

That is why counseling, someone talking to Joshua, one of his peers who has been through the same thing who may have then gone on to become a police officer could say: You can get mental health help. You can get the necessary treatment, and you can still become a police officer.

Well, while we delay and fail to act, we are losing more and more veterans to suicide. As I said, the VA plan was written 3 years ago, and they are still not implementing it.

The PTSD program treatment at Walter Reed accepts only 65 patients each year. Yet more than 45,000 veterans sought medical help for post-traumatic stress disorder in the first 3 months of 2007; Walter Reed accepts 65 a year.

The VA must be better equipped to deal with veterans who are in crisis. With this bill, we can ensure that the VA will provide comprehensive and critical services, even when the issue is not in the headlines because of some tragedy. We need to hold the VA accountable.

As I said, even their own inspector general said they were not living up to it, our GAO said they were not. We need to make it clear that preventing suicide among our veterans is a congressional and national priority. For our veterans who have served their country, fought for our country, many times they are being left to fight their own private mental health life wars alone, private wars they too often lose.

I urge the objecting Senator to reexamine this important bill, reconsider his objection. Lives are at stake. We need to move forward with the Joshua Omvig Veterans Suicide Prevention Act as quickly as possible.

I yield the floor.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION AND VETERANS AFFAIRS APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2008—Continued

Mr. REID. Mr. President, what is the matter now before the Senate?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. H.R. 2642, the Military Construction Appropriations Act.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, Senator REED is in the Chamber or at least in the building. He and Senator KAY BAILEY HUTCHISON have been wanting to move this bill.

I indicated, and the distinguished Republican leader agreed with me this morning, we need to move this legislation.

If there are no amendments that are going to be offered, we should move to third reading. If there are amendments that are going to be offered, I would hope someone would notify the cloakroom immediately, Democratic or Republican cloakroom, and we will certainly be as considerate to them as necessary.

But unless something happens pretty soon, I think we should move to third reading. If there are amendments, the two managers of the bill are happy to

deal with those amendments. We are going to finish this bill tonight. I would hope on this bill I do not have to file cloture, on Military Construction and Veterans. I do not think that would be appropriate.

But if there are no amendments and simply people let us return to final passage of this, I have no alternative. It would send a terribly bad message. Both the distinguished Republican leader and I think we should move forward. I hope we can. We are going to finish the bill tonight or I will file cloture on it tonight.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. (Mrs. McCASKILL). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. SALAZAR. Madam President, I rise today to speak in support of H.R. 2642, an act making appropriations for military construction, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2008.

Let me say at the outset, the leadership of this committee has done a tremendous job in bringing forward legislation that hopefully will receive the strong bipartisan support of this body. I am especially thankful for the great work of Senator JACK REED and Senator KAY BAILEY HUTCHISON and Senator TIM JOHNSON and his staff for having moved forward in developing a package that, at the end of the day here, will hopefully receive the support of most of the Members of this Chamber.

This legislation is important for us as we move forward to try to make sure we are doing everything we can for a strong America. This is important for us, for our military, for our men and women in uniform, and for our veterans. It is essential legislation which we must pass and which we all hope the President will sign into law.

With respect to military construction, the bill provides \$8.9 billion-plus for our Active-Duty construction efforts and \$929 million for the National Guard and Reserve construction. This includes key projects around the country for the Army National Guard. This is a significant improvement over what the President requested for the National Guard. It will be part of making sure we have a strong military for America.

Second, the legislation fully funds the 2005 recommendations of the BRAC, the Base Realignment and Closure Account. That BRAC recommendation which was approved by this Senate and by the Congress now 2 years ago is an important document that charts the way forward for the American military. This legislation

will fully fund the recommendations of that legislation.

Third, with respect to Veterans Affairs, I am proud that this legislation will provide \$87.5 billion for the VA. That is an increase of almost \$3.6 billion over what the President requested. That increase will go to veterans health care and make sure our PTSD and mental health issues and TBI issues that we are seeing in great numbers as we are involved in the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan—that we are providing the right kind of care to our veterans.

I am appreciative of the national issues that are embraced in this legislation that will allow the funding to move forward and to make those projects a reality.

I wish to comment on a few provisions in this legislation that are important to my State of Colorado. I must say, as we worked on these matters over the years, it has been my honor to work closely with Senator ALLARD as we worked on important projects for our veterans and for our military in my State.

I wish to mention the Fitzsimons VA Hospital. There is \$61 million in this legislation for Fitzsimons. Today in Colorado, the VA hospital in Denver is in very rough, shoddy condition. Our veterans deserve better. Over the last decade, there has been an effort in Colorado to try to establish a VA hospital that can become one of the crown jewels of our national health care. We are fortunate today that, under the leadership of MAJ Andy Lobb and others, we have found a site at what is the old Fitzsimons Army hospital which has been turned over to the city of Aurora and to an authority that is rehabilitating that site. At that site today, we have already located the health facilities and hospitals for the University of Colorado. We are about ready to open a brand-new children's hospital at this center. The VA hospital is the next move in the creation of what is going to be a crown jewel for health care and for biotech in the Rocky Mountain West. The Fitzsimons VA Hospital is very much a part of that program, but at its core it is making sure we in America are standing up and giving to the veterans of our country the health care services they deserve.

Next, Fort Carson. Fort Carson is a very important military installation in my State and helps us protect our Nation. Many of the men and women who serve and have trained at Fort Carson are now serving in Iraq and in Afghanistan. There is \$470 million in military construction funds for Fort Carson. That amount of money will accommodate the arrival of an additional 12,000 Active-Duty and 18,360 Active-Duty family members who are currently moving to Fort Carson. I am very proud of the inclusion of that amount of money in this legislation because it will allow us to warmly welcome the soldiers who are coming to Fort Carson, as well as their families, with the kinds of facilities they deserve.

Schriever Air Force Base is part of our national defense. As I say, Colorado is blessed to be the crown jewel of the Nation's homeland defense and national security. We do that through many of our military installations, including Schriever Air Force Base. It is part of the air and space integration program. It is the place where we have our Air Force Space Command. It will receive \$24.5 million for construction of the facilities that are needed there.

The U.S. Air Force Academy, located since the 1950s in El Paso County in Colorado Springs, is one of our Nation's premier institutes in training the future military leaders of our country. It is an installation of which I am very proud. This legislation includes \$15 million for upgrades to the academic facilities at the U.S. Air Force Academy.

The National Guard and Reserves station at Buckley Air Force Base in Aurora, CO, is an important part of the Army installations in our State. This legislation will add \$7.3 million to replace the outdated squadron operations facility that houses the F-16s of the 140th Air Wing of the Colorado National Guard.

This is important legislation, and I am proud to be a supporter of this legislation.

We also will be speaking at a later time this afternoon or this evening on several other amendments I want to bring forth which are important amendments to the future of the State of Colorado but also very important to the future of our Nation's military and assuring that our military has the appropriate training facilities. We will be speaking to an amendment I will be calling up in short order.

Mr. President, I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SANDERS). The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MENENDEZ). Without objection, it is so ordered.

AMENDMENT NO. 2686

Mr. DEMINT. Mr. President, I have an amendment I would like of offer, but since I do not see a manager here, I will explain the amendment first and then ask that the amendment be brought up as soon as I finish my comments.

The amendment I will offer will strike an earmark from this bill that takes \$4 billion intended for America's veterans and transfers it to the well-to-do citizens of Beverly Hills, CA. It is remarkable that we are even considering a veterans bill that contains an earmark for a facility on Wilshire Boulevard—the main street through Beverly Hills—a site barely 3 miles from the ritzy shops of Rodeo Drive.

This earmark prevents the Veterans Administration from taking highly val-

uable land in one of America's most lucrative real estate markets and putting it to work for our veterans. It would require that 200-plus acres in the middle of Beverly Hills that could be better used to generate revenue to care for America's veterans to sit empty.

The earmark completely undermines the results of over 3 years of study performed by nonpartisan, independent experts. It also undermines the authority of the Veterans' Administration to best help veterans around the country, not just those in the Beverly Hills area. The language on page 44 of the Senate substitute prohibits the Veterans' Administration from taking any action to:

exchange, trade, auction, transfer, or otherwise dispose of, or reduce the acreage of, Federal land and improvements at the Department of Veterans Affairs West Los Angeles Medical Center, California, encompassing approximately 388 acres on the north and south sides of Wilshire Boulevard and west of the 405 Freeway.

The Veterans' Administration estimates that reuse of this land would result in approximately \$4 billion in savings—that is \$450 per square foot for 205 acres—that would go directly to the Veterans' Administration for future construction since the receipts are deposited into Veterans' Administration accounts under its enhanced-use lease authority. We should note that the Veterans' Administration's enhanced-use lease authority specifically allows the Veterans' Administration to lease land and retain receipts from the lease.

In addition, the Veterans' Administration can place an option to buy in the lease, whereby the property can be sold shortly after commencement of the lease, allowing the Veterans' Administration to retain the sale proceeds. This process was used in 2005 to sell property in downtown Chicago and the Veterans' Administration realized \$50 million in proceeds. All can be used to better the health care of veterans.

As important, this prohibition that is written into this earmark would result in voiding the Capital Assessment Realignment for Enhanced Services process, known as CARES, which has been agreed to by Congress and the administration. Much like BRAC, one exception could undermine the entire process that was based on veterans' needs and not on earmarked interests.

