

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

Mr. OBEY. Mr. Chairman, I move that the Committee do now rise.

The motion was agreed to.

Accordingly, the Committee rose; and the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. BISHOP of Georgia) having assumed the chair, Mr. POMEROY, Chairman of the Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union, reported that that Committee, having had under consideration the bill (H.R. 6599) making appropriations for military construction, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2009, and for other purposes, had come to no resolution thereon.

REPORT ON RESOLUTION PROVIDING FOR PROCEEDINGS DURING THE PERIOD FROM AUGUST 1, 2008, THROUGH SEPTEMBER 4, 2008

Mr. MCGOVERN, from the Committee on Rules, submitted a privileged report (Rept. No. 110-816) on the resolution (H. Res. 1399) providing for proceedings during the period from August 1, 2008, through September 4, 2008, which was referred to the House Calendar and ordered to be printed.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION AND VETERANS AFFAIRS APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2009

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to House Resolution 1384 and rule XVIII, the Chair declares the House in the Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union for the further consideration of the bill, H.R. 6599.

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IN THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Accordingly, the House resolved itself into the Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union for the further consideration of the bill (H.R. 6599) making appropriations for military construction, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2009, and for other purposes, with Mr. POMEROY in the chair.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The CHAIRMAN. When the Committee of the Whole rose earlier today, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. EDWARDS) had 14½ minutes remaining and the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. WAMP) had 30 minutes remaining.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Tennessee.

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

Mr. Chairman, oftentimes in life it's more important what you do with your second chances than what you do the first time around. Neither Chairman EDWARDS, who spoke so eloquently in a comprehensive way about this bill and his commitment to our veterans, our men and women in harm's way and their families—neither he nor I took

advantage in our younger years of serving in the uniform of our Armed Forces. However, fate has it that we would have a second opportunity to serve by serving those who are serving us, past and present, through this bill; making sure that those great American patriots, past and present, have what they need—and are entitled to and deserve because of their commitment to this great Nation.

It is the highest compliment of my professional life to serve as the ranking member of this subcommittee. I want to thank Chairman LEWIS—former Chairman LEWIS, now Ranking Member LEWIS—for this privilege because without him and his support I wouldn't be here. I want to thank Mr. WICKER, who was the ranking member of this subcommittee last year, and I want to thank whoever helped him become a Senator to open up this subcommittee opportunity for me, and for Chairman EDWARDS, who, as you just saw on the House floor, is a class act, with a true commitment to the men and women in uniform and a determination to do whatever is necessary to honor their commitment.

And I can report today, as I did at the full committee, that when I go home and people ask me in 2008, in my new position, are we honoring our Nation's veterans and the men and women in uniform serving in an asymmetrical war on two fronts in Iraq and Afghanistan, with head trauma and IED injuries and amputations—double, triple, extraordinary injuries—stress from unfair deployments, unsustainable deployments, stress on the family, are we honoring our commitment to them? And I don't think a few years ago, regardless of party, that the answer to that question was yes. We had problems at Walter Reed, we had problems at Fort Stewart, we had problems across the board.

We still have many challenges. The deployment ratios have got to continue to improve. But I can tell you in this bill there is a bipartisan commitment to honor their commitment. And I believe we are making great progress at ensuring our men and women in uniform and their families have what they need and deserve, and when they come home as veterans, that we take adequate care of them—not adequate, but responsible care of them. And I think we're making great progress.

I want to thank the majority for doing something that people in the hinterland wouldn't even understand, but they put the Military Construction bill back in with the Veterans bill where it belongs. When I served on the subcommittee 10 years ago, this was not the case.

But when the Military Construction bill funds quality of life needs and child care centers and polytrauma centers and housing needs, the veterans piece being in with it in the same bill allows the continuum of care to come together so that we can look at the whole picture from today's men and

women in harm's way and what their quality of life needs are—which is number one for us—all the way through the end of their life as a veteran with our VA system. It needs to all be together.

That was an amazing success, bringing Military Construction and Veteran's Care back together—my hat's off to the Speaker for doing that, first and foremost, for Chairman EDWARDS for his leadership, and for Chairman OBEY for his commitment.

I do agree that over the 100 hearing hours Chairman EDWARDS and I had a hands-on with these amazing Americans, we produced a work product, this bill—at roughly \$48 billion for the VA and \$25 billion for the military construction needs around the world—that is very strong, and an encouragement to all those in harm's way today and those that have been in harm's way in the past.

I will say that the President's budget request for veterans was a record level. Now, the chairman said that it wasn't enough, and I agree with that. And we did increase it by \$3 billion, but it was at a record level. So today there is an encouraging bipartisan proliferation to see who can do more for our Nation's veterans. And that's a good thing for our Nation's veterans, that we're in competition to see who can do more for the men and women coming home from Iraq and Afghanistan and those that have served in the past.

But I was blown away over the last few months with the quality of the servicemembers and veterans. First, we hear from the chiefs of the respective services, the top enlisted personnel, the commanders from around the world, like the Commander of CENTCOM, who is now General Petraeus, with two wars under his command in Iraq and Afghanistan, we hear from all these leaders about the needs on the ground and what investments they need the Congress to make for them to do their job successfully. And then from the military families, that talk about the stress felt when we had a 15-month in, 1 year out deployment, now it's back to 1-1, it's going to 2-1. We need to get to 3-1 to make it sustainable, meaning 1 year in theater fighting, 3 years back in a noncombat station. This is so important that we work towards these objectives and that we honor this commitment.

Now, on the subcommittee, we've got extraordinary support. Former chairman of the full committee, who will speak in a minute, BILL YOUNG from Florida, sits with us every hearing, hands on, fully engaged. ANDER CRENSHAW from Jacksonville, Florida, who will also speak, JOHN CARTER, from Texas, KAY GRANGER from Texas on the Republican side. I want to compliment not just Chairman EDWARDS, but SAM FARR, the vice chairman; who was really engaged, and a man who understands the world; he does an outstanding job.

