxiety, or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). However, when wounded troops return home the treatment they receive is more befitting a second class citizen than a hero. This is a shame and a great stain on our nation.

How these problems could be overlooked or neglected by this Administration is unfathomable. The very leaders that these brave young men and women rely on let them

down. The message that incidents like Walter Reed Medical Center sends to our troops is that we do not care enough. But that is not the message we wish to send. The Veterans Administration and Military Construction Appropriations Act of 2008, H.R. 2642, will go long away toward correcting this misapprehension. All members of the House are indebted to our colleague, Mr. EDWARDS of Texas, for his masterful leadership in shepherding this landmark legislation to the House floor. For the 25,380, 2,401 from Texas, brave men and women who have been wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan, help is on the way. And the 3,519, 298 from Texas, heroes who have given the last full measure of devotion will always be in our hearts and prayers.

Mr. Chairman, my amendment requires the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to increase the number of medical facilities specializing in post-traumatic stress disorder located in underserved urban areas. Access to post-traumatic stress disorder treatment is especially important since veterans living in such areas are less likely to be diagnosed and treated for post-traumatic stress disorder.

Mr. Chairman, PTSD is one of the most prevalent and devastating psychological wounds suffered by the brave men and women fighting in far off lands to defend the values and freedom we hold dear.

For those of us whose daily existence is not lived in harm's way, it is difficult to imagine the horrific images that American servicemen and women deployed in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other theaters of war see on a daily basis. In an instant a suicide bomber, an IED, or an insurgent can obliterate your best friend and right in front of your face. Yet, you are trained and expected to continue on with the mission, and you do, even though you may not even have reached your 20th birthday.

But there always comes a reckoning. And it usually comes after stress and trauma of battle is over and you are alone with your thoughts and memories. And the horror of those desperate and dangerous encounters with the enemy and your own mortality come flooding back.

PTSD was first brought to public attention in relation to war veterans, but it can result from a variety of traumatic incidents, such as mugging, rape, torture, being kidnapped or held captive, child abuse, car accidents, train wrecks, plane crashes, bombings, or natural disasters such as floods or earthquakes.

People with PTSD may startle easily, become emotionally numb, especially in relation to people with whom they used to be close, lose interest in things they used to enjoy, have trouble feeling affectionate, be irritable, become more aggressive, or even become violent. They avoid situations that remind them of the original incident, and anniversaries of the incident are often very difficult. PTSD symptoms seem to be worse if the event that triggered them was deliberately initiated by another person, as in a mugging or a kidnapping. Most people with PTSD repeatedly relive the trauma in their thoughts during the day and in nightmares when they sleep. These are called flashbacks. Flashbacks may consist of images, sounds, smells, or feelings, and are often triggered by ordinary occurrences, such as a door slamming or a car backfiring on the street. A person having a flashback may lose touch with reality and believe that the traumatic incident is happening all over again.

Mr. Chairman, the matter is that most veterans with PTSD also have other psychiatric disorders, which are a consequence of PTSD. These veterans have co-occurring disorders, which include depression, alcohol and/or drug abuse problems, panic, and/or other anxiety disorders.

The current conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq are the most continuous combat operations since Vietnam. Only one comprehensive study has examined the mental health impact of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and that was performed by Charles W. Hoge, MD. This study looked at the experience of soldiers in the war zone and symptoms of psychological distress. Soldiers in Iraq are at risk for being killed or wounded themselves, are likely to have witnessed the suffering of others, and may have participated in killing or wounding others as part of combat operations. All of these activities have a demonstrated association with the development of PTSD. Hoge's study indicated that 94 percent of soldiers in Iraq reported receiving small-arms fire. In addition, 86 percent of soldiers in Iraq reported knowing someone who was seriously injured or killed, 68 percent reported seeing dead or seriously injured Americans, and 51 percent reported handling or uncovering human remains. The majority, 77 percent, of soldiers deployed to Iraq reported shooting or directing fire at the enemy, 48 percent reported being responsible for the death of an enemy combatant, and 28 percent reported being responsible for the death of a noncombatant.

My amendment recognizes that these soldiers are first and foremost, human. They carry their experiences with them. Ask a Vietnam Veteran about the frequency of nightmares they experience, and one will realize that serving in the Armed Forces leaves a lasting impression, whether good or bad. My amendment ensures that no soldier is left behind. By directing the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to increase the number of medical facilities specializing in PTSD that are located in underserved urban areas, and conducting a concurrent study on increasing access to PTSD treatment at these facilities those soldiers will never feel forgotten or taken for granted. These soldiers can be certain that Members of Congress will ensure that they receive the necessary treatment to guarantee that their adjustment back into society is a successful one.

As the war in Iraq continues to drag on, and with our country continuing to send military personnel to Afghanistan, the military has been overwhelmed with returning soldiers suffering from mental health problems. Earlier this month, Col. Elspeth Ritchie, psychiatry consultant to the Army surgeon general, stated "as the war has gone on, PTSD and other psychological effects of war have increased. The number of mental health workers that was adequate for a peacetime military is not adequate for a nation that's been at war."

Mr. Chairman, according to surveys conducted of troops in Iraq, 15–20 percent of Army soldiers have demonstrated signs of post-traumatic stress. Symptoms of this serious disorder include nightmares, flashbacks, emotional detachment, dissociation, insomnia, loss of appetite, memory loss, clinical depression, and anxiety. One year after returning from combat, approximately 35 percent of soldiers are seeking some kind of mental health treatment. Among soldiers still stationed in

Iraq and Afghanistan, many incidents of abuse, including killings and rapes by U.S. soldiers, have been attributed to ethics lapses caused by the strain of combat.

Mr. Chairman, last Thursday, the Department of Defense released a report that stated "current efforts fall significantly short" in providing help for troops. Further, this report found that the psychological health needs of America's military service members, their families and their survivors pose a daunting and growing challenge to the Department of Defense.

I urge adoption of my amendment. And I thank the Chairman for his fine work in bringing this exceptional legislation to the House floor where it should receive an overwhelmingly favorable vote.

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Chairman, will the gentlewoman yield?

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. I yield to the gentleman from Texas.

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Chairman, I thank the gentlewoman and particularly want to salute her for her strong support for veterans and, in particular, for PTSD and mental health care studies.

As she knows, this bill has a significant increase in funding, historic increase in funding, for VA medical care, and we have directed in the report of the bill that a significant part of that money should go to PTSD and mental health care services.

So I hope with the funding levels in this bill we will have opportunities to provide the kind of expanded service that the gentlewoman has spoken about so eloquently.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Chairman, I thank the distinguished gentleman, and I ask unanimous consent to withdraw my amendment.

The CHAIRMAN. Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from Texas?

There was no objection.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. UPTON

Mr. UPTON. Mr. Chairman, I offer an amendment.

The CHAIRMAN. The Clerk will designate the amendment.

The text of the amendment is as follows:

Amendment offered by Mr. UPTON:

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

SEC. 409. None of the funds made available in this Act may be used to purchase light bulbs unless the light bulbs have the "ENERGY STAR" designation.

The CHAIRMAN. Pursuant to the order of the House of today, the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. UPTON) and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Michigan.

Mr. UPTON. Mr. Chairman, I first want to thank Chairman EDWARDS and Ranking Member WICKER, Mr. OBEY and others, particularly my coauthor, Ms. HARMAN, on this amendment.

As Congress tackles climate change legislation and examines ways to promote energy efficiency, it is so important that the Federal Government set

a proper example, taking the lead in commonsense conservation measures. Some would say this is an amendment that sets a shining example for the rest of the country.

The Federal Government has to be the world's largest consumer of light bulbs, and with this amendment, we will likely save American taxpayers probably as much as \$100 million.

Why Energy Star light bulbs? Well, current incandescent bulbs on store shelves are obsolete, and they're highly inefficient. In fact, only 10 percent of the energy consumed by each bulb is for light, with 90 percent wasted on unnecessary heat.

Energy Star light bulbs use about 75 percent less energy than the standard incandescent bulbs, as they last as much as 10 times longer. In fact, if every house in the Nation switched to Energy Star bulbs, we would have the potential to annually reduce the emissions equivalent of 80 coal-burning plants each year, saving 65 billion kilowatts.

This amendment will make the Federal Government a shining example of how we can conserve energy, one light bulb at a time.

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

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Chairman, I move to strike the last word.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman from Texas is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Chairman, if my colleagues will excuse the pun, I want to thank the gentleman for enlightening the VA and the DOD on this issue. I'm glad to support this amendment. It is an important issue, and we can set a good example for the country by passing it.

The CHAIRMAN. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. UPTON).

The amendment was agreed to.

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Chairman, I move to strike the last word.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman from Texas is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Chairman, it is now my pleasure to yield to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. ORTIZ), a valued leader on armed services and veterans issues.

Mr. ORTIZ. Mr. Chairman, on behalf of our south Texas veterans, we appreciate the committee's concern regarding access to inpatient and outpatient care for our far south Texas veterans.