CARES is a systemwide process to put the Veterans' Administration's infrastructure to the best use for the current and future health care needs of veterans. This process was completed in May of 2004, and approved on a bipartisan basis by Congress and the administration. All medical construction budget requests since the completion of the study have complied with CARES recommendations and passed by Congress; that is, until today, if this bill passes.

The study identified 18 sites which called for downsizing or disposal but which were naturally very controversial. Consequently, it was decided each

of these sites needed "further study and analysis." Some of these studies have been completed, and realignment has begun, but the West Los Angeles study is still in process.

The White House recently weighed in against this earmark, saying in its Statement of Administration Policy:

The Administration strongly opposes the earmark provision that prohibits the disposal or transfer of property at the 388-acre West Los Angeles Medical Center. This language circumvents the recommendations in VA's nationwide infrastructure study, the Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services (CARES). The original decision on this property would have allowed VA to designate a portion of the campus for disposal or leasing . . . it is likely that the restrictive Senate language would eliminate more than \$4 billion of revenue, which would be used to improve facilities around the country for our Nation's veterans.

The central concerns of those opposed to the reuse of portions of the 388-acre facility seems to be that it will result in large commercial development. However, in the statement of work for the West L.A. project, the Veterans' Administration has included the following:

Because of a commitment made by a previous Secretary of Veterans Affairs, certain reuses of the property for commercial purposes were not considered in this study. In this context, the term "commercial" [includes] . . . uses such as shopping malls, movie theaters, convenience stores, fast food outlets, industrial/manufacturing activities, and other like operations. . . .

So the Veterans' Administration is listening to the community and is considering their concerns.

In August of 2005, the Veterans' Administration issued an interim report, describing several options available for reuse of the land, but a final decision is still pending, and there is not yet a timetable as to when a decision will be made.

Two public hearings—in May and September of 2005—have taken place, and one is taking place tomorrow night at the VA Center in West L.A. We should let the process we put in place run its course and not overrule the recommendations of independent experts and the Department of Veterans Affairs who are looking out for the needs of America's veterans.

If every Member of this body were to begin blocking modernization of the VA system every time a well-connected constituent in their State complains, America's veterans would be saddled with outdated infrastructure and their health care needs would not be met.

I wish to put this earmark in perspective because it would be the most wasteful and questionable earmark we have seen since the infamous "bridge to nowhere." The "bridge to nowhere" was extremely troubling, but at its heart was only an egregious waste of taxpayer dollars. This earmark, sadly, is much worse. It takes money—\$4 billion of money—which would be used to care for the brave men and women who fought for our country and turns it over to build a park for Beverly Hills.

We should all be able to agree that a community with an average household income of \$125,000 a year has a sufficient tax base to build a park and does not need a \$4 billion handout from the Federal Government. The men and women who wore America's uniform need the money a lot more than the men and women who live in this part of L.A.

In fact, the Los Angeles Times editorialized on this situation recently, citing "the compelling demands for park space" in Beverly Hills as the best use of \$4 billion. I disagree with the L.A. Times, as I often do, that \$4 billion that belongs to veterans should stay with the Veterans' Administration.

Let me repeat, according to the judgment of the L.A. Times, the best use of \$4 billion is a public park between Beverly Hills and Sunset Beach. This defies common sense, and we should all disagree with it.

My amendment is very simple. It would strike this language from the bill and preserve the VA's ability to make changes at this property that could generate over \$4 billion for our Nation's veterans, as well as create a better facility that better serves the health care needs of our veterans. It would also preserve the integrity of the VA's process for realigning its infrastructure to meet the current and future health care needs of veterans and ensure that decisions are made according to the needs of our veterans, instead of the local desires of America's most rich and famous citizens.

I encourage my colleagues to support my amendment.

Mr. President, I would like to move that we set aside the pending amendment and that my amendment be sent to the desk and called up.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. WEBB). No amendment is pending.

Mr. DEMINT. Then, Mr. President, I send my amendment to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from South Carolina [Mr. DEMINT] proposes an amendment numbered 2686.

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

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

The amendment is as follows:

(Purpose: To strike section 225, relating to a prohibition on the disposal of Department of Veterans Affairs lands and improvements at West Los Angeles Medical Center, California)

Beginning on page 44, strike line 20 and all that follows through page 45, line 23.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. CANTWELL). The Senator from California is recognized.

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Madam President, I come to the floor to oppose the amendment just presented by Senator DEMINT. I worked very hard to get a provision in the military construction bill regarding this major piece of veterans property in the center of Los Angeles. I want to begin by thanking Senator REED and Senator KAY BAILEY HUTCHISON for agreeing to put this legislation in the Military Construction bill. This is 388 acres—388 acres—in the middle of Los Angeles. It is bisected by Wilshire Boulevard. It is near Santa Monica Boulevard. It is a large piece of property, and on that property is a 1,000-bed veterans hospital.

The property was deeded in 1888 following the Civil War by two families to the Federal Government to be used specifically and permanently as an Old Soldiers' Home for the use of veterans. As many Members know, California has the largest number of veterans in America—over 2 million—and over 300,000 veterans are enrolled to use the facilities in this State of which this facility is prime. At the time, as the population of disabled and elderly veterans grew following the end of the Civil War, the Government decided to respond by establishing a number of national homes throughout the United States.

In March of 1888, Senator John P. Jones and Arcadia B. de Baker donated their Santa Monica ranch lands in southern California to establish the Pacific branch of the National Homes for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers.

The deed reads very specifically:

That whereas by an act of Congress approved March 2, 1887 to provide for the location and erection of a branch home for the disabled volunteer soldiers west of the Rocky Mountains, the Board of Managers of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers were authorized, empowered, and directed to locate, establish, construct, and permanently maintain a branch of said National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers.

The sole purpose outlined in the original deed was affirmed in 2002 by then Veterans Affairs Secretary Anthony Principi when he visited the site and again when he issued a May 2004 decision regarding plans for the modernization of VA facilities elsewhere.

What has happened is the administration sees this land dedicated to veterans and says: Aha, there is a higher and better use for this land. We can make \$4 billion if we lease out the unbuilt-upon parts of this land. That is what they have done under the radar screen. They have leased out to an automobile rental agency. They have leased out to a Fox movie lot. This is veterans land. This is land that was deeded to veterans to be used by veterans, not to be used by Fox movies, not to be used by automobile rentals. The administration admits if they do this, they can raise \$4 billion in com-

mercial rentals from this land, thereby taking this hospital, now in its park-like setting, and encrusting it with high rise buildings along Wilshire Boulevard.

Well, let me tell my colleagues what has happened. The veterans community has risen up in Los Angeles and said: We are the largest veterans community anywhere in the Nation. You are taking land deeded to us. You are going to lease it, rent it in any way you can for this higher and best use, which is high-rise construction, and they don't like it. The neighbors don't like it. The city doesn't like it. The Board of Supervisors doesn't like it. Yesterday, the L.A. Times editorialized against it.

So this amendment is not an amendment just concocted out of my brain. This is an amendment that has been worked on for a long time, with Members of the House who represent this area and with the Military Construction Subcommittee of Appropriations. We want to preserve the integrity of the land that was originally granted for use as an Old Soldiers' Home for veterans purposes in this new modern-day era and do it in a way where we have access to the largest number of veterans anywhere in the United States.

I find it shocking that the Department of Veterans Affairs went ahead and leased parts of this land. The VA continues to this day film production on the property. It recently allowed Fox Studios to construct a set storage building there.

In 1996, a 65,000-seat NFL football stadium was proposed for the open space on the west L.A. VA until Congress stepped in and passed a resolution to prohibit the action. Once again, I have asked Congress to step in and prohibit the commercialization of this site. It should be used for veterans purposes.

So when I was in Los Angeles in August, I met with former Mayor Dick Riordan and Eli Broad to discuss various options. No decisions were made, but they have a vision for this. The important thing is that it not be commercialized; that for the financial problems of the administration, they shouldn't commercialize this land. They shouldn't sell it to the highest bidder. They shouldn't go for the highest and best use. They shouldn't build high-rise construction. I will tell my colleagues, if it happens, there will be an uprising from the neighbors in the area because this land is right off of the 405 freeway, and congestion and difficulties will result. I find it rather a crass gesture to take veterans land that is dedicated to veterans, that has a large hospital, 1,000 beds in it, that serves tens of thousands of enrolled veterans—no other city serves so many veterans—and go ahead and commercialize this site.

So what this does is stops that commercialization of the site. The California delegation is united, whether it is in the Senate or whether it is in the House. I can give my colleagues two

pages—and I will give my colleagues some of them—of people supporting this legislation: the County of Los Angeles; the City of Los Angeles; Zev Yaroslavsky, chairman of the County Board of Supervisors; Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa; Representatives HENRY WAXMAN, BERMAN, HARMAN, and SHERMAN; City Council members, every one of them; State Senator Kuehl; Assemblyman Feuer, Assemblywoman Bass, Assemblywoman Brownlee; Santa Monica mayor; Santa Monica council; AMVETS Post 2; AMVETS Post 116; American Legion Post 123; VFW Post 875; Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 446; the Bel-Air Association; the Beverly Glen Association; Blair House; the Brentwood Community Council; and on and on—the Coalition for Veterans Land; the Federation of Hillside and Canyon Associations; Friends of Westwood; the Pacific Palisades. It is virtually all of west L.A. that is saying: Don't sell this land for commercial use.