You mentioned all the staff, I won't repeat their names, but both sides of

the aisle, just outstanding work. Members of the subcommittee—Mr. MOLLERAN, Mr. BOYD, Mr. KENNEDY, Mr. BISHOP—everyone's engaged on your side; and contributed to great bipartisan cooperation. And the quality of these people that are serving in uniform and their families is just extraordinary.

What we heard this year is that the value of the dollar is really hurting us around the world. Our money that we're investing won't buy what it used to buy all over the world, and that's a big problem. And we've known that it was getting worse, but it's really causing a budget pinch for our military construction around the world.

We heard, as we've continued to hear—which has held up the appropriation process—that energy costs are unsustainable. That's a huge burden on this budget. We're trying to help with those needs.

Most importantly, though, we heard about the stress of the deployments from the families, that they're unsustainable, that they put a huge burden on the servicemembers and families. That's why these child care centers and these housing issues are so important and we have prioritized in this bill.

I want to say one word of caution, because whether it's a \$3 billion increase in VA or \$13 billion increase in VA, the Veterans Administration is a longstanding bureaucracy. It is very large. And I have traveled, I've been to the sites, I've worked with the VA for a number of years, and they're not as efficient as they can be or must be. Money is not the only issue. I'm grateful that we came together to give them more money, but I want to make sure, and so does Chairman EDWARDS, that each and every year we hold them more accountable, and the subcommittee takes a greater hands-on role at looking for efficiencies. We worked with Ranking Member BUYER this year on the Authorization Committee on ways for the VA to recapture more third-party payments that they're entitled to to help with their bottom line; things like that we must do because the VA has to be more efficient and more accountable because they are a government bureaucracy. So it's not just money, it's oversight. And I believe we share that commitment.

I think Secretary Peake is doing a very good job as the Secretary. Sometimes these positions are political; I don't think he is, I think he's hands on. He understands the VA system from a health care perspective, which is possibly the most important piece of it. I just want to thank everyone. Again, the staff has really produced a great bill.

Member projects in this bill mirror those included in the House Armed Services Committee's bill. The projects all are authorized. We married them up, so there's no Member-advanced initiatives here that don't meet all the tests of authorization. That's important. So that makes this bill special.

It is special, too; we're the only Appropriations bill that's going to move off the House floor before we go home. I wish they all would have. But we're closing on a positive note because this bill is positive for our men and women in uniform. And they're out there facing the threats that are out there. And it's like never before. It's asymmetrical.

I don't know what's next, but I hope and pray we can bring them all home very soon. But as long as they're in harm's way and as long as they're willing to volunteer to serve, Chairman EDWARDS, you and I are going to work together, in this second chance of ours, to serve those who serve us. And we're going to honor their commitment fully. That's what this bill is about.

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

Mr. EDWARDS of Texas. Mr. Chairman, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Rhode Island (Mr. KENNEDY), who has been a powerful voice on our subcommittee on behalf of our veterans, our troops and their families.

Mr. KENNEDY. I want to thank Chairman CHET EDWARDS and Ranking Member ZACH WAMP for their incredible leadership on this legislation. And I'd like to take a moment, Mr. Chairman, to particularly say what an honor it is to serve under Chairman EDWARDS. And his particular leadership is due a great deal of appreciation, especially for what he does to champion the cause of veterans in this country. And I want to say what an honor it is to serve under his leadership in this committee.

I want to say, as Mr. WAMP did, that it is an honor, for those of us who never served in uniform, to be here and serving in a different uniform, in coat and tie, to be there to serve those who did go out there and put their lives on the line to serve our country, in a sense that we owe it to them and can have an opportunity to serve those veterans who have served our country so proudly. I take great pride in that.

I feel that this is an historic place in the Congress of the United States. I mean, this floor of the House is where Franklin Roosevelt announced that we would be declaring war, World War II. And we all read about the history of this country, when the country came together to fight wars on two sides of the world. And we read about those times in American history when all of America was joined together and sacrificing.

And the only difference between those times and now is that there seems to be a battle that's being fought by our men and women in uniform, but the sacrifice seems to be borne principally by those who are wearing the uniform, but not by the rest of America. It seems as though there is a bubble going on here where the rest of America is supposed to go on with their lives and the military is supposed to do the job, and yet the two should never meet. And I don't think that's the way America is supposed to work.

I think, as a country, we're supposed to be there every step of the way with our troops.

And what I think this bill does is it begins to acknowledge that the rest of America needs to step up to the plate and make sure when our troops come home, that we know that they aren't forgotten, and that we're going to remember them long after they've come home and make sure that they get the homecoming that they deserve.

Mr. Chairman, I rise in enthusiastic support of the Military Construction-Veterans Affairs Appropriation Bill. It has been my great privilege to serve under the leadership of Chairman CHET EDWARDS and Ranking Member ZACH WAMP as we have worked in a bipartisan way to support our military and honor America's commitment to our veterans.

I would like to take a moment, Mr. Chairman to honor the great service of the Chairman of the Military Construction Veterans Affairs Appropriations Subcommittee, CHET EDWARDS. There is no better champion for the veterans of our country and no better advocate for the needs of our service members than CHET EDWARDS. I applaud the Chairman for his earnest stewardship of our subcommittee.

Mr. Chairman, over the past year, I had the opportunity to travel the country to see with my own eyes the capabilities of our VA Hospitals, Medical Centers, Polytrauma Centers and Inpatient facilities and get a better perspective of the needs of patients, doctors, nurses, and hospital administrators. I met with many of our brave veterans who have made those enormous sacrifices for our nation. Needless to say, I was inspired by the courage of our wounded warriors.

The high degree of professionalism with which the Hospital staff conducted patient care was quite impressive and I have great confidence in the doctors and nurses who are doing their part in taking care of America's veterans.

Unfortunately, many of these great public servants are performing their jobs in antiquated facilities with substandard staffing requirements that make life difficult for doctors, but more importantly, diminish care for patients!

It was crystal clear to me that our VA Facilities need to do more to adapt to a new generation of American veterans who have come home from Iraq and Afghanistan. Specifically, the needs of our female veterans need immediate attention.

During my visit, I observed that our Veterans' Hospitals, many of which were built in the 1950s and 60s, were not built to accommodate the large number of female vets expected to enter the system. They lack the most rudimentary amenities like adequate female restrooms and hospital rooms to meet privacy needs.