Let me say I compliment you, Mr. Chairman, for doing such a great job and for having way down in your heart the care of the veterans that served in many, many wars, not only in Iraq and Afghanistan.

These veterans have to travel upwards of 6 hours each way to receive inpatient care, and many times they have their appointments cancelled. As you know, the VA's currently finalizing a study on options to provide inpatient and outpatient specialty care which will be out this July.

And Mr. Chairman, as you know, this war has resulted in many casualties.

We've had over 46 young men killed in this war. We have lost more, between Chairman HINOJOSA and I, 46 soldiers. In addition, we've had many more soldiers maimed and injured; and what we would like to see, Mr. Chairman, would the committee work with us to move the issue of a veterans hospital in south Texas forward.

Mr. EDWARDS. I thank the chairman for his strong leadership over the years on behalf of the veterans in south Texas.

With that, I'd like to yield to my colleague and close friend, Mr. HINOJOSA.

Mr. HINOJOSA. Mr. Chairman, I rise today in strong support of H.R. 2642, and I also rise on behalf of myself, the Honorable Congressman ORTIZ and the Honorable Congressman CUELLAR and the more than 75 veterans who in the fall of 2005 walked in the hot sun a long, long 250 miles from Edinburg, Texas, to San Antonio to raise the level of awareness of a badly needed veterans hospital in south Texas.

I want to sincerely thank Chairman EDWARDS for your outstanding leadership and for the past support for veterans affairs. I look forward to working with you to accomplish what naysayers have said, that it will never get done.

And finally, I want to emphasize that our south Texas veterans and the south Texas congressional delegation have been fighting for a veterans hospital for more than 20 years. While the VA has a contract for a few hospital beds, those 10 beds are not enough to take care of the more than 75,000 veterans living in the eight county region. Once the VA releases their report next month, will the chairman work with us to address any shortfalls that are identified for inpatient care in south Texas?

Mr. EDWARDS. Reclaiming my time, Mr. Chairman, let me say the answer to that is yes. As a native son of south Texas, as someone who grew up admiring Dr. Hector Garcia, the great World War II veteran who founded the American GI forum as you know, I have always stood in awe of the service of south Texans and Hispanic Americans as well in south Texas to our country in time of war and in time of our greatest need.

While a veterans hospital in south Texas would have to be authorized by the VA authorization committee, if that were to be done, certainly again as a native son of south Texas, it'd be a dream come true for all of us who care about that part of the country to see a hospital built.

The data will have to be there. The report should be a very important one coming in July, but until that report comes, let me just say in the meantime that veterans all across south Texas have benefited from the hard work of Mr. HINOJOSA and our colleague Mr. ORTIZ, and they're getting services today they wouldn't have gotten without your help, and I salute you both for that effort.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. PEARCE

Mr. PEARCE. Mr. Chairman, I offer an amendment.

The CHAIRMAN. The Clerk will designate the amendment.

The text of the amendment is as follows:

Amendment offered by Mr. PEARCE:

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

SEC. _____. None of the funds made available in this Act may be used to reimburse employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs for official travel expenses until the Secretary of Veterans Affairs increases the mileage reimbursement rate payable under section 111 of title 38, United States Code, to individuals traveling to or from a Department facility so that such rate is equal to the rate payable to Federal Government employees traveling on official business in privately-owned vehicles, as prescribed by the Administrator of General Services under section 5707(b) of title 5, United States Code.

The CHAIRMAN. Pursuant to the order of the House of today, the gentleman from New Mexico (Mr. PEARCE) and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

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

The CHAIRMAN. A point of order is reserved.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New Mexico.

Mr. PEARCE. Mr. Chairman, we call our veterans from World War II America's greatest generation but our actions don't always hold water.

I rise today to offer an amendment to the Military Construction-Veterans Affairs appropriations bill which would ensure veterans are appropriately reimbursed for mileage travel to and from medical facilities in New Mexico or large rural States.

Many times people in my county, 305 miles away from Albuquerque one way, are directed to drive to Albuquerque. These people, many are like my father in their 80s, they cannot travel 5½ hours one way. It's unthinkable that we do that. It's unconscionable that we only pay them 11 cents a mile.

From Hobbs to Albuquerque, 305 miles one way, the reimbursement is \$34. I would like to ask anyone in this chamber how they would expect to drive 305 miles for \$34, but even worse, the Veterans' Administration takes a fee when they get there. Approximately \$7.50 of the \$34 is then sacrificed to the VA.

□ 1545

No allowance is made to sleep overnight. No allowance is made for hotel. No allowance is made for any circumstance except turning around and driving another 5½ hours to get back home. We are reimbursing all that driving at 11 cents a mile.

Meanwhile many of us in government jobs, all Federal officials are reimbursed at 48½ cents per mile because that's the going rate. That's the rate that we should be paying, and yet to America's Greatest Generation, we're paying 11 cents a mile.

Now, the director of the service, the Secretary, could change this by regulation, and all people on this House floor agree that it should be changed. Back in March of 2007, March of this year, we passed the Wounded Warrior Act, H.R. 1538, by a vote of 426-0, where we mandated that the Secretary actually do this.

But we also know in Washington that we play games with people, we play games with our veterans. So that bill now is trapped over in the Senate.

What my amendment simply does is say we would like for the Secretary not to pay anyone mileage from this bill, from H.R. 2642, until he remedies the situation with our veterans. Pay them what the mileage costs them to drive. We are mandating that they go that far to the facilities. That's unthinkable, but it's unconscionable that we are paying only 11 cents a mile.

So while we are claiming America's generation, America's World War II veterans, to be our Greatest Generation, let's begin to act with honor and reimburse them the way that we should. My amendment would ensure that.

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

POINT OF ORDER

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Chairman, I rise to make a point of order.

Mr. Chairman, let me just say we all know that 11 cents per mile is inadequate. We need to deal with it. I don't think this amendment is the right way and the right time to do that.

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

The rule states in pertinent part: an amendment to a general appropriation bill shall not be in order if changing an existing law imposes additional duties.

The CHAIRMAN. Does any other Member wish to be heard on the point of order?

Mr. PEARCE. Mr. Chairman, I would say to the chairman that I understand and accept that, but I would point out to the chairman that we have legislated this way through appropriations before, and we'll do it again.

I would simply make the point that the point of order today says we will not do what our seniors and what our veterans deserve for us to do one more time.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back the balance of my time and graciously accept the gentleman's comments in his point of order and thank him for his work on this bill.

The CHAIRMAN. The amendment imposes a legislative condition on the availability of funds, namely, the increasing of a reimbursement rate not required under current law.

As such, the amendment constitutes legislation under clause 2 of rule XXI.

The point of order is sustained.

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Chairman, I move to strike the last word, and I

yield to the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. DONNELLY).

Mr. DONNELLY. Mr. Chairman, I want to commend you on this bill and what a tremendous job your committee has done in producing this. I want to make sure that the Veterans Administration uses the added resources that you have provided to help reduce the disability claims that we have seen getting backlogged. We need to reduce that backlog in the most efficient manner possible.

Mr. Chairman, I strongly support this underlying bill. For the first time in years, Congress is going to provide the kind of resources the VA should have in order to provide the level of health care and customer service that America's veterans have earned through their service.

I command you and the committee for drafting a bill that we can all be proud of and that works for our veterans.

Today, America's disabled veterans must wait an average of almost 6 months for the VA to make a decision on their initial claim. Right now, as we speak, almost half a million veterans have pending claims that have already exceeded that 6-month time period, a period of time, I believe, that is far, far too long.

With hundreds of thousands of returning veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan, we can only expect the demand for services to rise. This is an unacceptable situation, as you well know, Mr. Chairman, and it's a result from two occurrences, insufficient resources at the VA to process claims and a system that fundamentally needs to be improved. We commend you because this bill starts to address the funding issues that we face.

H.R. 2642 provides invaluable new resources to address the VA's deficiencies, including funding for over 1,000 additional claim workers. I want to make sure the VA is doing everything possible in considering every opportunity to use the funds you are using in a wise fashion.

The Government Accountability Office has made eight commonsense recommendations to how it can improve the disability claims process at the VA. This report, most recently reiterated on May 25, is a report that deals with our wounded warriors and how to take care of them better. It has eight strategic ways to fix the disability claims situation.

However, according to the GAO, the VA is not moving on these eight recommendations. I think the Congress should know why the VA is not moving forward with these, and if they do move forward, they should let us know when and how they are going to implement these recommendations. We should require the VA to report back to Congress on what it is doing to implement the GAO recommendations and how they can improve this process.

Mr. Chairman, we are grateful. The veterans of Indiana's Second District

are grateful for the increase in funds, and we ask your help in making sure that the VA uses those funds in a wise way and reduces the disability claims backlog.

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Chairman, reclaiming my time, let me thank Mr. DONNELLY for his leadership and seeing that we did put additional funding in this bill to hire, as he mentioned, over 1,000 new VA case workers, actually over 1,100 VA case workers to reduce that absolutely unacceptable backlog of handling veterans cases.