What the Department has announced is that they intend to make \$4 billion by selling this land. You and I know what is going to go on this land: commercial, office, high-rises because that is what you get the money from. It would be a travesty.

One of the things we now know is that traumatic brain injury is a major injury from this war. We need to build on veterans facilities, not take their land away.

So I would say, Senator DEMINT, take back this motion. It is the wrong thing to do. Administration, I know you have a statement saying you oppose the amendment, but the city of Los Angeles, the county of Los Angeles is united.

So, Madam President, I move to table the amendment, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Madam President, it is just an interesting note that the man who gave this land, the 300-plus acres, to veterans was a United States Senator at the time, John P. Jones. He actually was a Republican from the State of Nevada, and he served 30 years in the Senate, from 1873 to 1903. So he was a 50-percent owner of this land, and it was a wonderful gift to the veterans. I think it should not be destroyed. Thank you.

I note the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Madam President, I withdraw my motion to table at this time because I know Senator BOXER is coming to the floor and wishes to address this question, and Senator DEMINT may wish to also respond, and I will remain and propose the motion at a later time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The motion is withdrawn.

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. I note the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mrs. BOXER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mrs. BOXER. Madam President, I have come over to the floor, and I am a little out of breath because this amendment was somewhat of a surprise to me, although Senator FEINSTEIN was a little worried about it possibly coming. I am sorry Senator DEMINT isn't on the floor at this moment because I would like to look him in the eye and tell him that his amendment is misguided. It does damage to the veterans of this country and the faith they put in us.

As Senator FEINSTEIN eloquently stated, and just reiterated to me, the individual who gave this land for the veterans happened to be a Republican from Nevada who wanted to make a commitment to our veterans. So here we have a circumstance that is so bizarre because this amendment that Senator FEINSTEIN wrote, which Senator DEMINT is trying to pull out of the bill, and is now in the bill, is a very wise one. It is one that keeps faith with the veterans of this country at a time when they deserve that support.

In some ways, I say to my colleagues, we have battled many times on this floor for California and for the environment and for women's rights and all the rest. But I remember when another administration at another time tried to sell the Presidio army base for billions of dollars, when the people were promised it would be a park and it was written in legislation that it would be a park. That administration said we could get billions of dollars. But the fact is that certain things you cannot put a price on because, in the long run, it is the wrong thing to do. In the long run, it is wrong in this case to harm our veterans.

Now, here we have this land. As Senator FEINSTEIN has explained to my colleagues, it is in the middle of Los Angeles. Land is a precious commodity in Los Angeles. We have a huge number of veterans who need services in Los Angeles—maybe the highest concentration of veterans in the country. I would have to check that out, but I would not be surprised; it is certainly one of the highest concentrations. Here we are in the middle of a war and we all know the horrors our soldiers are facing. We

know there are great unmet needs in the Veterans' Administration all over this country, and certainly in California. For example, we didn't even have a burn unit in California and this war has brought so many problems with serious burns.

We finally were able to accommodate some beds in San Diego for that purpose. We finally were able to accommodate some of those who have lost their limbs because they were not able to get the services in California.

This, I say to my friend, Senator DEMINT of South Carolina, is not the time, not the place, not the moment to say to our veterans: You are not important; it is more important to have a rental car agency here or a movie studio here. This is not the time to tell that to our veterans. They are sacrificing.

We may have to have a women's clinic there someday. We may want to expand services for homeless veterans. Those of us who have lived through the Vietnam era know that homelessness followed our veterans. And still when you go on the streets of our cities, whether it is San Francisco, Los Angeles, or anywhere else, you will find a third to 45 percent of our veterans are from that era. They are Vietnam-era veterans who are homeless and struggling.

We may need to have job training centers for these returning veterans. Posttraumatic stress—my senior Senator made the point that we are now learning the depth of the problems we have. Is this the time to take this land away from the veterans? It is outrageous, and it is wrong.

Senator FEINSTEIN has absolutely done the right thing in this bill. I praise all of her colleagues on the committee. I wrote to Mr. Nicholson about this issue several months ago saying: Why are you doing this? I will ask to place that letter in the RECORD in a moment.

Senator FEINSTEIN is right not only for our community in southern California but for the veterans throughout this country.

I sent a letter on June 6, 2007, on this subject to the Honorable James Nicholson, Department of Veterans Affairs. I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD the letter I sent to Secretary Nicholson.

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

U.S. SENATE,
HART SENATE OFFICE BUILDING,
Washington, DC, June 6, 2007.
Hon. R. JAMES NICHOLSON,
Department of Veterans Affairs,
Washington, DC.

DEAR SECRETARY NICHOLSON: I am writing to you regarding the development of the West Los Angeles VA property and to urge you to ensure that its land and facilities are used by and for the veterans of the Los Angeles area.

I believe that two important facts should serve as the overriding guidelines for the discussion about the West LA VA property.

First, as has been pointed out many times, this property is veterans' property—given to veterans, to be used by veterans—and should not in any way be viewed as excess property to be sold, leased, or used for other purposes. I oppose the use of an Enhanced Use Lease for any project at the West LA VA. It is for this reason that I fully support Congressman Waxman's and Senator Feinstein's legislative efforts to preserve the land for veterans' use.

The second important fact is that at least one million veterans reside within a 50 mile radius of the West LA VA property, more than in 42 other states combined. When we consider that this number continues to grow and that the recent additions to the veterans rolls are sometimes severely disabled, more services rather than fewer services will be needed over time. Additionally, a remarkable number of the homeless population of the area are veterans, many of whom suffer from substance abuse or mental health problems. In Los Angeles County alone, it is estimated that at least 18,000 veterans are without shelter or a place to live. A broad range of services are desperately needed for them.

As the master plan for this property is developed, many people are looking to the Department of Veterans Affairs to use this property to support veterans and their needs. The veterans of the Los Angeles area benefit greatly from the services offered there now, and it is crucial that with the increasing numbers of returning veterans it remain a facility fully committed to serving them—they deserve nothing less.

Sincerely,

BARBARA BOXER,
U.S. Senator.

Mrs. BOXER. Madam President, I talked about the fact that at least a million veterans reside within a 50-mile radius of the west Los Angeles VA property, more than in 42 other States combined. When we consider that this number continues to grow, this is clearly the wrong thing to do.

Let me say that what my colleague has done in this bill is in concert with everyone in our area. I don't think she or I would walk in and offer an amendment that was a direct blow to a community in South Carolina. We would never do that. That would not be the right thing to do.

The community is opposed to what Mr. DEMINT wants to have happen. Local government, many veterans from the mayor's office, to the city council, to the board of supervisors, to the full congressional delegation, there is enormous support for the provision that Senator FEINSTEIN has placed in this bill. Dozens of local veterans groups are in support of her provision.

I am going to read some of these supporters because I want to give a sense to my colleagues that they should stick with us on this issue because Senator FEINSTEIN's language that she got placed in this bill is strongly supported.

I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD the entire list.

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

County of Los Angeles; City of Los Angeles; Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky, Chairman, Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors; Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa

Representative Henry Waxman; Blair House; Brentwood Community Council; Brentwood Homeowners Association; Cahuenga Pass Neighborhood Association; Citizens for Veterans Rights; Coalition of Homeowner Associations-Council District 5; Coalition for Veterans Land; Federation of Hillside and Canyon Associations; Friends of Westwood; Holmby Hills Homeowners Association; Holmby Westwood Property Owners Association; Mandeville Canyon Association; Pacific Palisades Chamber of Commerce; Pacific Palisades Community Council; Pacific Palisades Residents Association.

Roscomare Valley Association; Santa Monica Canyon Civic Association; Save Westwood Village; St. Paul the Apostle Catholic Parish; Sullivan Canyon Homeowners Association; Representative Howard Berman; Representative Jane Harman; Representative Brad Sherman; L.A. City Council President Eric Garcetti; L.A. City Council Member Jack Weiss; L.A. City Council Member Bill Rosendahl; State Senator Sheila Kuehl; Assemblyman Mike Feuer; Assemblywoman Karen Bass; Assemblywoman Julia Brownlee; Santa Monica Mayor Richard Bloom; Santa Monica Councilman Bobby Shriver; Former Los Angeles Mayor Richard Riordan; Former Assemblywoman Fran Pavley; AMVETS Post 2; AMVETS Post 116.

American Legion Post 123; VFW Post 875; Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 446; Bel-Air Association; Beverly Glen Association; Tract 7260 Homeowners Association; West L.A. Chamber of Commerce; West L.A. Neighborhood Council; West of Westwood Homeowners Association; Westside Neighborhood Council; Veterans Park Conservancy; Westwood Gardens Civic Association; Westwood Hills Property Owners Association; Westwood Homeowners Association; Westwood South of Santa Monica Homeowners Association.

Mrs. BOXER. Madam President, I will name a few. The County of Los Angeles, the city of Los Angeles, Representative WAXMAN, and every other Representative from that area; HOWARD BERMAN, HARMAN, SHERMAN, the L.A. City Council president, State Senator Sheila Kuehl, all those local folks, former Los Angeles Mayor Riordan, AMVETS Post 2, AMVETS Post 116, American Legion Post 123, VFW Post 875, Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 446, and then a slew of homeowners associations, including the Coalition of Homeowner Associations Council District 5, the Coalition for Veterans Land, Friends of Westwood, and it goes on and on.

Then we have the religious community: St. Paul the Apostle Catholic parish. We have the chamber of commerce. We have the neighborhood council. It just goes on. The park conservancy, the civic association. The administration is wrong to take this action.