Sadly, the VA is always playing a big game of "catchup" with respect to female vets. Instead of implementing a long term strategy designed to meet the needs of these service members, the VA would rather wait for another Walter Reed before changing the status quo.

In mental health services, I was alarmed by the lack of full-time mental health professional at VA Hospitals.

For example, my visit to the Hines VA in Chicago last fall revealed that all of its psychiatrists were part-time employees. Frankly, I find that unacceptable.

In this subcommittee, we have taken steps to bolster funding for mental health services in the VA and built upon our great success in last year's MILCON/VA appropriations bill which saw the greatest increase in veterans health funding in the 77-year history of the VA.

We have also dedicated \$24.8 billion for Military Construction to fully fund BRAC and increase the size of the Army and Marine Corps.

In Military Construction, this bill also includes:

—\$336 million, which was not in the President's request, will go towards quality of life initiatives.

—\$200 million for the Army and Marine Corps to improve their barracks so that our service members have decent places to call home.

The Veterans Health Administration estimates that in 2009 more than 5.8 million patients, including 333,275 veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. This is why we have funded the VHA at \$40.8 billion, \$1.6 billion over the request of President Bush and a 9 percent increase over 2008 levels.

According to a study by the Rand Corporation, more than 1 in 5 service men and women coming home from Iraq and Afghanistan suffer from a stress related mental illness. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is the signature wound of this war and I applaud my colleagues on this subcommittee for recognizing the seriousness of this issue and for their willingness to devote significant funding towards mental health care and research.

\$3.8 billion in this bill is dedicated to specialty mental health services and \$584 million to substance abuse programs in this bill.

In a time of great need for our veterans, this subcommittee came together to write a bipartisan bill. We solicited views from the other side of the aisle to put together a responsible, non-partisan bill that has only one objective: to most effectively meet the needs of our veterans and military families.

This is why I was appalled yesterday when I heard that President Bush announced that he would veto this legislation. The administration says we must spare no expense for our soldiers and Marines in the field, but when those servicemembers come home, this same President tells them that \$3 billion for health care, family housing and medical research is too much.

To shortchange our veterans and military families, in a time of war, is morally wrong. We have no right to put fiscal responsibility on the backs of our Nation's veterans.

I would hope that we can quickly pass the Military Construction Veterans Affairs Appropriations Bill so that the veterans I met across America can rest assured knowing the help is on the way.

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Mr. WAMP. Mr. Chairman, I yield 2 minutes to the ranking member of the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, the gentleman from Florida, who has a tremendous record with our Nation's veterans.

Mr. YOUNG of Florida. I thank the gentleman for yielding the time.

Mr. Chairman, as a member of the subcommittee presenting this appropriations bill tonight, I rise to strongly support the bill and to compliment and

pay a special tribute to Chairman EDWARDS and Ranking Member ZACH WAMP, who have done such a great job in leading this good subcommittee to present this exceptional bill.

I am particularly pleased that the Department of Veterans Affairs Hospital at Bay Pines, which is in my district that serves the veterans of Florida, will be able to expand the type and quality of care that it can provide through this bill. Work will begin next year on a major \$17.4 million expansion of the Bay Pines Hospital that will provide enhanced mental health and posttraumatic stress syndrome services with funds included in this bill. The new facility responds to an urgent need for additional space and resources to provide mental health and posttraumatic stress counseling and services which are so badly needed.

So, Mr. Chairman, I do rise in support of this bill. There are so many other parts of the bill that have already been discussed and that will be reported in the written legislation, but I just want to say that I believe that it meets the needs of today's military, the members of our military. It meets many of the needs of yesterday's military, and it meets many of the needs of tomorrow's military. It's a good bill. I hope we can expedite its passage and get it to the President, get this bill signed so that the money can start to flow to care for our veterans and to provide necessary facilities for the members of today's military.

Mr. Chairman, this is a good bill and it is needed now. While conducting a foreign war, our military continues to realign to meet current requirements around the globe and continues to aggressively work the base realignment and closure plan. I am glad that it has finally been brought to the floor of the House.

In total, this bill authorizes a total appropriation of \$24.8 billion for needed military construction efforts around the world. This total is \$400 million over the President's requested budget.

In addition, the bill appropriates a total of \$3.2 billion for military and family housing projects for the families of our service members who are bearing the bulk of the sacrifices of this Nation's ongoing military actions around the world. This is an increase of \$300 million over the fiscal year 2008 level.

The bill authorizes \$336 million to continue a quality of life initiative that was begun in the 2008 Supplemental. This sum includes \$200 million for new trainee and recruit housing, and \$136 million for medical military construction and upgrades to certain medical treatment facilities. The President did not request this funding in his budget.

Equally as important are the funds supplied in this bill for our continually increasing veterans population. This bill includes a total funding level of \$47.7 billion for the Department of Veterans Affairs. This total is \$2.9 billion over the President's request. We owe our past, our present and our future veterans the finest care possible.

BAY PINES

I am particularly pleased that the Department of Veterans Affairs Hospital at Bay Pines which serves veterans in Florida will be able

to expand the type and quality of care that it can provide through this bill.

Work will begin next year on a major \$17.4 million expansion of the Bay Pines hospital that will provide enhanced mental health and Post Traumatic Syndrome Disorder, PTSD, services with funds included in this bill. This new facility responds to an urgent need for additional space and resources to provide mental health and post traumatic stress counseling and services.

The three story, 156,00 square foot addition to the main hospital building will include an Outpatient Mental Health Center of Excellence and a Post Traumatic Center of Excellence on the main level and replacement Inpatient Psychiatric and Geriatric Psychiatric bed wings on the 2nd and 3rd levels.

The addition of new space will allow for the renovation of 189,000 square feet of existing patient care space in out years, which will be used for medical and surgical nursing wards and a modern psychiatric domiciliary.

The bill also includes \$4.5 million for the hiring of an additional 20 inspectors for the VA Office of Inspector General, 10 of which will go to the newly established Inspector General facility at Bay Pines. Each dollar spent on the IG will be returned many times over as fraud, waste and abuse are uncovered.