I also look forward to working with the gentleman in the months ahead to see how we can implement the GAO recommendations, to see we not only have additional money for the VA to reduce that management backlog, but to see that we are putting in place management practices to reduce it even further.

This is not the first time the gentleman has spoken out on behalf of veterans on this problem. I thank him for his continued leadership on this effort.

Mr. DONNELLY. I thank you for your leadership and your wisdom on this issue.

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Chairman, I move to strike the last word.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. EDWARDS. At this time I would like to yield to my colleague and friend, a distinguished veteran who comes to this Congress as the highest ranking enlisted officer to have ever served in Congress, the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. WALZ).

Mr. WALZ of Minnesota. Thank you to the distinguished colleague and gentleman from Texas.

Mr. Chairman, having been a member of our armed services for over 20 years and a member of many of our veterans service organizations for a long time and now as a representative of tens of thousands of veterans, I can assure you that no one has been a bigger supporter and fought harder for veterans than the gentleman from Texas.

It is an honor to stand here as we have crafted, I believe, under his leadership, one of the best pieces of legislation that has ever come through the House. I thank you for that, Mr. Chairman.

Having represented the district of southern Minnesota that includes the Mayo Clinic, the efficiency and quality of care in health care services is of deep concern to me.

One of the areas that I am concerned with, and one that I look forward to working with the chairman and his committee on, is how we figure out how to make sure that VA and the Department of Defense are fully cooperating in the efficient use of their health care resources.

In the past, the VA and the DOD have been encouraged by Congress to do the best they can to make sure they share those resources effectively. Some great examples of successes come out of that. Joint purchasing of pharmaceuticals

has been one of those where we have seen great savings for our Nation, great savings for our veterans.

A year ago, the Government Accountability Office found that the VA and DOD are, indeed, making progress. But they also made some suggestions where they said standards must be developed to measure that performance in order to determine whether they are doing an adequate job of sharing their health care resources.

A year later yet we haven't seen, even though DOD and VA have agreed, we haven't seen them implement some of those recommendations.

Once, again, I applaud the chairman for a great piece of legislation, very thoughtful. I applaud my friends on other side of the aisle for great cooperation, thoughtful care, and an absolute commitment, a moral commitment to taking care of our veterans.

I look forward to working with you on this issue in the future to make sure that we are not only taking care of our veterans at the highest quality standard; we are also safeguarding those precious resources of the American taxpayers to make sure we are not duplicating services when we don't have to and to make sure that we are maximizing our effect.

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Chairman, reclaiming my time. I want to thank the gentleman for his distinguished military service to our country. Veterans of America ought to be grateful to having someone like you with your experience on the VA Committee.

You have taken a leadership position this year. Particularly we look forward to working with you in getting the VA and DOD to work together. There needs to be a seamless transition as someone moves from active duty or is a member of the Guard and Reserves into the VA health care system or the VA benefits system. We know we will have a better system because of your leadership, and we will work with you.

Mr. Chairman, I yield to my colleague and very close friend from Texas (Mr. GENE GREEN) for a unanimous consent request.

(Mr. GENE GREEN of Texas asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. GENE GREEN of Texas. Mr. Chairman, I rise in support of this appropriations bill and thank Chairman OBEY, Chairman EDWARDS, and our ranking members for their work in setting a new standard for funding our veterans program.

Mr. Chairman, I rise today in support of this appropriations bill, and to congratulate Chairman EDWARDS and Ranking Member and Chairman OBEY for their work in crafting this bill that sets a new standard for funding veterans' programs.

For the first time since the veterans' service organizations began producing their independent budget, Congress has met and even exceeded their request in this bill. The bill appropriates a total of \$87.7 billion for veterans' programs, which marks a \$6.7 billion increase in funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs—the largest increase in veterans' health care funding in the 77-year history of the VA.

This level of funding lets veterans, our troops, and their families know this Congress is going to make sure the promises we made to the men and women who fight for our country will be fulfilled, even after they are done with their service. The wait times at VA medical facilities have increased in recent years; the number of veterans has increased and will continue to grow in the coming years as service members return from Iraq and Afghanistan; and unspeakable conditions at Walter Reed uncovered earlier this year all require attention, and this bill ensures there is funding to address these problems.

During a time of war, we need to demonstrate a strong commitment not only to our troops currently serving, but to those who have returned from service and those who fought to defend our country in previous conflicts. I would also like to offer my support for a project request to provide funding for a fire station at Ellington Field, and I hope the chairman will give it strong consideration as projects are funded.

The existing fire station at Ellington field is in a rapidly deteriorating condition and does not meet OSHA or Air Force standards. Roof leaks and lack of insulation result in equipment being destroyed and extremely high operating costs. New firefighting apparatus must be parked outside the station because they will not fit into the truck bays.

This fire station supports all flying operations at Ellington Field including Air National Guard, Army National Guard, U.S. Coast Guard, NASA, and civilian aircraft. Construction of a new fire station at Ellington is critical for the Texas Air National Guard and all units stationed at Ellington Field.

Mr. Chairman, I again applaud the leadership from the chairmen who drafted this bill, and I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting this legislation.

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Chairman, I move to strike the last word.

These will be my last remarks of the day. We have had a lot of debate here over the last 4 hours.

I just want to say that we are facing a historic moment. Never before in the history of this Congress have we voted on the floor of this House to increase veterans health care spending by the level we will in just a few moments.

I want to thank all those who have been part of it. I want to salute Speaker PELOSI for having said we must keep our promises to our veterans. I want to salute Chairman OBEY; Congressman SPRATT, the chairman of the Budget Committee; Mr. FILNER, the chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee; as well as Mr. WICKER and the others who have worked on this in a bipartisan basis.

As the son of a World War II veteran, son of a dad I love greatly for his service to our country, as my mentor was Congressman Olin B. "Tiger" Teague, known as Mr. Veteran in Congress for over 32 years, his service here, what an honor and privilege, and humbling privilege it is to me to work with us here today to pass this historic bill for America's veterans.

We know we can never repay our debt of gratitude, but this bill today will be a great down payment on that debt,

and ultimately it will be a show of respect for those who have sacrificed so much for the American family.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

The CHAIRMAN. Pursuant to clause 6 of rule XVIII, proceedings will now resume on those amendments on which further proceedings were postponed, in the following order:

Amendment by Mr. HAYES of North Carolina.

Amendment by Mr. BLUMENAUER of Oregon.

Amendment No. 17 by Mr. PRICE of Georgia.

Amendment by Mr. MORAN of Kansas.

Amendment No. 1 by Mr. GARRETT of New Jersey.

Amendment by Mrs. MUSGRAVE of Colorado.

The Chair will reduce to 2 minutes the time for any electronic vote after the first vote in this series.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. HAYES

The CHAIRMAN. The unfinished business is the demand for a recorded vote on the amendment offered by the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. HAYES) on which further proceedings were postponed and on which the noes prevailed by voice vote.

The Clerk will redesignate the amendment.

The Clerk redesignated the amendment.

The CHAIRMAN. A recorded vote has been requested. Those in support of the request for a recorded vote will rise and be counted.

POINT OF ORDER

Mr. DICKS. Mr. Chairman, point of order. I don't see a sufficient second, Mr. Chairman. I think we have been going automatically assuming. I see staff people on both sides. I do not see Members.

The CHAIRMAN. Does the gentleman wish to have a quorum call first?

Mr. DICKS. I just want to make sure that everybody sat down and we had the Members stand up.

The CHAIRMAN. A sufficient number having risen, a recorded vote is ordered. Members will record their votes by electronic device.