Senator FEINSTEIN is right. She mentioned colleagues on the committee who were very helpful to her. It is very important to note that she moved in a very bipartisan way.

In conclusion, I thank my colleague, Senator FEINSTEIN, for withdrawing her motion to table to give me this opportunity to express myself because I think what she did was so important, and certainly she spoke for both of us when she did it.

I hope she will make this motion to table at the appropriate time, and we

can table this amendment and send a message tonight to the veterans across this country that we stand with them.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. REED. Madam President, I join Senator FEINSTEIN and Senator BOXER in their efforts to preserve this property in west Los Angeles as a VA facility and not turn it over to developers. This is commensurate with the deed that originally granted this property to the United States back in 1888. The deed reads as follows:

Whereas, by an act of Congress approved March 2, 1887, to provide for the location and erection of a branch home for the disabled volunteer soldiers west of the Rocky Mountains, the board of managers of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers are authorized, empowered, and directed to locate, establish, construct and permanently maintain a branch of said National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers.

The purpose of this donation and the purpose that has been preserved over these many years has been to provide a place where veterans can be hospitalized, and it has become part of not only the Veterans' Administration system, it has become part of the culture of the community of Los Angeles.

The purpose of the original deed has been reaffirmed numerous times. It was reaffirmed in 2002 by then-VA Secretary Anthony Principi when he visited the site and when he issued a May 2004 decision regarding plans for the modernization of VA facilities nationwide. In fact, a document released by the VA previewing the September 6, 2005, Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services—the CARES process—of the local advisory panel meeting regarding the west L.A. VA site states the following:

It is important that the VA preserve the integrity of the land originally granted for use as an old Soldier's home.

And that is the purpose of the language included in the appropriations bill by Senator FEINSTEIN.

The CARES process was akin to the BRAC process used for the military, going around and looking at the uses of all the Veterans' Administration facilities around the country and concluding what is the best and highest purpose.

It is terribly important that the conclusion of this panel, very recently, is that it is important that the VA preserve the integrity of the land originally granted for use as an Old Soldiers' Home. That is what Senator FEINSTEIN proposes to do, and it would be undercut by the amendment of Senator DEMINT.

I join Senator FEINSTEIN and Senator BOXER as they are trying not only to preserve the integrity of this land but also to preserve the integrity of the community of west Los Angeles.

I had occasion to drive by this area, and I will stand corrected by the local geographic experts, but it is a place of open space and tranquility in a very large metropolitan area. So it is a value beyond the VA system; it is a

value to the community of Los Angeles. That is why there is a huge number of supporters of this initiative by Senator FEINSTEIN and Senator BOXER: the County of Los Angeles, the city of Los Angeles, Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky, chairman of the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, Representative WAXMAN, our colleagues in the House—all these individuals are standing shoulder to shoulder on this issue. This is consistent with the original donation of the land. It is consistent with the evaluation of the Veterans' Administration as to how they should use the land, and it is consistent with the community of Los Angeles.

I applaud and commend the Senators from California for their efforts.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from California.

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Madam President, I particularly thank Chairman REED for putting this provision in the bill. I am very grateful. I am also very grateful for his defense of it today.

I thank my friend and colleague, Senator BOXER, for her help on the floor, for her support, and for her continuous advocacy on behalf of California.

The bottom line is, would you sell the National Mall for profit? Would you sell Roosevelt Island for profit? Would you sell any part of the federal highway system for profit? Why would you take land that has been dedicated for veterans purposes and lease it out for profit when we know, as Senator BOXER said, we have thousands of homeless veterans, and right now there is a proposal moving forward to possibly build some homeless units for veterans on that facility?

This land was deeded to the Federal Government, a huge amount of land, for the purpose of veterans, not for Fox movie studios, not for Enterprise, or whatever car rental agency, but for veterans in a city with the largest number of veterans in the United States, and over 322,000 veterans enrolled to use that facility, with a hospital of 1,000 beds on that facility. You are going to begin to lease out that land?

I think it is terrible, just terrible. The next step would be the National Mall. We ought to resist this effort. There are a lot of ways to make money, but I think the worst way is to make money off veterans at this point in time.

I very much resist this amendment. I join with my friend and colleague, Senator BOXER, in resisting the amendment. I join with the committee chairman in resisting this amendment. I join with the ranking member of the committee in resisting this amendment. I hope there will be a very strong vote.

Madam President, I ask for the yeas and nays, and I move to table the amendment.

Once again, I will withdraw my motion to table for the greater good of

getting a unanimous consent agreement, I hope.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. REED. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the following be the only first-degree amendments remaining in order to H.R. 2642, that they be subject to second-degree amendments which are relevant to the amendment to which it is offered, that no other amendments be in order: Feingold amendment No. 2661, Obama amendment No. 2658, McCaskill amendment No. 2660, Hutchison amendment No. 2681, Coleman amendment relating to conventions, Sanders amendment No. 2664, Tester amendment No. 2669, Salazar amendment No. 2662, Murray amendment No. 2677, Landrieu amendment No. 2679, Stabenow amendment No. 2680, Stevens/Inouye amendment No. 2682, Allard amendment relating to VA land transfer in Denver, the pending DeMint amendment, and the Brown amendment No. 2673; that when the Senate resumes consideration of the bill on Thursday, the only amendments remaining for disposition be No. 2664, No. 2662, No. 2673, and the Coleman amendment relating to conventions, and passage, with no further debate or motions in order except for debate specified in an order related to the vote sequence; that upon disposition of all amendments, the bill be read a third time and the Senate proceed to vote on passage of the bill; that upon passage, the Senate insist on its amendment, request a conference with the House on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses and the Chair be authorized to appoint conferees, with the previous order relating to points of order remaining in effect with respect to this bill; that upon disposition of H.R. 2642, the Senate then proceed to the consideration of Calendar No. 265, H.R. 2764, the State, Foreign Operations Appropriations Act.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. LOTT. Reserving the right to object, if I can inquire for clarification, what this really means, then, is that we will have one vote tonight on the pending DeMint issue, and the other remaining four amendments and final passage would occur without other intervening business tomorrow morning; is that correct?

Mr. REED. That is correct.

Mr. LOTT. Thank you very much. That is basically what you just read.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from California.

Mr. LOTT. And for the sake of one other issue under my reservation, I would like to ask that a quorum be put

in place, just temporarily. So I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection to the quorum call?

Hearing no objection, it is so ordered. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mrs. HUTCHISON. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Is there objection to the unanimous consent request?

Mrs. HUTCHISON. I ask that one additional amendment be added to the list to be voted on tomorrow, Thursday. It would be the McConnell amendment No. 2666.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection? Is there objection to the request to modify?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from California is recognized.

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Madam President, I move to table amendment No. 2642, the DeMint amendment. If I might correct that, it is 2686, the DeMint amendment.

I move to table and I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There is a sufficient second.

The question is on agreeing to the motion. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Delaware (Mr. BIDEN), the Senator from New York (Mrs. CLINTON), the Senator from Connecticut (Mr. DODD), the Senator from Arkansas (Mrs. LINCOLN), and the Senator from Illinois (Mr. OBAMA) are necessarily absent.

Mr. LOTT. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Kansas (Mr. BROWNBACK), the Senator from Idaho (Mr. CRAIG), the Senator from South Carolina (Mr. GRAHAM), and the Senator from Arizona (Mr. McCAIN).

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

The result was announced—yeas 66, nays 25, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 312 Leg.]

YEAS—66

Akaka	Dole	Lieberman
Alexander	Domenici	Lott
Baucus	Dorgan	Martinez
Bayh	Durbin	McCaskill
Bingaman	Feinstein	Menendez
Bond	Gregg	Mikulski
Boxer	Harkin	Murkowski
Brown	Hutchison	Murray
Byrd	Inouye	Nelson (FL)
Cantwell	Isakson	Nelson (NE)
Cardin	Johnson	Pryor
Carper	Kennedy	Reed
Casey	Kerry	Reid
Cochran	Klobuchar	Roberts
Coleman	Kohl	Rockefeller
Collins	Landrieu	Salazar
Conrad	Lautenberg	Sanders
Corker	Leahy	Schumer
Cornyn	Levin	Smith

Snowe	Stevens	Webb
Specter	Tester	Whitehouse
Stabenow	Warner	Wyden
NAYS—25		
Allard	Ensign	McConnell
Barrasso	Enzi	Sessions
Bennett	Feingold	Shelby
Bunning	Grassley	Sununu
Burr	Hagel	Thune
Chambliss	Hatch	Vitter
Coburn	Inhofe	Voinovich
Crapo	Kyl	
DeMint	Lugar	
NOT VOTING—9		
Biden	Craig	Lincoln
Brownback	Dodd	McCain
Clinton	Graham	Obama

The motion was agreed to.

Mr. REED. Mr. President, I move to reconsider the vote, and lay that motion on the table.

The motion to lay on the table was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia is recognized.

Mr. CHAMBLISS. Mr. President, I rise to first of all say I am sure I am going to be supporting this underlying bill; military construction is such a critical component of our overall defense programs. But there is a collateral issue I would like to address for a minute. I, first of all, ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD an article from the Moody Air Force Base newspaper from February 1 of this year.