It was through an initiative that I sponsored that the VA opened a major new VA IG office at Bay Pines in May 2007 to expand oversight and investigation operations in Florida to ensure that veterans receive the finest in care and the best use of limited tax dollars. Three years ago I learned that the VA Inspector General had only five personnel to monitor VA operations throughout the entire state of Florida. Soon thereafter I provided funding to enable the Inspector General to expand its operations in Florida to more than 50 investigators, auditors and agents to ferret out waste, fraud and abuse within the VA system, monitor the quality of care veterans receive, and apprehend those who seek to violate the public trust by stealing federal funds or abusing the trust of veterans. The Inspector General has said that the operation at Bay Pines is a flagship for the entire VA system.

TAMPA

The legislation also includes \$21 million for a new headquarters for the special operations element of United States Central Command at MacDill Air Force Base. The new 66,000 square foot building will provide a secure facility for command and control, to train an increasing number of personnel, and store operational equipment. The unit currently operates out of a Cold War era alert bombing facility that is too small to accommodate existing and future manpower requirements and equipment storage.

Another \$10.5 million is included in the bill for construction of a headquarters for the United States Special Operations Command's Global Network Control Center. The unit is currently scattered about MacDill in trailers and temporary facilities. Construction of this 32,000 square foot building would begin in February 2009 with completion in May 2010.

These two projects are part of a major base-wide construction program at MacDill that I have championed since 2006.

Our men and women who serve in uniform deserve the finest possible facilities to train and prepare for missions throughout the world. It is time that we move these special operations units out of trailers and 50-year-old

make-shift facilities and into state-of-the-art buildings.

Mr. EDWARDS of Texas. Mr. Chairman, now it's my privilege to yield for 2 minutes to the gentleman from Florida (Mr. BOYD), a decorated Vietnam veteran and a valued member of this subcommittee.

Mr. BOYD of Florida. Let me thank my chairman, Mr. EDWARDS, for yielding.

Ladies and gentlemen, when our men and women are committed into combat, that has very long and costly consequences. Sometimes I think people in this town don't recognize this. But I can tell you there are some people in this Chamber, particularly Chairman CHET EDWARDS, Ranking Member ZACH WAMP, who do understand that commitment into combat has very long and costly consequences.

Mr. Chairman, I see a lot of "Support Our Troops" slogans around. I see a lot of yellow bumper stickers and those great things. I see people going to churches and preparing care boxes to send overseas.

But that's not enough. That's not enough. We must make a commitment to take care of the families of those who put on the uniform when those in uniform are deployed. We must make a solemn commitment to provide for the health care and education benefits for those who come home after wearing the uniform. Many of them come home injured.

Mr. Chairman, there are some folks in this Chamber that understand that. Congressman DAVE OBEY clearly understands that. Congressman BILL YOUNG, whom you just heard from. I saw Congressman STEVE BUYER earlier, BOB FILNER from California. Those are the folks who were involved in the writing of this legislation which provides the benefits and the commitment that we have made to our men and women.

We have got a whole new generation of veterans who need our support. Those are veterans of the war in Iraq and Afghanistan. And, obviously, it's our moral duty to provide them with the care and benefits that they need.

You've heard in detail about the details of what's in this bill. Mr. WAMP and Mr. EDWARDS have explained that. But it's important that we do this, ladies and gentlemen. This is a promise we've made, and it's simply the right thing to do.

If not for those who answered the call of duty, we would not be the great Nation we are today. For their service and sacrifice, we as Americans are eternally grateful, and I encourage this Congress to honor them by supporting this bill.

And, again, I want to thank the bipartisan work of Chairman CHET EDWARDS and Ranking Member ZACH WAMP, our committee leaders, for what they have done.

Mr. WAMP. Mr. Chairman, I recognize for 2 minutes the gentleman from Jacksonville, Florida, an extremely active member of the subcommittee, ANDER CRENSHAW.

Mr. CRENSHAW. Thank you, Mr. WAMP, for yielding the time and thank you for your leadership on the subcommittee. And I certainly want to commend Chairman EDWARDS for all the hard work that he puts in.

Mr. Chairman, I have served on this subcommittee for as long as I have been on the Appropriations Committee, and I can tell you that there is never a time that I am more proud than when I am working with the young men and women in uniform.

I think we ought to note tonight that this is the first appropriations bill that we're taking up, and I think that speaks volumes about the priority and the commitment that we have in this Chamber to the men and women that wear the uniform. And this bill touches literally everyone, whether they are active duty today, as we provide money for new barracks, new training facilities, new hangars and airfields, and we improve our port facilities for the ships and the planes. It touches those that have served us in the past as veterans, building new facilities, veterans clinics, hospitals, even providing a suicide prevention line to help those troubled veterans as they come back and save, literally save, their lives.

And it also touches the people that are no longer with us because we have money in this bill to maintain and construct national cemeteries to give a final resting place for those who have served us, provide money for the monuments around the world to pay tribute to our fallen heroes.

But it also touches the lives of the family members of our men and women in uniform, day care centers we have talked about, quality of life issues.

So I would say this is a very important bill. It's a good bill. It serves those who serve us the most, and it deserves our support. So I urge my colleagues to join us in passing this legislation.

Mr. EDWARDS of Texas. Mr. Chairman, I yield 2½ minutes to the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. BISHOP), who has been a strong member not only of this committee but the Defense appropriations committee.

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. I thank the gentleman for yielding.

Mr. Chairman, I am very pleased to rise in full support of the fiscal year 2009 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs and related agencies appropriations bill. I am extremely proud of the work of the subcommittee, on both sides of the aisle, as we have crafted a bill that truly supports America's servicemen and -women as well as their families.

Today I am especially pleased that we are ensuring better housing, health care, and day care facilities for our servicemen and -women by providing \$24.8 billion for military construction, family housing, and fully funding BRAC.

Military facilities such as Fort Benning, located in my district, need this funding as they experience signifi-

cant numbers of new personnel as a result of BRAC and the global repositioning of our forces around the world. In the Columbus area, we still have concerns with respect to the impact that BRAC may have on our local school system. But I'm encouraged by the interest and support shown by my colleagues on the subcommittee, in particular Mr. EDWARDS, our chairman; and our ranking member, Mr. WAMP.