The vote was taken by electronic device, and there were—ayes 110, noes 304, not voting 23, as follows:

[Roll No. 492]

AYES—110

Alexander	Cantor	Gerlach	Crowley	Kildee	Price (GA)
Arcuri	Carney	Gingrey	Cuellar	Kilpatrick	Price (NC)
Bachus	Chabot	Gohmert	Cummings	Kind	Rahall
Baker	Conaway	Goode	Davis (AL)	King (IA)	Ramstad
Barrett (SC)	Cubin	Goodlatte	Davis (CA)	King (NY)	Rangel
Bartlett (MD)	Culberson	Granger	Davis (IL)	Kirk	Regula
Barton (TX)	Davis, David	Hall (TX)	Davis (KY)	Klein (FL)	Reichert
Bilbray	Davis, Tom	Hastert	Davis, Lincoln	Knollenberg	Renzi
Bishop (UT)	Deal (GA)	Hayes	DeFazio	Kucinich	Reyes
Blackburn	Diaz-Balart, L.	Heller	DeGette	Kuhl (NY)	Reynolds
Blunt	Diaz-Balart, M.	Herger	Delahunt	Lamborn	Rodriguez
Boehner	Donnelly	Hunter	DeLauro	Lampson	Roskam
Bordallo	Drake	Jindal	Dent	Langevin	Ross
Boyda (KS)	Duncan	Johnson (IL)	Dicks	Lantos	Rothman
Brown (SC)	Etheridge	Johnson, Sam	Dingell	Larsen (WA)	Royal-Allard
Brown-Waite, Ginny	Fallin	Jones (NC)	Doggett	Larson (CT)	Royce
Burton (IN)	Fortuño	Jordan	Doolittle	Latham	Ruppersberger
Buyer	Fossella	Keller	Doyle	Lee	Rush
Calvert	Foxx	Kingston	Dreier	Levin	Ryan (OH)
Cannon	Franks (AZ)	Kline (MN)	Edwards	Lewis (CA)	Ryan (WI)
		LaTourette	Ehlers	Lewis (GA)	Salazar

Sánchez, Linda T.	Smith (WA)	Walberg	Pitts	Snyder	Wasserman	Rogers (KY)	Shea-Porter	Turner
Sanchez, Loretta	Snyder	Walden (OR)	Roybal-Allard	Stark	Schultz	Rogers (MI)	Sherman	Udall (CO)
Space	Solis	Walsh (NY)	Sánchez, Linda	Thompson (CA)	Waters	Rohrabacher	Shimkus	Udall (NM)
Saxton	Spratt	Walz (MN)	T.	Tierney	Walman	Ros-Lehtinen	Shuler	Upton
Schakowsky	Stark	Wasserman	Sanchez, Loretta	Velázquez	Weiner	Roskam	Shuster	Van Hollen
Schiff	Stearns	Schultz	Slaughter	Walden (OR)	Welch (VT)	Ross	Simpson	Visclosky
Schmidt	Sutton	Waterson	Smith (WA)	Walsh (NY)	Wu	Rothman	Sires	Walberg
Schwartz	Tanner	Watson				Royce	Skelton	Walz (MN)
Scott (GA)	Tauscher	Waxman				Ruppersberger	Smith (NE)	Wamp
Scott (VA)	Taylor	Weiner	Ackerman	Edwards	LaTourette	Rush	Smith (NJ)	Watson
Sensenbrenner	Thompson (CA)	Welch (VT)	Aderholt	Ehlers	Lee	Ryan (OH)	Smith (TX)	Wat
Serrano	Thompson (MS)	Weldon (FL)	Akin	Ellsworth	Levin	Ryan (WI)	Solis	Weldon (FL)
Sestak	Thornberry	Wexler	Alexander	Emanuel	Lewis (CA)	Salazar	Souder	Weller
Shays	Tiahrt	Wicker	Allen	Emerson	Lewis (KY)	Sali	Space	Wexler
Shea-Porter	Tierney	Wilson (NM)	Altmine	Engel	Linder	Sarbanes	Stearns	Whitfield
Sherman	Towns	Wilson (OH)	Andrews	English (PA)	Lipinski	Schakowsky	Sullivan	Wicker
Shimkus	Udall (CO)	Woolsey	Arcuri	Etheridge	LoBiondo	Schiff	Sutton	Wilson (NM)
Simpson	Udall (NM)	Wu	Baca	Everett	LoBrock	Schmidt	Tanner	Wilson (OH)
Sires	Upton	Wynn	Bachmann	Fallin	Lowey	Schwartz	Tauscher	Wilson (SC)
Skelton	Van Hollen	Yarmuth	Bachus	Fattah	Lucas	Scott (GA)	Taylor	Wolf
Slaughter	Velázquez	Young (FL)	Baker	Ferguson	Lungren, Daniel	Scott (VA)	Terry	Woolsey
Smith (NJ)	Visclosky		Barrett (SC)	Filner	E.	Sensenbrenner	Thompson (MS)	Wynn

NOT VOTING—23

Bonner	Harman	Miller, George	Berkley	Fortenberry	Mahoney (FL)	Bonner	Gutierrez	Paul
Brady (TX)	Hastings (WA)	Paul	Berry	Fortuño	Maloney (NY)	Brady (TX)	Harman	Pickering
Buchanan	Higgins	Pickering	Biggert	Fossella	Marchant	Buchanan	Hastings (WA)	Sessions
Coble	Jones (OH)	Sessions	Bilirakis	Frank (MA)	Markey	Coble	LaHood	Stupak
Davis, Jo Ann	LaHood	Stupak	Bishop (GA)	Franks (AZ)	Marshall	Davis, Jo Ann	Lofgren, Zoe	Tancredo
Eshoo	Lofgren, Zoe	Tancredo	Bishop (NY)	Frelinghuysen	Matheson	Eshoo	McHenry	Westmoreland
Faleomavaaga	McHenry	Westmoreland	Bishop (UT)	Gallegly	McCarthy (CA)	Faleomavaaga	Meehan	Gonzalez
Gutierrez	Meehan		Blackburn	Garrett (NJ)	McCarthy (NY)	Gutierrez	Miller, George	

□ 1622

Messrs. HOBSON, RYAN of Wisconsin, ALTMIRE, ADERHOLT, AKIN, TIAHRT, BOOZMAN, Mrs. McMORRIS RODGERS, and Mrs. BACHMANN changed their vote from "aye" to "no."

Messrs. FOSSELLA, WATT and ROHRABACHER, and Mrs. BOYDA of Kansas changed their vote from "no" to "aye."

So the amendment was rejected.

The result of the vote was announced as above recorded.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. BLUMENAUER

The CHAIRMAN. The unfinished business is the demand for a recorded vote on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. BLUMENAUER) on which further proceedings were postponed and on which the noes prevailed by voice vote.

The Clerk will redesignate the amendment.

The Clerk redesignated the amendment.

RECORDED VOTE

The CHAIRMAN. A recorded vote has been demanded.

A recorded vote was ordered.

The CHAIRMAN. This will be a 2-minute vote.

The vote was taken by electronic device, and there were—ayes 68, noes 347, not voting 22, as follows:

[Roll No. 493]

AYES—68

Abercrombie	Crowley	Inslee	Davis (CA)	Kildee	Price (GA)	Akin	Burgess	Dent
Baird	Davis (IL)	Jackson (IL)	Davis (KY)	Kilpatrick	Price (NC)	Alexander	Burton (IN)	Diaz-Balart, L.
Baldwin	DeFazio	Jackson-Lee	Davis, David	Kind	Pryce (OH)	Altmine	Calvert	Diaz-Balart, M.
Barrow	DeGette	(TX)	Davis, Lincoln	King (IA)	Putnam	Bachmann	Camp (MI)	Dingell
Barton (TX)	Delahunt	Johnson (IL)	Davis, Tom	King (NY)	Radanovich	Baker	Campbell (CA)	Doolittle
Bean	Doggett	Kingston	Deal (GA)	Kirk	Rahall	Barrett (SC)	Cannon	Emerson
Berman	Duncan	Lantos	DeLauro	Klein (FL)	Ramstad	Barrow	Cantor	Fallin
Bilbray	Ellison	Lewis (GA)	Dent	Kline (MN)	Rangel	Bartlett (MD)	Capito	Ferguson
Blumenauer	Farr	Manzullo	Díaz-Balart, L.	Knollenberg	Regula	Bilirakis	Chabot	Gilerson
Brown-Waite, Ginny	Feeney	Matsui	Díaz-Balart, M.	Kucinich	Rehberg	Blackburn	Cole (OK)	Forbes
Campbell (CA)	Foxx	McDermott	Dicks	Kuhl (NY)	Reichert	Blunt	Conaway	Fossett
Capps	Gilchrest	McGovern	Dingell	Lamborn	Reynolds	Bono	Cubin	Fortuno
Cardoza	Gordon	Mitchell	Donnelly	Lampson	Reyes	Bruzman	Culberson	Foxx
Clay	Herseth Sandlin	Moore (WI)	Doolittle	Langevin	Rodriguez	Boren	Davis (KY)	
Cleaver	Hinchey	Napolitano	Doyle	Larsen (WA)	Rogers (AL)	Boswell	Davis, David	
Costa	Honda	Pascarella	Drake	Larson (CT)		Boustany		
	Hooley	Payne	Dreier	Latham				

NOT VOTING—22

Bonner	Gutierrez	Paul
Brady (TX)	Harman	Pickering
Buchanan	Hastings (WA)	Sessions
Coble	LaHood	Stupak
Davis, Jo Ann	Lofgren, Zoe	Tancredo
Eshoo	McHenry	Westmoreland
Faleomavaaga	Meehan	
Gutierrez	Miller, George	

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

The CHAIRMAN (during the vote). Members are advised there are 30 seconds remaining in this vote.

□ 1627

Mr. BILIRAKIS changed his vote from "aye" to "no."

So the amendment was rejected.

The result of the vote was announced as above recorded.

AMENDMENT NO. 17 OFFERED BY MR. PRICE OF GEORGIA

The CHAIRMAN. The unfinished business is the demand for a recorded vote on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. PRICE) on which further proceedings were postponed and on which the noes prevailed by voice vote.