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

[From the Air Force Print News Today, Feb. 1, 2007]

MOODY OPENS DOORS TO NEW HOUSING

(By Tech. Sgt. Parker Gyokeres)

MOODY AIR FORCE BASE, GA.—Team Moody celebrated the completion of the first new single family housing units with a ribbon cutting ceremony Jan. 31, at the new Magnolia Grove Housing area.

The \$52 million project provides 383 three and four-bedroom homes in Magnolia Grove, each with no less than 1,630 square feet of space.

Dignitaries attending the ribbon cutting ceremony included Maj. Gen. Del Eulberg, Air Force Civil Engineer, Col. Joe Callahan, 23rd Wing commander, and leadership from American Eagle Communities LLC.

"This is a big day for the Airmen and families of Team Moody," said Colonel Callahan. "The Magnolia Grove homes are the nicest base housing units I have ever seen in the 31 years I have been living in base housing. Moody Family Housing has created a community that any Airman would be proud to live in." Moody Family Housing is a 50-year, joint public-private partnership between American Eagle Communities and the U.S. Air Force.

"The partnership is intended to improve standards of living for current and future base housing residents," said Louis Screws, 23rd Civil Engineer Squadron housing flight chief.

The homes are fully owned and maintained by American Eagle under rules agreed to in the project's transaction documents.

"The Air Force benefits because they receive quality new housing without the up-front money a military construction contract requires," said Mr. Screws. "American Eagle can use private sector financing and private resources to build these homes faster, better and more economically using local codes and standards."

The units are built with an all-metal framing system that arrives partially assembled in a kit for a single home. It takes only four days for a team of eight workers to frame an entire house, said Rich Safranic, Moody Family Housing quality assurance director.

By using all-metal construction, the materials are less expensive to transport, stronger than wood, will not burn and can be recycled easily, said Mr. Safranic.

American Eagle plans to use this construction technique for every home in Magnolia Grove, and with an average of five homes a week arriving at the site, every time-saving measure is essential, added the quality assurance inspector.

Moody Family Housing expects to hand over an average of one house a day to Air Force inspectors for certification, said Naomi Hendricks, Moody Family Housing project director. The construction on Magnolia Grove housing is scheduled to be completed this December.

The first residents of Magnolia Grove will be the 94 families currently residing in the "Courts" townhouses of the Quiet Pines housing area. These units are scheduled to be demolished as the residents are relocated. MFH will then use the land for new senior leadership housing, said Mr. Screws.

American Eagle purchased 700 acres of peanut farmland along the southern edge of Moody. There will be 383 single-family units built on 150 acres of this property. The American Eagle Communities has permanently donated approximately 200 acres to the Banks Lake Wildlife Refuge Area. The remaining 350 acres are being set aside for future base-housing growth.

"We are the first major installation to accomplish the goal of creating a new community using a privatized partnership like this," said Lowell Klepper, 23rd CES deputy base civil engineer. "Moody has been working towards this point for more than 20 years."

Mr. CHAMBLISS. I note for the record that after 4 years of work on a housing privatization contract and the millions spent, exactly two houses have been built. This article talks about a celebration at Moody Air Force base upon the completion of these two homes. The problem is, neither one of these two houses has ever been occupied, and the privatization issue at Moody has developed into a real mess.

The Air Force entered into a real estate transaction with Carabetta Enterprises Inc. for privatized housing at Moody Air Force Base. The estimated cost of the project has exceeded available funding by \$25 million, and the project lender stopped funding in March of 2007 to prevent all funds from being expended. At least three other Air Force bases—Patrick Air Force base in Florida, Little Rock Air Force base in Arkansas, and Hanscom Air Force base in Massachusetts—have similar contracting delays with privatized housing projects associated with this same contractor.

Despite having declared bankruptcy in the 1990s and supposedly being embroiled in a series of previous lawsuits over Government contracts, the Carabetta organization was allowed to form a new joint entity, American Eagle Communities LLC, and has won Government contracts in five States for a total \$3.3 billion. American Eagle won the \$50 million contract for the

Moody Air Force Base Magnolia Grove privatized housing project, hired one of its principals to be the general contractor, and now has left dozens of local subcontractors unpaid for months, resulting in numerous liens being filed, a complete lockdown of the site, and millions of dollars in unpaid bills to local subcontractors.

There has been concern that we have 1,000 new personnel who are going to be coming into Moody by 2009 under the BRAC, and this housing project is specifically designed to accommodate the influx. I have written two letters to the Air Force expressing my concern and inquiring about the delay and the intended plan of action. In response, the Air Force has said that because it has no legal agreements with the contractor, issues of nonpayment between the contractor and subcontractors must be resolved through the legal system.

That is not an acceptable answer. The Air Force is a contractor. This directly affects the quality of life of Air Force personnel at Moody Air Force Base as well as the other bases that have contracts with this particular contractor. Air Force personnel are suffering because of the poor performance of this contractor, and the Air Force should have been more proactive to fix this problem before we got to this point.

I have several questions on this issue that have yet to be answered. I am specifically asking the Air Force to answer: First, what were the factors contributing to the decision to award Carabetta Enterprises, Inc. this contract, given their known previous defaults and bankruptcy declarations? Secondly, is the Air Force currently taking steps to terminate this contract and, if so, what steps are they taking and, if not, why not? Thirdly, what is the plan for housing the incoming Air Force personnel slated to live in the new quarters at Moody Air Force base as well as the other bases that are affected by the default of this contractor?

In my opinion, this issue is also ripe for an IG investigation to figure out exactly what went wrong, why this contractor was awarded a \$3.3 billion contract for privatized housing, covering five States, work on all of which has been halted.

I urge the Air Force's expeditious attention and resolution of this issue.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. REED. Mr. President, I wish to bring up several amendments for consideration. These amendments have been cleared on both sides of the aisle.

AMENDMENT NO. 2661

I call up amendment No. 2661 for Senator FEINGOLD regarding a VA mental health GAO report.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Rhode Island [Mr. REED], for Mr. FEINGOLD, proposes an amendment numbered 2661.

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

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

The amendment is as follows:

(Purpose: To require a report from the Comptroller General on the adequacy of mental health care services provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Defense to female members of the Armed Forces and female veterans)

On page 50, between lines 17 and 18, insert the following:

SEC. 408. (a) ASSESSMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH CARE SERVICES FOR FEMALE SERVICEMEMBERS AND VETERANS.—The Comptroller General of the United States shall conduct an assessment of the adequacy of the mental health care services provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Defense to female members of the Armed Forces and female veterans to meet the mental health care needs of such members and veterans.

(b) REPORT.—Not later than September 1, 2008, the Comptroller General shall submit to the Subcommittees referred to in section 407 a report on the assessment required by subsection (a).

Mr. REED. I know of no further debate.

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

The amendment (No. 2658) was agreed to.

Mr. REED. I move to reconsider the vote and to lay that motion on the table.

The motion to lay on the table was agreed to.

AMENDMENT NO. 2658

Mr. REED. I call up amendment No. 2658 for Senator OBAMA.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Rhode Island [Mr. REED], for Mr. OBAMA, proposes an amendment numbered 2658.

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

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

The amendment is as follows:

(Purpose: To provide that none of the funds appropriated or otherwise made available by this Act may be used to enter into a contract in an amount greater than \$5,000,000 or to award a grant in excess of such amount unless the prospective contractor or grantee makes certain certifications regarding Federal tax liability)

On page 50, between lines 17 and 18, insert the following:

SEC. 408. None of the funds appropriated or otherwise made available by this Act may be used to enter into a contract in an amount greater than \$5,000,000 or to award a grant in excess of such amount unless the prospective contractor or grantee certifies in writing to the agency awarding the contract or grant that the contractor or grantee has filed all Federal tax returns required during the three years preceding the certification, has not been convicted of a criminal offense under the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, and has not been notified of any unpaid Federal tax assessment for which the liability remains unsatisfied unless the assessment is

the subject of an installment agreement or offer in compromise that has been approved by the Internal Revenue Service and is not in default or the assessment is the subject of a non-frivolous administrative or judicial appeal.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there further debate?

Mr. REED. I know of no further debate.

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

The amendment (No. 2658) was agreed to.

Mr. REED. I move to reconsider the vote and to lay that motion on the table.

The motion to lay on the table was agreed to.

AMENDMENT NO. 2660

Mr. REED. Mr. President, I call up amendment No. 2660 for Senator McCASKILL regarding the VA Inspector General Web site.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Rhode Island [Mr. REED], for Mrs. McCASKILL, proposes an amendment numbered 2660.

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

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

The amendment is as follows:

(Purpose: To provide a mechanism by which individuals can report to the Inspector General of the Department of Veterans Affairs cases of waste, fraud, or abuse with respect to the Department of Veterans Affairs)

On page 46, between lines 2 and 3, insert the following:

SEC. 227. (a) ANONYMOUS REPORTING OF WASTE, FRAUD, OR ABUSE.—Not later than 30 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Inspector General of the Department of Veterans Affairs shall establish and maintain on the homepage of the Internet website of the Office of Inspector General a mechanism by which individuals can anonymously report cases of waste, fraud, or abuse with respect to the Department of Veterans Affairs.

(b) LINK TO OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL FROM HOMEPAGE OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.—Not later than 30 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall establish and maintain on the homepage of the Internet website of the Department of Veterans Affairs a direct link to the Internet website of the Office of Inspector General of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there debate?

If not, the question is on agreeing to the amendment.

The amendment (No. 2660) was agreed to.