But that's not all. Our bill includes nearly \$200 million in additional housing for Army and Marine Corps trainees, an additional \$136 million for medical facilities, \$1.6 billion for Veterans Health Administration, and \$3.8 billion for specialty mental health services, and \$584 million for substance abuse programs.

But I don't think listing figures does justice to saying how important this bill is because with those resources, we are filling some gaping holes in veterans services and upgrading military facilities that are currently underfunded and overextended.

We are fully meeting and addressing the very same kinds of needs that arose at the barracks at Fort Bragg and the hospital at Walter Reed. We're keeping our commitment to veterans and giving the VA the funds they need to hire caseworkers to process the current backlog of claims. We are making sure that our veterans traveling long distances for medical care don't have to empty their wallets in order to get there. And we are upping funding for medical technology and giving our veterans access to a new generation of prosthetics so they may live as normal a life as possible.

Mr. Chairman, in short, this is a good bill.

The Acting CHAIRMAN (Mr. LYNCH). The time of the gentleman has expired.

Mr. EDWARDS of Texas. Mr. Chairman, I yield an additional 15 seconds to the gentleman.

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Thank you.

I would like to recognize and thank the staff of the subcommittee: Carol Murphy, Mary Arnold, Walter Hearne, Tim Bishop, and Donna Shabaz of the majority staff; and Martin Delgado and Liz Dawson of the minority staff; and, of course, Michael Reed and Ed Larkin of my staff.

Mr. WAMP. Mr. Chairman, I yield 5 minutes to the ranking member of the Legislative Branch appropriations subcommittee, the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. LATHAM).

Mr. LATHAM. I thank Mr. WAMP for the time.

Mr. Chairman, I rise today to voice my support for this important measure, and I want to commend Chairman EDWARDS and Ranking Member WAMP for their good work on this most important bill. I urge the Members to support the bill. It is so important to all of our veterans of this country.

I only talk about this to express real frustration that I have. I want to note that in my hand I have an amendment which I had hoped to offer today, but

because of the nature of the rule, I can't. And I wanted to offer this amendment in the interest of people from Iowa and throughout the Midwest who are struggling to put their lives together in the wake of the 500-year Midwest floods.

This amendment would have provided emergency money for economic development assistance for restoration of infrastructure, Army Corps of Engineers money to repair levees, SBA disaster loan assistance, Community Planning and Development funds for infrastructure, and additional FEMA disaster relief moneys. Unfortunately, we can't, and I don't want to delay this process. But this bill should be passed before we leave for break.

Mr. Chairman, last week I wrote a letter to the Speaker of the House and asked that we finally address, after 7 weeks, the flood disaster throughout the Midwest. I have not heard a response; so obviously we're being ignored.

I asked some folks at home to tell me some of their stories, and they have e-mailed me and sent me their messages, and I would like to read a couple of those.

The first one actually is a copy I received of an e-mail to Speaker PELOSI, and it reads:

"I cannot believe that you will not bring flood relief legislation to a vote. Now you are going on vacation. Twenty-five thousand homes were lost in the June floods in Iowa alone, and Congress votes to recognize the National Day of the Cowboy instead of passing legislation to help Iowans.

"After Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, Congress passed emergency supplemental bills nearly immediately, and here we are 7 weeks after the Iowa floods and no additional help! It is no wonder Congress's approval rating is at an all-time low.

"While you're on vacation, please remember the thousands of Iowans who have no homes."

An e-mail received from a resident of Cedar Rapids. She said:

"My husband volunteers on the weekends and 1 day a week (bless his employer for letting him work 4 10-hour days so he can do flood relief) as a flood site coordinator, which means he moves around from team to team and are sent by our church to help the residents 'muck' out their basements, and tear out the walls, insulation, trim, carpet, and get rid of the furnaces and water heaters (and, unfortunately, throw out their life with every personal item that goes on the curbs)

"What are the elected officials in Washington going to do to help? I must be the most naive U.S. citizen who can hardly believe that it takes an act of Congress to have a National Cowboy Day but can go on a recess with clear consciences before coming up with some plan of action for this area and the people . . .

"The Red Cross has moved on and the Salvation Army has come off the

streets. FEMA sent trailers, people settled into them, and then they were displaced again when mold was found in the trailers . . .

"These people are not asking for more than what they had, just help putting their lives, families, and homes back together. They need help and support from those they have put their trust in."

And another e-mail from a lady in Mason City. It says:

"Please continue your fight to have Congress address the disaster needs of the Midwest! The rest of the world seems to have forgotten about our disaster. However, for those of us still fighting it, it's as painful today as it was the day our houses were filled with water.

"My family is just one of many here in Mason City who are homeless . . .

"Our house is significantly damaged; so we can't move back into it. We thought we could, and then 2 weeks ago we discovered the amount of damage was too much.

□ 2045

"We have to elevate it, move it, or destroy it. Our house is a trilevel house where the floors are not on top of each other. The cost of elevating or moving would be more than the value of our home. The only option is to destroy it.

"The house we are currently renting is a house for sale. On any given day, we are 30 to 45 days away from being homeless again. The house has been shown to prospective buyers at least six times since the flood. We are trying to find a house we can rent for a year. It's almost impossible to find something we can afford that's in a safe area and somewhat decent."

I would hope that the House tomorrow, since we are going to be in session, will finally pass disaster relief for people who are really hurting.

Mr. EDWARDS of Texas. Mr. Chairman, may I first inquire as to how much time we have remaining on our side.

The Acting CHAIRMAN. The gentleman from Texas has 7¼ minutes.

Mr. EDWARDS of Texas. Mr. Chairman, I now yield 3 minutes to the chairman of the full House Appropriations Committee, the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. OBEY).

Mr. OBEY. Mr. Chairman, I had not intended to speak in general debate on this bill, but in light of some of the comments made by the previous speaker, I feel obligated to.