The Clerk will redesignate the amendment.

The Clerk redesignated the amendment.

RECORDED VOTE

The CHAIRMAN. A recorded vote has been demanded.

A recorded vote was ordered.

The CHAIRMAN. This will be a 2-minute vote.

The vote was taken by electronic device, and there were—ayes 154, noes 260, not voting 23, as follows:

[Roll No. 494]

AYES—154

Akin	Burgess	Dent
Alexander	Burton (IN)	Diaz-Balart, L.
Altmine	Calvert	Diaz-Balart, M.
Bachmann	Camp (MI)	Dingell
Baker	Campbell (CA)	Doolittle
Courtney	Cannon	Emerson
Cramer	Neal (MA)	Fallin
Crenshaw	Hulshof	Ferguson
Cubin	Hunter	Gilerson
Cuellar	Inglis (SC)	Forbes
Culberson	Israel	Fossett
Cummings	Obey	Forbes
Davis (AL)	Oberstar	Forbes
Davis (CA)	Price (VA)	Gilerson
Davis (KY)	Ortiz	Forbes
Davis, David	Pallone	Gilerson
Davis, Lincoln	Pastor	Gilerson
Davis, Tom	Pearce	Gilerson
Deal (GA)	Pence	Gilerson
Dingell	Perlmuter	Gilerson
Díaz-Balart, L.	Peterson (MN)	Gilerson
Díaz-Balart, M.	Peterson (PA)	Gilerson
Dicks	Petri	Gilerson
Dingell	Platts	Gilerson
Díaz-Balart, M.	Poe	Gilerson
Dicks	Pomeroy	Gilerson
Díaz-Balart, M.	Porter	Gilerson
Díaz-Balart, M.	Price (GA)	Gilerson
Díaz-Balart, M.	Price (NC)	Gilerson
Díaz-Balart, M.	Pryce (OH)	Gilerson
Díaz-Balart, M.	Putnam	Gilerson
Díaz-Balart, M.	Radanovich	Gilerson
Díaz-Balart, M.	Rahall	Gilerson
Díaz-Balart, M.	Ramstad	Gilerson
Díaz-Balart, M.	Rangel	Gilerson
Díaz-Balart, M.	Rehberg	Gilerson
Díaz-Balart, M.	Reichert	Gilerson
Díaz-Balart, M.	Renzi	Gilerson
Díaz-Balart, M.	Reyes	Gilerson
Díaz-Balart, M.	Rodriguez	Gilerson
Díaz-Balart, M.	Rothman	Gilerson
Díaz-Balart, M.	Rush	Gilerson
Díaz-Balart, M.	Ryan (OH)	Gilerson
Díaz-Balart, M.	Ryan (WI)	Gilerson
Díaz-Balart, M.	Salazar	Gilerson
Díaz-Balart, M.	Sali	Gilerson
Díaz-Balart, M.	Space	Gilerson
Díaz-Balart, M.	Sarbanes	Gilerson
Díaz-Balart, M.	Saxton	Gilerson
Díaz-Balart, M.	Stearns	Gilerson
Díaz-Balart, M.	Whitfield	Gilerson
Díaz-Balart, M.	Wexler	Gilerson
Díaz-Balart, M.	Weller	Gilerson
Díaz-Balart, M.	Wolberg	Gilerson
Díaz-Balart, M.	Walz (MN)	Gilerson
Díaz-Balart, M.	Wamp	Gilerson
Díaz-Balart, M.	Watson	Gilerson
Díaz-Balart, M.	Watson	Gilerson
Díaz-Balart, M.	Watt	Gilerson
Díaz-Balart, M.	Weller	Gilerson
Díaz-Balart, M.	Wexler	Gilerson
Díaz-Balart, M.	Whitfield	Gilerson
Díaz-Balart, M.	Wicker	Gilerson
Díaz-Balart, M.	Wilson (NM)	Gilerson
Díaz-Balart, M.	Wilson (OH)	Gilerson
Díaz-Balart, M.	Wilson (WI)	Gilerson
Díaz-Balart, M.	Wolberg	Gilerson
Díaz-Balart, M.	Young (AK)	Gilerson
Díaz-Balart, M.	Young (FL)	Gilerson
Díaz-Balart, M.	Young (NM)	Gilerson
Díaz-Balart, M.	Young (PA)	Gilerson
Díaz-Balart, M.	Young (WI)	Gilerson
Díaz-Balart, M.	Young (WV)	Gilerson
Díaz-Balart, M.	Young (WY)	Gilerson
Díaz-Balart, M.	Zimmer	Gilerson

Kind	Oberstar	Sherman	DeFazio	Klein (FL)	Pryce (OH)	Mollohan	Ryan (OH)	Tiahrt
Knollenberg	Obey	Sires	Dent	Kline (MN)	Putnam	Moore (KS)	Salazar	Tierney
Langevin	Olver	Slaughter	Diaz-Balart, L.	Kucinich	Rahall	Moore (WI)	Sánchez, Linda	Towns
Lantos	Ortiz	Snyder	Diaz-Balart, M.	Kuhl (NY)	Ramstad	Moran (VA)	T.	Udall (CO)
Larson (CT)	Pallone	Stark	Doolittle	Lamborn	Rangel	Murphy (CT)	Sanchez, Loretta	Udall (NM)
Lee	Pascarella	Sutton	Drake	Lampson	Regula	Murphy, Patrick	Sarbanes	Van Hollen
Levin	Pastor	Tanner	Ehlers	Latham	Rehberg	Murtha	Schakowsky	Velázquez
Lewis (CA)	Payne	Tauscher	Emerson	LaTourette	Reichert	Napolitano	Schiff	Visclosky
Lewis (GA)	Porter	Taylor	English (PA)	Lewis (KY)	Renzi	Neal (MA)	Schwartz	Walden (OR)
Lipinski	Price (NC)	Thompson (MS)	Fallin	Linder	Reynolds	Norton	Scott (GA)	Walsh (NY)
Lowey	Radanovich	Towns	Feehey	Lipinski	Rogers (KY)	Oberstar	Scott (VA)	Walz (MN)
Lynch	Rangel	Udall (NM)	Ferguson	LoBiondo	Rogers (MI)	Obey	Sensenbrenner	Wasserman
Maloney (NY)	Reichert	Forbes	Lucas	Rohrabacher	Olver	Serrano	Shea-Porter	Schultz
Markey	Reyes	Van Hollen	Fortenberry	Lungren, Daniel	Ros-Lehtinen	Ortiz	Sherman	Waters
McCarthy (NY)	Rodriguez	Velázquez	Fortuño	E.	Roskam	Pastor	Sires	Watson
McCullom (MN)	Rothman	Visclosky	Fossella	Mack	Rothman	Payne	Skelton	Watt
McDermott	Royal-Allard	Wasserman	Foxx	Mahoney (FL)	Royce	Perlmutter	Peterson (MN)	Waxman
Meeks (NY)	Rush	Schultz	Franks (AZ)	Manzullo	Ruppertsberger	Pomeroy	Smith (WA)	Weiner
Melancon	Ryan (OH)	Waters	Geflinghuisen	Marchant	Ryan (WI)	Porter	Snyder	Weldon (FL)
Mollohan	Sánchez, Linda	Watson	Gallegly	Marshall	Sali	Price (NC)	Solis	Wicker
Moore (WI)	T.	Wat	Garrett (NJ)	Matheson	Saxton	Radanovich	Spratt	Wilson (OH)
Moran (VA)	Sanchez, Loretta	Waxman	Gerlach	McCaull (TX)	Schmidt	Reyes	Stark	Woolsey
Murtha	Sarbanes	Weiner	Giffords	McCotter	Sestak	Rodriguez	Stearns	Wu
Nadler	Schakowsky	Wicker	Gillibrand	McCrery	Shadegg	Rogers (AL)	Sutton	Wynn
Napolitano	Schiff	Woolsey	Gillmor	McHugh	Shays	Ross	Tauscher	Young (AK)
Neal (MA)	Schwartz	Wu	Gingrey	McIntyre	Shimkus	Royal-Allard	Taylor	Young (FL)
Norton	Serrano	Yarmuth	Gohmert	McKeon	Shuler	Rush	Thompson (CA)	
Nunes	Sestak		Goode	McMorris	Shuster			