Mr. REED. I move to reconsider the vote and to lay that motion on the table.

The motion to lay on the table was agreed to.

AMENDMENT NO. 2677

Mr. REED. I call up amendment No. 2677 for Senator MURRAY regarding the

transfer of funds from the VA to the Secretary of Health and Human Services to train psychologists.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Rhode Island [Mr. REED], for Mrs. MURRAY, proposes an amendment numbered 2677.

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

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

The amendment is as follows:

(Purpose: To authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to transfer funds to the Secretary of Health and Human Services to train psychologists)

On page 46, between lines 2 and 3, insert the following:

SEC. 227. (a) AUTHORITY FOR TRANSFER OF FUNDS TO SECRETARY OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES TO TRAIN PSYCHOLOGISTS.—Upon a determination by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs that such action is in the national interest, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs may transfer not more than \$5,000,000 to the Secretary of Health and Human Services for the Graduate Psychology Education Program to support increased training of psychologists skilled in the treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury, and related disorders.

(b) LIMITATION ON USE OF TRANSFERRED FUNDS.—The Secretary of Health and Human Services may only use funds transferred under this section for the purposes described in subsection (a).

(c) NOTIFICATION.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall notify Congress of any such transfer of funds under this section.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there debate?

If not, the question is on agreeing to the amendment.

The amendment (No. 2677) was agreed to.

Mr. REED. I move to reconsider the vote and to lay that motion on the table.

The motion to lay on the table was agreed to.

AMENDMENT NO. 2679

Mr. REED. Mr. President, I call up amendment No. 2679 for Senator LANDRIEU regarding a report on the progress of the veterans hospital in New Orleans.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Rhode Island [Mr. REED], for Ms. LANDRIEU, proposes an amendment numbered 2679.

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

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

The amendment is as follows:

(Purpose: To require reports on the reconstruction of the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center, New Orleans, Louisiana)

On page 46, between lines 2 and 3, insert the following:

SEC. 227. (a) REPORTS ON RECONSTRUCTION OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS MEDICAL CENTER IN NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA.—

(1) Not later than October 1 and April 1 each year, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to the Committees on Appropriations a report on the current status of the reconstruction of the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center in New Orleans, Louisiana. Each report shall include the following:

(A) The current status of the reconstruction of the Medical Center, including the status of any ongoing environmental assessments, the status of any current construction, and an assessment of the adequacy of funding necessary to complete the reconstruction.

(B) If reconstruction of the Medical Center is subject to any major delay—

- (i) a description of each such delay;
- (ii) an explanation for each such delay; and
- (iii) a description of the action being taken or planned to address the delay.

(C) A description of current and anticipated funding for the reconstruction of the Medical Center, including an estimate of any additional funding required for the reconstruction.

(2) The requirement in paragraph (1) shall cease on the day that the reconstruction of the Medical Center referred to in that paragraph is completed.

(b) REPORT ON DESIGNATION OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS MEDICAL CENTER IN NEW ORLEANS AS POLYTRAUMA REHABILITATION CENTER OR POLYTRAUMA NETWORK SITE.—Not later than 60 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall submit to the Committees on Appropriations a report setting forth the recommendation of the Secretary as to whether or not the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center being reconstructed in New Orleans, Louisiana, should be designated as a tier I polytrauma rehabilitation center or a polytrauma network site.

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

The amendment (No. 2679) was agreed to.

Mr. REED. I move to reconsider the vote and to lay that motion on the table.

The motion to lay on the table was agreed to.

AMENDMENT NO. 2680

Mr. REED. Mr. President, I call up amendment No. 2680 for Senators STABENOW and LEVIN renaming a clinic located in Alpena, MI.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Rhode Island [Mr. REED], for Ms. STABENOW and Mr. LEVIN, proposes an amendment number 2680.

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

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

The amendment is as follows:

(Purpose: To designate the Department of Veterans Affairs clinic located in Alpena, Michigan, as the “Lieutenant Colonel Clement C. Van Wagoner Department of Veterans Affairs Clinic”)

At the appropriate place, insert the following:

SEC. _____. LIEUTENANT COLONEL CLEMENT C. VAN WAGONER DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS CLINIC.

(a) DESIGNATION.—The Department of Veterans Affairs clinic located in Alpena, Michigan,

shall be known and designated as the “Lieutenant Colonel Clement C. Van Wagoner Department of Veterans Affairs Clinic”.

(b) REFERENCES.—Any reference in a law, map, regulation, document, paper, or other record of the United States to the Department of Veterans Affairs clinic referred to in subsection (a) shall be deemed to be a reference to the “Lieutenant Colonel Clement C. Van Wagoner Department of Veterans Affairs Clinic”.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there debate?

If not, the question is on agreeing to the amendment.

The amendment (No. 2680) was agreed to.

Mr. REED. I move to reconsider the vote and to lay that motion on the table.

The motion to lay on the table was agreed to.

AMENDMENT NO. 2681

Mr. REED. Mr. President, I call up amendment No. 2681 for Senator HUTCHISON regarding a clinic lease in Texas.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Rhode Island [Mr. REED], for Mrs. HUTCHISON, proposes an amendment numbered 2681.

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

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

The amendment is as follows:

At the appropriate place in the bill, insert:

SEC. . The Secretary of Veterans Affairs may carry out major medical facility lease in fiscal year 2008 in an amount not to exceed \$12,000,000 to implement the recommendations outlined in the August, 2007 Study of South Texas Veterans’ Inpatient and Specialty Outpatient Health Care Needs.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there debate?

If not, the question is on agreeing to the amendment.

The amendment (No. 2681) was agreed to.

Mr. REED. I move to reconsider the vote and to lay that motion on the table.

The motion to lay on the table was agreed to.

AMENDMENT NO. 2682

Mr. REED. Mr. President, I call up amendment No. 2682 for Senators STEVENS and INOUYE regarding a VA rural health report.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Rhode Island [Mr. REED], for Mr. STEVENS, for himself, Ms. MURKOWSKI, and Mr. INOUYE, proposes an amendment numbered 2682.

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

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

The amendment is as follows:

(Purpose: To require a report on access to medical services provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs to veterans who live in remote rural areas)

On page 46, between lines 2 and 3, insert the following:

SEC. 227. (a) REPORT ON ACCESS TO MEDICAL SERVICES PROVIDED BY DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS TO VETERANS IN REMOTE RURAL AREAS.—Not later than six months after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall submit to the appropriate committees of Congress a report setting forth the following:

(1) A description of the following:

(A) The unique challenges and costs faced by veterans in remote rural areas of contiguous and non-contiguous States when obtaining medical services from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

(B) The need to improve access to locally-administered care for veterans who reside in remote rural areas.

(C) The need to fund alternative sources of medical services—

(i) in areas where facilities of the Department of Veterans Affairs are not accessible to veterans without leaving such areas; and

(ii) in cases in which receipt of medical services by a veteran in a facility of the Department requires transportation of such veteran by air due to geographic and infrastructural constraints.

(2) An assessment of the potential for increasing local access to medical services for

SEC. 227. (a) ADDITIONAL AMOUNT FOR MEDICAL SERVICES.—The amount appropriated or otherwise made available by this title under the heading “MEDICAL SERVICES” is hereby increased by \$125,000,000.

(b) AVAILABILITY.—Of the amount appropriated or otherwise made available by this title under the heading “MEDICAL SERVICES”, as increased by subsection (a), \$125,000,000 shall be available for the Veterans Beneficiary Travel Program. The amount available for the Veterans Beneficiary Travel Program under this subsection is in addition to any other amounts available for that program under this title.

(c) OFFSET.—The amount appropriated or otherwise made available by this title for the Veterans Health Administration under the heading “MEDICAL ADMINISTRATION” is hereby decreased by \$125,000,000.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there debate?

If not, the question is on agreeing to the amendment.

The amendment (No. 2669) was agreed to.

Mr. REED. I move to reconsider the vote and to lay that motion on the table.

The motion to lay on the table was agreed to.

AMENDMENT NO. 2682

Mr. REED. Mr. President, I call up amendment No. 2682 for Senators STEVENS and INOUYE regarding a VA rural health report.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Rhode Island [Mr. REED], for Mr. STEVENS, for himself, Ms. MURKOWSKI, and Mr. INOUYE, proposes an amendment numbered 2682.

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

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

The amendment is as follows:

(Purpose: To require a report on access to medical services provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs to veterans who live in remote rural areas)

On page 46, between lines 2 and 3, insert the following:

SEC. 227. (a) REPORT ON ACCESS TO MEDICAL SERVICES PROVIDED BY DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS TO VETERANS IN REMOTE RURAL AREAS.—Not later than six months after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall submit to the appropriate committees of Congress a report setting forth the following:

(1) A description of the following:

(A) The unique challenges and costs faced by veterans in remote rural areas of contiguous and non-contiguous States when obtaining medical services from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

(B) The need to improve access to locally-administered care for veterans who reside in remote rural areas.

(C) The need to fund alternative sources of medical services—

(i) in areas where facilities of the Department of Veterans Affairs are not accessible to veterans without leaving such areas; and

(ii) in cases in which receipt of medical services by a veteran in a facility of the Department requires transportation of such veteran by air due to geographic and infrastructural constraints.

(2) An assessment of the potential for increasing local access to medical services for

veterans in remote rural areas of contiguous and non-contiguous States through strategic partnerships with other government and local private health care providers.