The gentleman said that it was the nature of the rule under which this bill is being considered that prevented him from offering an amendment. The fact is that the only thing this rule did was to require that people publish their amendments 1 day ahead of time so that we were not legislating by ambush. The rules of the House always provide for germaneness. And, as the gentleman knows, his amendment is not germane to this bill.

Secondly, I would point out that we put \$2.65 billion in the supplemental for

Midwest disaster funding and for other disasters around the country. And I would point out that we did that even though the White House never sent to this Congress an official budget request to deal with the disasters not just in Iowa, but Wisconsin as well, my own State.

Thirdly, I would point out that the Speaker met today with a number of Members from the Iowa delegation and we made clear that as soon as we get official numbers from the administration that are at all coherent, we will act, and that this Congress will not adjourn for the year without providing needed disaster relief.

I just want to make clear there was nothing done in the rule.

Mr. LATHAM. Would the gentleman yield?

Mr. OBEY. Yes. I'd be happy to.

Mr. LATHAM. I appreciate the chairman's work. I sincerely do. We all know that it would not be germane in this bill. That is not the issue.

I would ask, would the gentleman entertain a unanimous consent to have this amendment considered today?

Mr. OBEY. As the gentleman knows, we have been criticized up and down the river by your own leadership for trying to add what they described as nongermane or unrelated items to these bills. As you well know, this bill is probably not going to become law before any supplemental that is passed in September, as the gentleman knows. So there is no rational reason for me to accede to that request.

We have dealt with the gentleman above the table, honorably, and fairly. You offered an amendment in the full committee to the energy and water bill, adding money for disaster funding. We accepted the amendment. I would suggest that the gentleman owes the Speaker of the House an apology.

Mr. LATHAM. Would the gentleman yield?

Mr. OBEY. Not further at this time.

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

Mr. EDWARDS of Texas. Mr. Chairman, at this time I'd like to yield 2 minutes to a member of the Armed Services Committee who has worked day and night for the troops and veterans in her district and this country, the gentlelady from Kansas (Mrs. BOYDA).

Mrs. BOYDA of Kansas. Thank you very much to my good friend from Texas, Mr. CHET EDWARDS, for yielding. We have worked quite diligently on many of the issues going on right in Kansas at the military bases, Fort Leavenworth and Fort Riley, that I have the honor to represent.

I would just like to say that as a new Member of Congress, when I came, I had heard many, many promises made to veterans, and I had to wonder if they were going to be met. Many people said, Yes. Trust us. They will be met. And you can imagine as a new Member of Congress, and as a freshman, to have those promises to our veterans actually met meant so much to me, for

somebody who came to Washington to try to make a difference and, in fact, for the second year in a row we are really righting some of the real problems that we have seen with our Veterans Administration and we are proposing record funding for the second year in a row, and I am deeply proud and honored to be part of this Congress.

I understand that this is a bipartisan bill, and for that I am very grateful. We have plenty of floods in Kansas as well. There's a right time and a wrong time to bring that up. I believe that the Members on this side of the aisle have been very, very diligent to make sure that that is taken care of. I would like to see this committee particularly keep that same bipartisan air that has served this country so well.

Some of the things that are highlighting that are so important to the good people of Kansas and our veterans across the United States, an initial \$4 billion for mental health, for TBI, for PTSD, for the drug abuse that we see way too often, for the suicides that are hitting our soldiers. That \$4 billion of extra funding will make a huge difference in these soldiers' lives.

Mileage reimbursement. I come from the State of Kansas. It's a huge issue. The 41.5 cents a mile is a significant increase. I still would love to see it come up to be the full standard, but this is a significant increase that will mean a great deal to veterans from Kansas who have to travel a great deal.

Thank you, and congratulations on this wonderful and bipartisan bill.

Mr. WAMP. Mr. Chairman, I yield 3 minutes to a great patriot, the gentleman from the State of Arizona (Mr. FRANKS).

Mr. FRANKS of Arizona. I thank the gentlemen very much for yielding.

Mr. Chairman, I will vote "yes" on this bill, but I am really astonished that the Democrats have gutted the European Missile Defense site. We don't seem to understand that the coincidence of jihadist terrorism and nuclear proliferation represents the greatest existential threat to human peace in the world today. Unfortunately, they seem to think that if they kill it for this year and put it in the next administration, somehow it will be of some political benefit to them. BARACK OBAMA has said that he will cut missile defense spending, and he simply does not understand the gravity of a nuclear Iran, Mr. Chairman.

Every day we are in this body, Iran enriches more uranium. They come closer and closer to having a nuclear capability. When they gain that, Mr. Chairman, it won't be long before al Qaeda will have that capability as well.

It may not be long that Iran will be able to actually field a weapon that could create an electromagnetic pulse across this country that would be the ultimate asymmetric weapon for terrorists in the world today. And I find it astonishing that when our first purpose in this body is to protect the lives and

constitutional rights of the American people, that for some ridiculous political motivation that we would strip the ability for us to be able to intercept missiles coming from Iran that would either hit our allies in Europe or our forward-deployed troops or people here at home, that somehow we think that we have done our job.

I would remind us all that Osama bin Laden said these words. He said, It is our religious duty to gain nuclear weapons.

Mr. Chairman, if they succeed, if Iran succeeds, al Qaeda will succeed in gaining those nuclear weapons. If that happens, we will revisit this subject on a day in the future and we will have to explain to our children why we let such a profound threat to human peace exist when it was in our power to change it.

Mr. EDWARDS of Texas. Mr. Chairman, may I ask how much time I have remaining.

The Acting CHAIRMAN. The gentleman has 2¼ minutes.

Mr. EDWARDS of Texas. Let me first yield myself 15 seconds, if I could respond.

Mr. Chairman, the last speaker was simply wrong. He suggested this bill kills the European Missile Defense plan. It does not do that. He suggested there were political motivations. That is not correct. I hate to see that partisanship injected in a bill that has been put together on a bipartisan basis. We fund \$140 million for that project. The project hasn't even been authorized by the parliaments in the Czech Republic or Poland. We allow the program to continue despite that fact.

With that, I would like to yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. ALTMIRE).

Mr. ALTMIRE. I thank the gentleman. I could not be more proud of this bill that we are debating here today and that we are going to pass tonight.