NOT VOTING—21

Bonner	Gutierrez	Miller, George	Graves	McNulty	Simpson	Smith (NE)	Bonner	Gutierrez
Brady (TX)	Harman	Paul	Hall (NY)	Melancon	Smith (NJ)	Smith (NJ)	Brady (TX)	Hastings (WA)
Buchanan	Hastings (WA)	Pickering	Hall (TX)	Miller (FL)	Smith (TX)	Souder	Buchanan	LaHood
Coble	LaHood	Sessions	Hayes	Miller (MI)	Space	Sullivan	Coble	Sessions
Davis, Jo Ann	Lofgren, Zoe	Stupak	Hensarling	Miller, Gary	Tanner	Tanner	Davis, Jo Ann	McHenry
Eshoo	McHenry	Tancredo	Herger	Mitchell	Terry	Terry	Eshoo	Meehan
Faleomavaaga	Meehan	Westmoreland	Hill	Moran (KS)	Thompson (MS)	Thompson (MS)	Faleomavaaga	Miller, George
			Hobson	Murphy, Tim				
			Hoekstra	Musgrave				
			Holt	Myrick				
			Hooley	Nadler				
			Hulshof	Neugebauer				
			Hunter	Nunes				
			Inglis (SC)	Pallone				
			Issa	Pascarella				
			Jindal	Pearce				
			Johnson, Sam	Pence				
			Jordan	Peterson (PA)				
			Keller	Petri				
			King (IA)	Pitts				
			King (NY)	Platts				
			Kingston	Poe				
			Kirk	Price (GA)				

NOES—211

Abercrombie	Davis (CA)	Hoyer	Abercrombie	Davis (CA)	Hoyer	Abercrombie	Bilirakis	Brown-Waite,
Ackerman	Davis (IL)	Inslee	Ackerman	Davis (IL)	Inslee	Ackerman	Bishop (GA)	Ginny
Allen	Davis, Tom	Israel	Allen	Davis, Tom	Israel	Allen	Bishop (NY)	Burgess
Baca	DeGette	Jackson (IL)	Baca	DeGette	Jackson (IL)	Baca	Bishop (UT)	Burton (IN)
Bachus	Delahunt	Jackson-Lee	Bachus	Delahunt	Jackson-Lee	Bachus	Blackburn	Butterfield
Baird	DeLauro	(TX)	Baird	DeLauro	(TX)	Baird	Boehner	Calvert
Baldwin	Dicks	Jefferson	Baldwin	Dicks	Jefferson	Baldwin	Bono	Camp (MI)
Bean	Dingell	Johnson (GA)	Bean	Dingell	Johnson (GA)	Bean	Bordallo	Campbell (CA)
Becerra	Doggett	Johnson (IL)	Becerra	Doggett	Johnson (IL)	Becerra	Boren	Cantor
Berkley	Donnelly	Johnson, E. B.	Berkley	Donnelly	Johnson, E. B.	Berkley	Baird	Capito
Berman	Doyle	Jones (NC)	Berman	Doyle	Jones (NC)	Berman	Boswell	Capps
Berry	Dreier	Jones (OH)	Berry	Dreier	Jones (OH)	Berry	Boucher	Cardoza
Biggert	Duncan	Kagen	Biggert	Duncan	Kagen	Biggert	Boustany	Carnahan
Bishop (GA)	Edwards	Kanjorski	Bishop (GA)	Edwards	Kanjorski	Bishop (GA)	Boyd (FL)	Carney
Bishop (NY)	Ellison	Kaptur	Bishop (NY)	Ellison	Kaptur	Bishop (NY)	Boysda (KS)	Carson
Blumenauer	Ellsworth	Kennedy	Blumenauer	Ellsworth	Kennedy	Blumenauer	Braley (IA)	Castle
Bordallo	Emanuel	Kildee	Bordallo	Emanuel	Kildee	Bordallo	Berman	Castor
Boucher	Engel	Kilpatrick	Boucher	Engel	Kilpatrick	Boucher	Brown, Corrine	Chabot
Boyd (FL)	Etheridge	Kind	Boyd (FL)	Etheridge	Kind	Boyd (FL)	Brown, Corrine	
Boysda (KS)	Everett	Knollenberg	Boysda (KS)	Everett	Knollenberg	Boysda (KS)	Brown, Corrine	
Brady (PA)	Farr	Langevin	Brady (PA)	Farr	Langevin	Brady (PA)	Brown, Corrine	
Braley (IA)	Fattah	Lantos	Braley (IA)	Fattah	Lantos	Braley (IA)	Brown, Corrine	
Brown, Corrine	Filner	Larsen (WA)	Brown, Corrine	Filner	Larsen (WA)	Brown, Corrine	Brown, Corrine	
Butterfield	Flake	Larson (CT)	Butterfield	Flake	Larson (CT)	Butterfield	Brown, Corrine	
Capps	Frank (MA)	Lewis (GA)	Capps	Frank (MA)	Lewis (GA)	Capps	Brown, Corrine	
Capuano	Gilchrest	Lewis (GA)	Capuano	Gilchrest	Lewis (GA)	Capuano	Brown, Corrine	
Cardoza	Gonzalez	Lewis (GA)	Cardoza	Gonzalez	Lewis (GA)	Cardoza	Brown, Corrine	
Carnahan	Gordon	Lowey	Carnahan	Gordon	Lowey	Carnahan	Brown, Corrine	
Castor	Green, Al	Loebssack	Castor	Green, Al	Loebssack	Castor	Brown, Corrine	
Chandler	Green, Gene	Lynch	Chandler	Green, Gene	Lynch	Chandler	Brown, Corrine	
Clarke	Hare	Maloney (NY)	Clarke	Hare	Maloney (NY)	Clarke	Brown, Corrine	
Clay	Harman	Markey	Clay	Harman	Markey	Clay	Brown, Corrine	
Cleaver	Hastert	Matsui	Cleaver	Hastert	Matsui	Cleaver	Brown, Corrine	
Clyburn	Hastings (FL)	McCarthy (CA)	Clyburn	Hastings (FL)	McCarthy (CA)	Clyburn	Brown, Corrine	
Cohen	Heller	McCarthy (NY)	Cohen	Heller	McCarthy (NY)	Cohen	Brown, Corrine	
Cooper	Higgs	McDermott	Cooper	Higgs	McDermott	Cooper	Brown, Corrine	
Costello	Costa	McCollum (MN)	Costello	Costa	McCollum (MN)	Costello	Brown, Corrine	
Cubin	Courtney	McGovern	Cubin	Courtney	McGovern	Cubin	Brown, Corrine	
Culberson	Hinchey	McNerney	Culberson	Hinchey	McNerney	Culberson	Brown, Corrine	
Cummings	Hinojosa	Meek (FL)	Cummings	Hinojosa	Meek (FL)	Cummings	Brown, Corrine	
Davis (KY)	Hirono	Meeks (NY)	Davis (KY)	Hirono	Meeks (NY)	Davis (KY)	Brown, Corrine	
Davis (MI)	Hirosho	Michaud	Davis (MI)	Hirosho	Michaud	Davis (MI)	Brown, Corrine	
Davis (CA)	Honda	Miller (NC)	Davis (CA)	Honda	Miller (NC)	Davis (CA)	Brown, Corrine	

NOT VOTING—20

Bonner	Gutierrez	Paul
Brady (TX)	Hastings (WA)	Pickering
Buchanan	LaHood	Sessions
Coble	Lofgren, Zoe	Stupak
Davis, Jo Ann	McHenry	Tancredo
Eshoo	Meehan	Westmoreland

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

The CHAIRMAN (during the vote).
Members have 30 seconds on this vote.

□ 1636

Ms. GIFFORDS changed her vote from "no" to "aye."

The amendment was agreed to.

The result of the vote was announced as above recorded.

AMENDMENT NO. 1 OFFERED BY MR. GARRETT OF NEW JERSEY

The CHAIRMAN. The unfinished business is the demand for a recorded vote on the amendment offered by the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. GARRETT) on which further proceedings were postponed and on which the noes prevailed by voice vote.

The Clerk will redesignate the amendment.

The Clerk redesignated the amendment.

RECORDED VOTE

The CHAIRMAN. A recorded vote has been demanded.

A recorded vote was ordered.

The CHAIRMAN. This will be a 2-minute vote.

The vote was taken by electronic device, and there were—ayes 206, noes 211, not voting 20, as follows:

[Roll No. 496]

AYES—206

Aderholt	Boehner	Capito
Akin	Bono	Carney
Alexander	Boozman	Carson
Altmine	Boren	Carter
Andrews	Boswell	Castle
Arcuri	Boustany	Chabot
Bachmann	Brown (SC)	Cole (OK)
Baker	Brown-Waite,	Conaway
Barrett (SC)	Ginny	Cooper
Barrow	Burgess	Costello
Bartlett (MD)	Burton (IN)	Cubin
Barton (TX)	Buyer	Culberson
Bilbray	Calvert	Cummings
Bilirakis	Camp (MI)	Davis (KY)
Bishop (UT)	Campbell (CA)	Davis, David
Blackburn	Cannon	Davis, Lincoln
Blunt	Cantor	Deal (GA)

The CHAIRMAN. This will be a 2-minute vote.