(b) APPROPRIATE COMMITTEES OF CONGRESS DEFINED.—In this section, the term “appropriate committees of Congress” means—

(1) the Committees on Veterans’ Affairs of the Senate and the House of Representatives; and

(2) the Subcommittees referred to in section 407.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there debate?

If not, the question is on agreeing to the amendment.

The amendment (No. 2682) was agreed to.

Mr. REED. I move to reconsider the vote and to lay that motion on the table.

The motion to lay on the table was agreed to.

AMENDMENT NO. 2688

Mr. REED. Mr. President, I call up amendment No. 2688 for Senator ALLARD regarding a land transfer to the VA.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Rhode Island [Mr. REED], for Mr. ALLARD, proposes an amendment numbered 2688.

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

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

The amendment is as follows:

(Purpose: To authorize the Secretary of the Interior to modify certain instruments to allow the City of Aurora, State of Colorado, to convey to the United States certain non-Federal land to be used by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs for the construction of a veterans medical facility)

At the appropriate place, insert the following:

SEC. (a) In this section:

(1) The term “City” means the City of Aurora, Colorado.

(2) The term “deed” means the quitclaim deed—

(A) conveyed by the Secretary to the City; and

(B) dated May 24, 1999.

(3) The term “non-Federal land” means—

(A) parcel I of the Fitzsimons Army Medical Center, Colorado; and

(B) the parcel of land described in the deed.

(4) The term “Secretary” means the Secretary of the Interior.

(b)(1) In accordance with paragraph (2), and subject to each term and condition required under paragraph (3), to allow the City to convey to the United States the non-Federal land to be used by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs for the construction of a veterans medical facility, the Secretary may execute such instruments as determined by the Secretary to be necessary to modify or release any condition under which the non-Federal land would revert to the United States.

(2) In carrying out paragraph (1), with respect to the non-Federal land, the Secretary shall alter—

(A) each provision of the deed relating to a reversionary interest of the United States; and

(B) any other reversionary interest of the United States

to authorize the use of the property to include use as a veterans’ facility in addition to use for recreational purposes.

(3) The Secretary shall carry out paragraph (1) subject to such terms and conditions as the Secretary determines to be necessary to protect the interests of the United States.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there debate?

If not, the question is on agreeing to the amendment.

The amendment (No. 2688) was agreed to.

Mr. REED. I move to reconsider the vote and to lay that motion on the table.

The motion to lay on the table was agreed to.

Mr. REED. Unless my colleague has anything to say, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

FORT MONMOUTH

Mr. LAUTENBERG. Mr. President, I would like to take a few moments to discuss an important issue with the manager of this bill, Senator REED, and with my colleague from New Jersey, Senator MENENDEZ.

Mr. REED. I am happy to discuss this issue with my colleagues from New Jersey.

Mr. LAUTENBERG. I thank the Senator. I would like to first thank the Senator and Senator HUTCHISON for putting together a good bill. Everyone in this body agrees that we must support the men and women of the military while they are serving overseas and when they return home, and I believe this appropriations bill meets that demand.

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, I agree and I support this legislation as well. It will provide critical money to make sure our veterans are given the health care they deserve.

Mr. REED. I thank the Senators from New Jersey. We have no greater responsibility than to our veterans, and I am proud of the bill we were able to complete in committee and now offer on the floor.

Mr. LAUTENBERG. Mr. President, this bill also strengthens our military bases, providing money for military construction efforts and improvements at bases, and to support projects related to the Defense Base Realignment and Closure Act of 2005, known as BRAC. While I support strengthening our bases and their overall infrastructure, some disturbing information has come to light about the BRAC process and the closing of the Fort Monmouth Army base in New Jersey since our Appropriations Committee completed work on this bill that warrants our immediate attention.

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, fighting wars involves not just the men and women on the ground overseas but

also dedicated workers here at home. It depends on the training and research done at military bases like Fort Monmouth. Fort Monmouth provides intelligence and reconnaissance support for our Armed Forces, making them more effective fighters and protecting their lives.

Mr. LAUTENBERG. Fort Monmouth researchers also develop critical technology for our Armed Forces, such as “Warlock Jammers,” which were engineered at Fort Monmouth and modified for use in Iraq. This equipment emits radio frequencies that interfere with the signals that set off improvised explosive devices known as IEDs. The military was able to deploy them within 60 days of their development, and they started saving American lives.

Mr. REED. Mr. President, I agree that great work has been done at Fort Monmouth to support our military and it deserves recognition. Fort Monmouth has played an important role in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the men and women working there are to be commended.

Mr. MENENDEZ. The BRAC Commission knew about that important work and wanted to make sure our troops in the field would not be harmed by closing the base. They included a requirement that the Secretary of Defense issue a report to Congress proving that “movement of organizations, functions, or activities from Fort Monmouth to Aberdeen Proving Ground will be accomplished without disruption of their support to the Global War on Terrorism.”

Mr. LAUTENBERG. Yet more than 2 years after the BRAC Commission vote, the administration has failed to produce this report. To make matters worse, the Army is trying to move personnel out of Fort Monmouth now, before it has even considered the effect on our Armed Forces. Before the Army starts to shift work out of Fort Monmouth, we need to know that it won’t hurt our troops.

Mr. MENENDEZ. When we raised concerns about this to the Army, it halted the transfer and our understanding was that the Army would wait until the report required by BRAC was completed. But now the Army has reversed course and plans to start transferring people soon.

Mr. LAUTENBERG. This is simply unacceptable. No personnel should be transferred out of Fort Monmouth until the Department of Defense has submitted the report to Congress proving that the closure of Fort Monmouth will not hurt troops in the field.

Mr. REED. I thank the Senator for his thoughts. It is my understanding that the Army plans to issue a report on Fort Monmouth by the end of the year. I can also assure my colleagues from New Jersey that the Senate Armed Services Committee as the authorizing committee will continue its oversight of the BRAC process.

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, I rise to offer for the RECORD, the Budget Committee’s official scoring of H.R. 2642,

the Military Construction and Department of Veterans Affairs Appropriations Act for fiscal year 2008.

The bill, as reported by the Senate Committee on Appropriations, provides \$64.745 billion in discretionary budget authority for fiscal year 2008, which will result in new outlays of \$38.327 billion. When outlays from prior-year budget authority are taken into account, discretionary outlays for the bill will total \$55.001 billion.

The Senate-reported bill is at its section 302(b) allocation for budget authority and \$20 million below its allocation for outlays. No points of order lie against the committee-reported bill.

I commend the distinguished chairman of the Military Construction and Department of Veterans Affairs Appropriations Subcommittee for bringing this legislation before the Senate. I ask unanimous consent that the table displaying the Budget Committee scoring of the bill be printed in the RECORD.

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

H.R. 2642, MILITARY CONSTRUCTION AND DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS APPROPRIATIONS, 2008

[Spending comparisons—Senate reported bill (in millions of dollars)]

	Defense	General purpose	Total
Senate-Reported Bill:			
Budget Authority	21,556	43,189	64,745
Outlays	13,302	41,699	55,001
Senate 302(b) allocation:			
Budget Authority	.....	.....	64,745
Outlays	.....	.....	55,021
House-passed bill:			
Budget Authority	21,371	43,374	64,745
Outlays	13,259	41,573	54,832
President's Request:			
Budget Authority	22,071	38,672	60,743
Outlays	13,264	39,120	52,384
Senate-Reported Bill Compared To:			
Senate 302(b) allocation:			
Budget Authority	.....	.....	0
Outlays	.....	.....	-20
House-passed bill:			
Budget Authority	185	-185	0
Outlays	43	126	169
President's Request:			
Budget Authority	-515	4,517	4,002
Outlays	38	2,579	2,617

Mr. AKAKA. Mr. President, I express my strong support for the level of funding provided for the Department of Veterans Affairs in the pending Military Construction and Veterans Affairs appropriations bill for fiscal year 2008. I also take this opportunity to congratulate Senators REED, BYRD, and the other members of the committee for their hard work on this measure.

This bill truly reflects our commitment to fully fund veterans' health care and benefits. Indeed, the bill before us closely tracks the level of funding recommended by the Veterans' Affairs Committee in our Views and Estimates to the Budget Committee. This legislation would provide a \$6.5 billion increase for VA health care over last year, \$3.6 billion more than the President requested. This represents the largest increase in funding ever for VA health care. I am very pleased that there are additional funds included in this amount for the treatment of traumatic brain injuries, TBI, and for VA

mental health programs, to treat the "invisible wounds" that many veterans suffer from after serving in combat. These are two areas of vital importance to servicemembers returning from Operations Iraqi and Enduring Freedom.

I also thank the Military Construction-VA Appropriations Subcommittee members for their support of the VA Office of Inspector General. The \$16 million increase for the OIG will enable that office to continue conducting extremely valuable oversight of VA. The VA inspector general has consistently been vitally important to the Veterans' Affairs Committee in the execution of our oversight responsibilities. The OIG is the central gear in VA's internal controls and quality assurance mechanism.

I would like to take this opportunity to raise the issue of Priority 8—so-called middle-income—veterans and their current exclusion from the VA health care system. The majority members of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, in our Views and Estimates, endorsed re-opening enrollment to these veterans. That recommendation was followed. The omnibus health care authorization bill recently reported out by the Veterans' Affairs Committee contains a provision that would allow these veterans back into VA. We would fully allow the VA Secretary to close enrollment off at any time. It is my view that adequate funding to reopen enrollment exists.