Last year, we provided \$12 billion in increased funding for the VA health care system, the largest single year increase in the 77-year history of the VA. Today, we follow up with a \$4.6 billion funding increase, representing an 11 percent increase over that high bar that we set last year.

We are proving once again tonight in this Congress no group will stand ahead of our Nation's veterans when it comes time to make funding decisions.

The increased funding allows for enrollment of Priority 8 veterans. Priority 8 veterans have not been enrolled since 2003, as part of the Bush administration's cost-cutting efforts, and approximately 50 percent of all uninsured veterans today are Priority 8 veterans.

This bill will allow us to hire over 2,000 more claims processors to decrease that backlog that we have, which is now almost 400,000 cases, with 2,000 new claims processors.

In western Pennsylvania, where I'm from, there's a 6,000-case backlog. Those claims remain unanswered. So we are going to clear that up with this funding today.

In February, I testified before the House Budget Committee about the importance of increasing funding for our veterans' programs. I was pleased to vote on the floor of this House this year and last in favor of a budget resolution that met and exceeded the commitment that we have made to our Nation's veterans.

I urge all of my colleagues to support this bill. I congratulate Chairman EDWARDS on his work on this. It's a bipartisan bill. We are all on this together.

Mr. WAMP. Mr. Chairman, I yield myself such time as I may consume for the purpose to close briefly by saying that Chairman OBEY said something at the full committee that I want to paraphrase and restate in the context that we all know that those who do not learn from history, are destined to repeat it.

One of the lessons of Vietnam is that regardless of how you feel, especially as a policymaker, but even as a citizen, about the war in Iraq or the war in Afghanistan, or any war, it's so important to appreciate fully the men and women who are engaged in that war on our behalf. Regardless of how you feel about the mission, it is so important for our Nation to appreciate and support and fund and resource the needs of our men and women in uniform and our veterans.

I want to say tonight I grew up a Democrat. I am a Republican today. But we should, and are, meeting at the water's edge on this issue of resourcing the men and women in harm's way and supporting the veterans when they come home for the balance of their life.

This is a lesson of history, of modern history. We saw it and we are making that right. So even though many of them do not support what we are doing in Iraq, or maybe even Afghanistan, this bill supports those who are fighting, and their families. And that is important.

In closing, I do want to recognize by name again the extraordinary staff. They call these people the front office staff. Rob Nabors and Jeff Shockey at the highest level. This committee staff is bipartisan. There happens to be a majority staff, Carol Murphy, Donna Shahbaz, Walter Hearne; the minority staff, Martin Delgado, Liz Dawson, and Kelly Shea. Mr. EDWARDS has John Conger, I have Amanda Schoch. They have done a remarkable job day in day out to bring us to this today because this is a great work product. Not all bills that come to this floor are, but this is. And it's right. I urge its passage.

I thank you for the time on the general debate. We have got 37 amendments. The hour is getting late. Let's get on with it.

I yield back the balance of our time.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. Chairman, I rise in support of H.R. 6599, a bill to fund U.S. military construction and maintenance and the operations of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The Military Construction and Veterans Affairs bill appropriates a total of \$118.7 billion

for military construction and veterans' programs, \$10.3 billion more than the current level and \$3.4 billion more than the President's request. This funding will provide compensation payments to millions of veterans and their survivors, pension payments and financial assistance to their widows and children, and is the primary support for their military related medical care.

The Veterans Department oversees the largest Federal medical care delivery system in the country, with 153 hospitals, 50 residential rehabilitation treatment centers, 135 nursing homes, and 1,089 outpatient clinics. The almost \$94 billion set aside in this bill is a significant increase over the Administration's request and will help fund medical administration, operations and maintenance of medical facilities such as Walter Reed, and important medical, trauma and mental health research. This bill also provides the funding for the BRAC.

We all know there is a massive military base closure and realignment underway in this country. The potential for increased traffic congestion at these new military facilities, such as the one being constructed in my district in Bethesda, MD, can be disruptive for the citizens who currently live in these communities. I want to thank the Committee for working with me to insert language in this bill directing the Department of Defense to aggressively plan and budget for the Defense Access Roads programs that should help alleviate some of the pressure on the communities that are dealing with BRAC.

This nation has 23,500,000 veterans and 35,900,000 family members of living veterans and survivors of deceased veterans. That means close to 20 percent of this country's total population are potential recipients of veterans benefits. We have a responsibility to support the past and present servicemembers and their families who have served and sacrificed for us. Providing quality healthcare and decent living conditions for them and their families is the least we can do for these brave men and women. I hope my colleagues will join me in supporting this important piece of legislation.

Mr. SOUDER. Mr. Chairman, pursuant to the Republican Leadership standards on earmarks, I, MARK SOUDER, am submitting the following information for publication in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD regarding earmarks I received as part of H.R. 6599—The Military Construction and Veterans Affairs FY09 Appropriations bill.

Included in H.R. 6599 is a \$5,600,000 earmark that I submitted for the construction of Aircraft Ready Shelters and Fuel Fill Stands for the 122nd Fighter Wing located at 3005 Ferguson Road, Fort Wayne International Airport, IN 46809.

The funding will be used to construct a two aircraft bay parking shelter addition to the existing two aircraft bay parking shelter providing a total of four parking spots under shelter as required for a base A/C Readiness Shelter. Project consists of the following: Construct reinforced concrete foundation and painted floor slab with grounding points; masonry and metal siding walls; steel frame; and standing seam metal roof; include a high expansion fire suppression system and overhead infrared heating; provide hangar style doors for drive through capability; remove existing asphalt and provide new concrete taxiway entry and

exit; provide asphalt transition to the south apron area; construct stainless steel underground piping, reinforced concrete for curbed access pavement, and refueler fill stands. The base requires adequately sized, appropriately configured, and functional aircraft readiness shelters with supporting taxiway system to support four-ship F-16 aircraft mission requirements. Due to previous funding restraints the current shelter facility was constructed with two parking spots with a plan to add two more at a later date. Readiness shelters are necessary for mission support, operations safety, and protection of aircraft and flightline personnel from inclement weather. The project will also provide a refueler vehicle fill stand on the operational side of the railroad tracks to support the flying mission.