The vote was taken by electronic device, and there were—ayes 206, noes 211, not voting 20, as follows:

[Roll No. 497]

AYES—383

Abercrombie	Bilirakis	Brown-Waite,
Ackerman	Bishop (GA)	Ginny
Allen	Bishop (NY)	Burgess
Akin	Bishop (UT)	Burton (IN)
Alexander	Blackburn	Butterfield
Altmine	Boehner	Calvert
Andrews	Bono	Camp (MI)
Arcuri	Boozman	Campbell (CA)
Baca	Bordallo	Cannon
Bachmann	Born	Cantor
Baird	Boren	Capito
Baker	Boswell	Capps
Baldwin	Boucher	Cardoza
Bartlett (MD)	Boustany	Carnahan
Bean	Boyd (FL)	Carney
Becerra	Boysda (KS)	Carson
Berkley	Brady (PA)	Carter
Berman	Braley (IA)	Castle
Brown, Corrine	Brown (SC)	Castor
Brown, Corrine	Brown, Corrine	Chabot

Chandler	Hoekstra	Musgrave	Van Hollen	Watson	Wilson (OH)	Wilson (SC)
Christensen	Holden	Myrick	Velázquez	Watt	Wolf	
Clarke	Holt	Nadler	Walberg	Waxman	Woolsey	
Clay	Honda	Napolitano	Walden (OR)	Weiner	Wu	
Cleaver	Hooley	Neal (MA)	Walsh (NY)	Welch (VT)	Weldon (FL)	Yarmuth
Clyburn	Hoyer	Neugebauer	Walz (MN)	Weller	Wynn	Young (AK)
Cohen	Hulshof	Norton	Wamp	Wexler	Whitfield	
Cole (OK)	Hunter	Nunes	Wasserman	Schultz		
Conaway	Inglis (SC)	Oberstar		Waters	Wilson (NM)	
Conyers	Inslee	Obey				
Cooper	Israel	Olver				
Costa	Issa	Ortiz				
Costello	Jackson (IL)	Pallone	Bachus	Higgins	Sestak	
Courtney	Jackson-Lee	Pastor	Barrett (SC)	Johnson (IL)	Shimkus	
Cramer	(TX)	Payne	Barrow	Lamborn	Skelton	
Crowley	Jefferson	Pearce	Barton (TX)	Lewis (CA)	Smith (WA)	
Cubin	Jindal	Pence	Biggert	Lungren, Daniel	Taylor	
Cuellar	Johnson (GA)	Perlmutter	Blumenauer	E.	Thompson (MS)	
Culberson	Johnson, E. B.	Peterson (MN)	Capuano	Lynch	Tiberi	
Cummings	Johnson, Sam	Peterson (PA)	Crenshaw	Marshall	Visclosky	
Davis (AL)	Jones (NC)	Petri	Dicks	Pascarella	Wicker	
Davis (CA)	Jones (OH)	Pitts	Edwards	Putnam	Young (FL)	
Davis (IL)	Jordan	Platts	Emanuel	Sánchez, Linda		
Davis (KY)	Kagen	Poe	Frelinghuysen	T.		
Davis, David	Kanjorski	Pomeroy	Hastert	Sanchez, Loretta		
Davis, Lincoln	Kaptur	Porter				
Davis, Tom	Keller	Price (GA)				
Deal (GA)	Kennedy	Price (NC)	Bonner	Gutierrez	Paul	
DeFazio	Kildee	Pryce (OH)	Brady (TX)	Hastings (WA)	Pickering	
DeGette	Kilpatrick	Radanovich	Buchanan	LaHood	Sessions	
Delahunt	Kind	Rahall	Coble	Lofgren, Zoe	Stupak	
DeLauro	King (IA)	Ramstad	Davis, Jo Ann	McHenry	Tancredo	
Dent	King (NY)	Rangel	Eshoo	Meehan	Westmoreland	
Diaz-Balart, L.	Kirk	Regula	Faleomavaega	Miller, George		
Diaz-Balart, M.	Kingston	Rehberg				
Dingell	Klein (FL)	Reichert				
Doggett	Kline (MN)	Renzi				
Donnelly	Knollenberg	Reyes				
Doolittle	Kucinich	Reynolds				
Doyle	Kuhl (NY)	Rodriguez				
Drake	Lampson	Rogers (AL)				
Dreier	Langevin	Rogers (KY)				
Duncan	Lantos	Rogers (MI)				
Ehlers	Larsen (WA)	Rohrabacher				
Ellison	Larson (CT)	Ros-Lehtinen				
Ellsworth	Latham	Roskam				
Emerson	LaTourette	Ross				
Engel	Lee	Rothman				
English (PA)	Levin	Royer-Allard				
Etheridge	Lewis (GA)	Royce				
Everett	Lewis (KY)	Ruppersberger				
Fallin	Linder	Rush				
Farr	Lipinski	Saxton				
Fattah	LoBiondo	Ryan (OH)				
Feeney	Loebsack	Ryan (WI)				
Ferguson	Lowey	Salazar				
Filner	Lucas	Sali				
Flake	Mack	Sarbanes				
Forbes	Mahoney (FL)	Schakowsky				
Fortenberry	Maloney (NY)	Schiff				
Fortuno	Manzullo	Schmidt				
Fossella	Marchant	Schwartz				
Foxx	Markey	Scott (GA)				
Frank (MA)	Matheson	Scott (VA)				
Franks (AZ)	Matsui	Sensenbrenner				
Galligly	McCarthy (CA)	Serrano				
Garrett (NJ)	McCarthy (NY)	Shadegg				
Gerlach	McCaul (TX)	Shays				
Giffords	McCullum (MN)	Shea-Porter				
Gilchrest	McCotter	Sherman				
Gillibrand	McCrery	Shuler				
Gillmor	McDermott	Shuster				
Gingrey	McGovern	Simpson				
Gohmert	McHugh	Sires				
Gonzalez	McIntyre	Slaughter				
Goode	McKeon	Smith (NE)				
Goodlatte	McMorris	Smith (NJ)				
Gordon	Rodgers	Smith (TX)				
Granger	McNerney	Snyder				
Graves	McNulty	Solis				
Green, Al	Meek (FL)	Souder				
Green, Gene	Meeks (NY)	Space				
Grijalva	Melancon	Spratt				
Hall (NY)	Mica	Stark				
Hall (TX)	Michaud	Stearns				
Hare	Miller (FL)	Sullivan				
Harman	Miller (MI)	Sutton				
Hastings (FL)	Miller (NC)	Tanner				
Hayes	Miller, Gary	Tauscher				
Heller	Mitchell	Terry				
Hensarling	Mollohan	Thompson (CA)				
Herger	Moore (KS)	Thornberry				
Herseth Sandlin	Moore (WI)	Tiahrt				
Hill	Moran (KS)	Tierney				
Hinchey	Moran (VA)	Towns				
Hinojosa	Murphy (CT)	Turner				
Hirono	Murphy, Patrick	Udall (CO)				
Hobson	Murphy, Tim	Udall (NM)				
Hodes	Murtha	Upton				

NOES—34

NOT VOTING—20

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN
The CHAIRMAN (during the vote).
There are 30 seconds remaining.

□ 1645

Mr. MILLER of North Carolina changed his vote from "no" to "aye."

So the amendment was agreed to.

The result of the vote was announced as above recorded.

The Acting CHAIRMAN. The Clerk will read.

The Clerk read as follows:

This Act may be cited as the "Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Act, 2008".

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Chairman, I move that the Committee do now rise and report the bill back to the House with sundry amendments, with the recommendation that the amendments be agreed to and that the bill, as amended, do pass.

The motion was agreed to.

Accordingly, the Committee rose; and the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. WEINER) having assumed the chair, Mr. LYNCH, Chairman of the Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union, reported that that Committee, having had under consideration the bill (H.R. 2642) making appropriations for military construction, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2008, and for other purposes, pursuant to the previous order of the House by unanimous consent, he reported the bill back to the House with sundry amendments adopted in the Committee of the Whole, with the recommendation that the amendments be agreed to and that the bill, as amended, do pass.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the rule, the previous question is ordered.

Is a separate vote demanded on any amendment reported from the Committee of the Whole? If not, the Chair will put them en gros.

The amendments were agreed to.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the engrossment and third reading of the bill.

The bill was ordered to be engrossed and read a third time, and was read the third time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the passage of the bill.

Under clause 10 of rule XX, the yeas and nays are ordered.

This will be a 5-minute vote.