I want to also express my strong support for the \$21.5 billion in funding for military construction projects included in this bill. This bill fully funds the administration's request for BRAC and the President's Grow the Force Initiative. It also includes the much needed funding necessary to repair and maintain the military facilities that are so critically important to the readiness and well-being of the Armed Forces. I am particularly in support of the bill's inclusion of \$929 million for National Guard and Reserve construction. We have asked our National Guard and Reserve troops to commit significant sacrifices for this Nation and we should be prepared to provide these brave men and women the support they need to fulfill their duties.

I thank Senator REED and the other subcommittee members for their work on this bill and for sending the right message to both our Nation's veterans and those currently serving. We have made a commitment to providing support both before and after active service, and this measure honors that commitment. I urge my colleagues to support swift passage of the legislation before us today.

Mr. NELSON of Nebraska. Mr. President, I rise today to speak about a critical issue regarding Iraq and Afghanistan veterans' health care needs. America's Armed Forces are sustaining attacks by rocket-propelled grenades, improvised explosive devices, and landmines almost daily in Iraq and Afghan-

istan. These injured soldiers require specialized care from providers experienced in treating their unique health challenges. These blast injuries result from the complex pressure waves generated by an explosion. Air-filled organs such as the ear, lung, and other organs surrounded by fluid-filled cavities such as the brain and spinal cord are especially susceptible.

Earlier this year, I visited with a soldier named Mack Richards who sustained blast wounds to his wrist and ankle in Iraq, as well as traumatic brain injury, or TBI. This soldier recounted to me his difficulty and frustration in receiving treatment for his brain injury. He was left at an army base far from home for months before he was sent back to his family and finally received therapy from our local rehabilitation facility.

Congress has been assured that veterans with brain and other complex injuries are able to access the specialized treatment they need. However, Mack's story is not unique, and I think the time has come to question what role the underutilized capacity in civilian rehab can play. That is not to devalue VA efforts and the great facilities the VA has to offer, but to ask how civilian providers can complement VA facilities and improve the care afforded our veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan.

The large numbers of traumatic brain injury survivors returning home from war highlights the need to leverage all of the resources available to us for the successful treatment and rehabilitation of our injured troops. Tapping into existing civilian TBI research and treatment capacity can help improve outcomes and supplement the care systems being developed at both the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs.

This is an issue which I know can stir up sensitivities given the diversity of our veteran population. I want to make it clear that I am fully committed, as are many of my colleagues, to ensuring the VA has the resources and strength to offer sustainable and top quality care for every American veteran. That said, the public and civilian sectors must come together to meet the needs of our newest generation of wounded warriors. This is not unprecedented. In the past, the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs have contracted with civilian clinicians and providers to make up the TBI continuum of care.

The VA has shown tremendous effort in addressing the needs of our returning troops, given the enormous challenges we face. However, I believe the large volume of returning veterans with increasingly complex health care needs require an increasingly dynamic approach to better serve those who have given so much for our country. The need for timely treatment and immediate rehabilitation expertise and capacity requires additional resources and flexibility for the VA to form partnerships to ensure top notch care for

our service personnel. And, if this care can be provided closer to veterans' community and family support networks, then it is a win-win as families can be kept together and servicemembers can more easily transition back into their daily routines.

I have included language in this bill requesting the Department of Veterans Affairs to report to Congress on the conditions and criteria used for contracting with civilian rehabilitation providers, and outreach efforts being conducted to inform veterans and those who advocate on their behalf about such treatment options. I look forward to working with the VA and my colleagues to make sure our veterans have access to the care their sacrifices and personal injuries require.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. REED. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 5 minutes each.

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

HONORING OUR ARMED FORCES

SERGEANT JON BONNELL, JR.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I speak today with great sorrow as we have lost a great American. A Fort Dodge native, Marine Sergeant Jon "J.J." Bonnell died while serving his country in Iraq on August 7, 2007. Sergeant Bonnell stepped on a roadside bomb while on duty between Baghdad and Fallujah. He was part of the 1st Battalion, 11th Marine Regiment, based in Camp Pendleton CA. My prayers and deepest sympathy go out to J.J.'s parents, Jon Bonnell, Sr., and Denise Roark, as well as to his three sisters and all his family and friends. I also wish to express my sympathy to the community of Fort Dodge, who not only lost a fine young man, but an exemplary soldier.

J.J. will be remembered fondly and missed dearly. Only 22 years old, multiple students at Fort Dodge Senior High School referred to J.J. as a "hero," a label he greatly deserves. Making the ultimate sacrifice, J.J. deserves the gratitude of every American. An uncle described J.J. by saying "He loved doing what he did, and he gave the ultimate sacrifice. He said he was ready for the ultimate sacrifice." This speaks volumes for J.J.'s character, and we as Iowans and Americans are fortunate and honored to have a man with J.J.'s devotion and dedication serving our Nation.

J.J. enlisted in the Marine Corps as a senior in high school in 2003. He assisted victims of the 2004 tsunami in Southeast Asia after his first tour in Iraq. A deeply dedicated marine, his grandmother recounted that J.J. "thought all the marines were heroes." On behalf of all Iowans, I offer my most

sincere appreciation for J.J.'s service to our Nation. I ask my colleagues in the Senate, and every American, to take a moment and remember with honor and gratitude the ultimate sacrifice of a true patriot, Sgt. Jon Bonnell, Jr.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

TRIBUTE TO THE EASTERN KENTUCKY CONCENTRATED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM, INCORPORATED

• Mr. BUNNING. Mr. President, today I pay tribute to the Eastern Kentucky Concentrated Employment Program, Incorporated, EKCEP, for their recent accomplishments at the 2007 Workforce Innovations Conference.

The 2007 Workforce Innovations Conference provides the opportunity for State and local government officials, workforce and economic development officials, as well as private sector representatives to assemble and discuss new ideas about workforce development issues. During this conference, Eastern Kentucky Concentrated Employment Program's Coal Services Program was awarded the U.S. Department of Labor's Recognition of Excellence Award for "Leveraging the Power of e3 Partnerships." The U.S. Labor Department's Employee and Training Administration presents Recognition of Excellence honors in five different categories. The e3 partnerships category presents value in projects that demonstrate sustained partnerships between employers, educators, and economic development leaders.

The EKCEP's Coal Services Program uses a variety of services that tackle the needs of employers and job seekers, such as crucial training for new coal miners and seasoned miners who need new training to increase mine productivity. Training is easily accessible for miners through Kentucky Community and Technical College System locations as well as a mobile miner training unit equipped with a high-tech classroom that features a computerized three-dimensional mining simulator.

I now ask my fellow colleagues to join me in congratulating the Eastern Kentucky Concentrated Employment Program for their achievements and commitment in helping Kentucky's largest industry and our Nation's largest energy source. •

TRIBUTE TO ALEX SOTO

• Mr. MARTINEZ. Mr. President, today I congratulate Mr. Alex Soto as he nears the end of his term as the 102nd president of the Nation's largest insurance association, the Independent Insurance Agents & Brokers of America, IIABA. Mr. Soto was elected to the IIABA's executive committee in 2001 and was installed as the association's president last September.

Founded in 1896, IIABA, or the Big "I" as it is better known, is the Na-

tion's oldest and largest association of independent insurance agents and brokers, representing a network of more than 300,000 agents, brokers, and their employees. During his term as president of the Big "I," Alex Soto has been a leader on a number of issues for the association including natural disaster insurance, regulatory reform, and producer compensation. He is a national leader on enhancement and enforcement of building codes, which is an important issue in our home State of Florida. Notably, as chairman of the National Branding Committee and president of the IIABA, Alex devoted significant time and energy to the development and promotion of the "Trusted Choice" brand for independent agents. Thanks to his leadership, the Trusted Choice initiative has successfully created a distinctive mark that conveys the virtues of the independent agent insurance delivery system.

Alex Soto is also a great American success story. He came to the United States as a political refugee after fleeing communist Cuba in 1960 at the age of 11. When he arrived in this country, he did not speak any English and had to completely start over, learning the language, customs, and assimilating. Alex has gone on to achieve numerous accomplishments and is now the president of InSource, Inc., a successful and growing independent agency in Miami. He holds a degree in international affairs from Florida State University, the Chartered Property and Casualty Underwriter, CPCU, designation, and the Associate in Risk Management, ARM, designation. Alex has served as the chairman of the Florida Association of Insurance Agents, FAIA, and before that, as president of the Independent Insurance Agents of Dade County. He was vice chairman of the Florida Property Casualty Joint Underwriting Association, FPCJUA, in 1995–1996, as well as a member of the Governor's Commission on the Florida Insurance Crisis in 1993, and the Insurance Fraud Task Force in 1997.

In addition, Alex is active in his community. He has taught numerous insurance courses with the FAIA and at the University of Miami. He also serves as a trustee of the Archdiocese of Miami Trust. He was a member of St. Hugh Catholic Church Parish Council and a member of the Grove Outreach Center.

I sincerely thank Alex Soto for his work with the IIABA over the years and for his commitment to his profession, his community, and our State of Florida. His efforts are greatly appreciated. I am proud to count Alex as both a constituent and a friend. I wish him, his wife Patt, and their family all the best in their future endeavors. •

TRIBUTE IN HONOR OF MACDONALD GALLION

• Mr. SHELBY. Mr. President, today I pay tribute to MacDonald Gallion, who passed away on Saturday, August 11,