The vote was taken by electronic device, and there were—yeas 409, nays 2, not voting 21, as follows:

[Roll No. 498]

YEAS—409

Abercrombie	Costa	Harman
Ackerman	Costello	Hastert
Aderholt	Courtney	Hastings (FL)
Akin	Cramer	Hayes
Alexander	Crenshaw	Heller
Brady (TX)	Hastings (WA)	DeFazio
Buchanan	LaHood	DeGette
Coble	Lofgren, Zoe	Delahunt
Davis, Jo Ann	McHenry	Dent
Eshoo	Meehan	Berman
Faleomavaega	Miller, George	Berry
		Bartlett (MD)
		Barton (TX)
		Bean
		Becerra
		Berkley
		Berman
		Berry
		Biggert
		Bilbray
		Bilirakis
		Bishop (GA)
		Bishop (NY)
		Bishop (UT)
		Blackburn
		Blumenauer
		Blunt
		Boehner
		Bono
		Boozman
		Boren
		Boswell
		Boucher
		Boustany
		Boyd (FL)
		Boyd (KS)
		Braley (IA)
		Brown (SC)
		Brown, Corrine
		Brown-Waite,
		Ginny
		Burgess
		Burton (IN)
		Butterfield
		Buyer
		Calvert
		Camp (MI)
		Cannon
		Cantor
		Capito
		Capps
		Capuano
		Cardoza
		Carnahan
		Carney
		Carson
		Castle
		Castor
		Chabot
		Chandler
		Clarke
		Clay
		Cleaver
		Clyburn
		Green, Al
		Cohen
		Cole (OK)
		Conaway
		Conyers
		Cooper
		Gerlach
		Giffords
		Larsen (WA)
		Lamborn
		Lathan
		LaTourette
		Lampson
		Lantos
		King (IA)
		King (NY)
		Flake
		Kingston
		Kirk
		Forbes
		Butterfield
		Fortenberry
		Fossella
		Knollenberg
		Lamborn
		Lathan
		LaTourette
		Lampson
		Lantos
		Lathan
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		LaTourette
		Lampson
		Lantos
		Lathan
		Kingston
		Kirk
		Forbes
		Butterfield
		Fortenberry

Mack	Peterson (PA)	Slaughter
Mahoney (FL)	Petri	Smith (NE)
Maloney (NY)	Pitts	Smith (NJ)
Manzullo	Platts	Smith (TX)
Marchant	Poe	Smith (WA)
Markey	Pomeroy	Snyder
Marshall	Porter	Solis
Matheson	Price (GA)	Souder
Matsui	Price (NC)	Space
McCarthy (CA)	Pryce (OH)	Spratt
McCarthy (NY)	Putnam	Stark
McCaul (TX)	Radanovich	Stearns
McCullom (MN)	Rahall	Sullivan
McCotter	Ramstad	Sutton
McCrary	Rangel	Tanner
McDermott	Regula	Tauscher
McGovern	Rehberg	Taylor
McHugh	Reichert	Terry
McIntyre	Renzi	Thompson (CA)
McKeon	Reyes	Thompson (MS)
McMorris	Reynolds	Thornberry
Rodgers	Rodriguez	Tiaht
McNerney	Rogers (AL)	Tiberi
McNulty	Rogers (KY)	Tierney
Meek (FL)	Rogers (MI)	Towns
Meeks (NY)	Rohrabacher	Turner
Melancon	Ros-Lehtinen	Udall (CO)
Mica	Roskam	Udall (NM)
Michaud	Ross	Upton
Miller (FL)	Rothman	Van Hollen
Miller (MI)	Royal-Allard	Velázquez
Miller (NC)	Royce	Walberg
Miller, Gary	Ruppersberger	Walden (OR)
Mitchell	Rush	Walsh (NY)
Mollohan	Ryan (OH)	Walz (MN)
Moore (KS)	Ryan (WI)	Wamp
Moore (VA)	Salazar	Wasserman
Moran (KS)	Sali	Schultz
Moran (VA)	Sánchez, Linda T.	Waters
Murphy (CT)	Sanchez, Loretta	Watson
Murphy, Patrick	Sarbanes	Watson
Murphy, Tim	Saxton	Watt
Murtha	Schakowsky	Waxman
Musgrave	Schiff	Weiner
Myrick	Schmidt	Welch (VT)
Nadler	Schwartz	Weldon (FL)
Napolitano	Neal (MA)	Weller
Neugebauer	Neugebauer	Wexler
Nunes	Sensenbrenner	Whitfield
Oberstar	Serrano	Wicker
Obey	Sestak	Wilson (NM)
Olver	Shadegg	Wilson (OH)
Ortiz	Shays	Wilson (SC)
Pallone	Shea-Porter	Wolf
Pascarella	Sherman	Woolsey
Pastor	Shimkus	Wu
Payne	Shuler	Wynn
Pearce	Shuster	Yarmuth
Pence	Simpson	Young (AK)
Perlman	Sires	Young (FL)
Peterson (MN)	Skelton	Young (FL)

NAYS—2

Campbell (CA)

Feeney

NOT VOTING—21

Bonner	Gutierrez	Miller, George
Brady (TX)	Hastings (WA)	Paul
Buchanan	Kilpatrick	Pickering
Coble	LaHood	Sessions
Davis, Jo Ann	Lofgren, Zoe	Stupak
Diaz-Balart, L.	McHenry	Tancredo
Eshoo	Meehan	Westmoreland

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (during the vote). Members are advised 2 minutes remain in this vote.

□ 1653

So the bill was passed.

The result of the vote was announced as above recorded.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

Stated for:

Mr. COBLE. Mr. Speaker, I was detained and not present on the House Floor when the final vote for passage of H.R. 2642—Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations was taken. Had I been present I would have voted "yea."

LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM

(Mr. BLUNT asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. BLUNT. Mr. Speaker, I take this time for the purpose of inquiring about next week's schedule. I yield to my good friend, the majority leader, for information about the schedule next week. In light of the agreement we reached this week, any sense you could give us at all about the remaining 10 appropriations bills would be helpful.

Mr. HOYER. Mr. Speaker, I hope my recitation of the schedule for next week is a little more accurate than my recitation of the schedule last week, which had a little bit of a problem getting done.

In any event, my distinguished friend, on Monday the House will meet at 12:30 p.m. for morning hour business and then at 2 p.m. for legislative business. We will consider several bills under suspension of the rules. A complete list of those bills will be announced later today.

On Tuesday, the House will meet at 9 a.m. for morning hour business and 10 a.m. for legislative business. On Wednesday and Thursday, the House will meet at 10 a.m., and on Friday the House will meet at 9 a.m. We will consider the following fiscal year 2008 appropriations bills: Energy and Water Development; State, Foreign Operations; and the Legislative Branch bill.

In addition to that, in the week following, I am waiting for it to be written up for me, but I know Financial Services we hope to have up on the last week of the session; the Commerce, Justice, Science bill and the Interior bill in the last week; and then in July, the week we get back, which is the second full week of July, we expect to have the Labor-Health bill, the Agriculture bill and the Transportation-HUD bill.

In addition, after that, we will have the Defense appropriations bill as we had always planned to have that, approximately mid-July.

I want to tell my friend that obviously the three bills that are scheduled for the second week in July may slip to the third week in July because of the difficulty of getting together all of the projects that will be added to the bills as a result of Members' initiatives and the committee's action. But whether it is the second week in July or the third week in July, they will be in mid-July sometime.

Mr. BLUNT. I appreciate that. I would ask my friend, on the Energy and Water bill that we expect to do next week, it is my understanding we will come back at a later time and finish that bill, once time has been adequate to allow projects that would have otherwise gone in at some time even later than House passage.

Mr. HOYER. If the gentleman will yield further, yes, the Energy and Water bill, again because of the numbers of projects in Members' districts that are very important to them and, I

think, to the country, but will take time to vet properly to make sure that they are justified and to check with the agency, those projects are going to be added after we consider the Energy and Water bill, which is scheduled for next week.

But before the Energy and Water bill is sent to the Senate, we will have those add-ons added to another appropriation bill that will come to the floor and will be, therefore, subject to Members' actions on each and every one of the legislatively added provisions. When that bill passes, those provisions will then be added to the Energy and Water bill and then, and only then, sent to the Senate.

Mr. BLUNT. I thank my friend for that.

I would also ask, this was covered extensively last night, but just to verify this one more time as we look at the schedule for these appropriations bills and for next week, on Monday of next week, we intend under unanimous consent to reinstate the rule that we had at the end of the last Congress that would provide for a point of order on any projects that are put in a conference report that we hadn't had an opportunity to see prior to that. That would happen on Monday?

Mr. HOYER. If the gentleman will yield further, let me be precise.

Mr. BLUNT. I will be glad to yield, and I am not trying to be unusually prescriptive in describing that.

Mr. HOYER. Let me be precise so there won't be any misunderstanding. I am not sure, but I think your rule dealt with more than appropriations conference reports. I may not be correct on that.

But in any event, the rule that will be offered Monday night, hopefully by unanimous consent, will be a rule that will say that a point of order will lie to a conference report from the appropriations conference which has added a project that was not listed in either the House consideration or the Senate consideration, and that point of order would have 10 minutes of debate on either side, 10 minutes for those in opposition to allowing the conference committee report to be considered, and 10 minutes for the proponents of the conference committee report being considered, effectively adding a third to the hour.

□ 1700

So it would be an hour and 20 minutes of debate rather than just an hour.

Obviously if the point of order is sustained, then the conference committee with the add-on or add-ons would be referred back to the conference committee.

Mr. BLUNT. That is the way I understand it, my friend, and our agreement at this point is for these appropriations bills, although in our rule last year we also extended that to authorizing bills. As you know, we don't want to continue that discussion, but the agreement we made this week, the majority