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. Chairman, Fort Campbell, one of the Army's largest posts and home to the 101st Airborne Division, is in the seventh district of Tennessee, which I am honored to represent.

Currently, over 700 Tennessee National Guardsmen and the bulk of the 101st Airborne are deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan.

With this in mind, I'm particularly gratified that this House is finally discussing an appropriations bill today. Funding for Military Construction and Veterans Affairs certainly warrants our attention.

The brave members of our military, and the families that support them at home, are fulfilling the commitment they made to our Nation by fighting and serving to help protect it.

The federal government must in turn fulfill its commitment to provide top-quality equipment, facilities, and training for these heroes, and the best possible care upon their return.

On behalf of the men and women in uniform, veterans, and military families in Tennessee's 7th district, I urge my colleagues to support today's measure for MILCON-VA appropriations.

□ 2100

The Acting CHAIRMAN. All time for general debate has expired.

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

No amendment to the bill may be offered except those printed in the portion of the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD designated for that purpose in a daily issue dated July 30, 2008, or earlier, and pro forma amendments for the purpose of debate. Each amendment may be offered only by the Member who caused it to be printed, or his designee, and shall be considered read.

The Clerk will read.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 6599

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That the following sums are appropriated, out of any money in the Treasury not otherwise appropriated, for military construction, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2009, and for other purposes, namely:

TITLE I

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, ARMY

(INCLUDING RESCISSIONS OF FUNDS)

For acquisition, construction, installation, and equipment of temporary or permanent

public works, military installations, facilities, and real property for the Army as currently authorized by law, including personnel in the Army Corps of Engineers and other personal services necessary for the purposes of this appropriation, and for construction and operation of facilities in support of the functions of the Commander in Chief, \$4,801,536,000, to remain available until September 30, 2013: *Provided*, That of this amount, not to exceed \$175,823,000 shall be available for study, planning, design, architect and engineer services, and host nation support, as authorized by law, unless the Secretary of Defense determines that additional obligations are necessary for such purposes and notifies the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress of the determination and the reasons therefor: *Provided further*, That the amount appropriated in this paragraph shall be for the projects and activities, and in the amounts, specified under the headings "Army" in the table entitled "Military Construction" in the report of the Committee on Appropriations of the House of Representatives to accompany this bill: *Provided further*, That of the funds appropriated for "Military Construction, Army" under Public Law 110-5, \$34,720,000 are hereby rescinded: *Provided further*, That of the funds appropriated for "Military Construction, Army" under Public Law 110-161, \$16,600,000 are hereby rescinded.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, NAVY AND MARINE CORPS

For acquisition, construction, installation, and equipment of temporary or permanent public works, naval installations, facilities, and real property for the Navy and Marine Corps as currently authorized by law, including personnel in the Naval Facilities Engineering Command and other personal services necessary for the purposes of this appropriation, \$3,280,809,000, to remain available until September 30, 2013: *Provided*, That of this amount, not to exceed \$247,128,000 shall be available for study, planning, design, and architect and engineer services, as authorized by law, unless the Secretary of Defense determines that additional obligations are necessary for such purposes and notifies the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress of the determination and the reasons therefor: *Provided further*, That the amount appropriated in this paragraph shall be for the projects and activities, and in the amounts, specified under the headings "Navy" in the table entitled "Military Construction" in the report of the Committee on Appropriations of the House of Representatives to accompany this bill.

Mr. THOMPSON of California. Mr. Chairman, I move to strike the last word and engage in a colloquy with Chairman EDWARDS, Congressman REHBERG and myself.

The Acting CHAIRMAN. The gentleman is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. THOMPSON of California. Mr. Chairman, I would like to yield to the gentleman from Montana.

Mr. REHBERG. Thank you, and I would like to thank the gentleman from Texas for all his hard work in drafting this important piece of legislation.

Beginning in 1962, the Department of Defense commenced a number of chemical and biological tests involving nearly 6,000 American military personnel. These tests, known as Project 112 and Project SHAD, exposed servicemembers to toxic agents such as Vx nerve gas, sarin nerve gas and E. Coli.

Not surprising, many of the veterans unknowingly exposed to deadly agents are suffering from serious medical conditions. Yet for over 40 years the Department of Defense denied the existence of these tests. All the while, these veterans continued to suffer. Finally, in 2001, DOD admitted to conducting Project 112 and Project SHAD, but they still refused to take responsibility for their care.

Enough is enough. As we approach the end of this Congress, we can do our part to care for these veterans by extending an expiring provision which allows for Project 112 and Project SHAD veterans to receive care at VA facilities without proving service connection.

My constituent, John Olson, a veteran of Project SHAD, spent all day Tuesday undergoing tests for a possible aneurysm. This is the latest in a long line of medical problems since leaving the service. Yet, as my friend from California will state, the VA is approving claims at an embarrassingly low rate. We can and should do everything we can to care for these veterans.

I want to thank Mr. THOMPSON of California for keeping this issue in front of the press, keeping this issue in front of the Congress, and keeping this issue in front of the American people.

Mr. THOMPSON of California. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for all your work on this bill and all that you have done over the years for both veterans and those currently serving in the military. I value greatly all the work that you have done. But as Mr. REHBERG said, 45 years ago, the Department of Defense began more than 50 chemical and biological weapons tests on U.S. servicemen without their knowledge. The government called these top secret tests Project SHAD. For the next 40 years, the Department of Defense denied Project SHAD even took place.

Ten years ago, I was able to prove that in fact they did take place, and the DOD said they only used simulants and at no time were these veterans exposed to anything harmful. Finally, after 3 more years of work, the DOD admitted they used live and extremely dangerous agents, such as Vx nerve gas and sarin.

More alarming than the lies and the coverup, we are not giving these veterans the care they need and deserve today. A recent Associated Press article revealed that only 6 percent of claims made by Project SHAD veterans and other veterans involved in these secret government tests have been accepted by the VA. That is only 39 out of 641 claims. These brave men served our country and they served it with distinction, and in return they were unknowingly used as human guinea pigs by their own government. Now they are denied care.

The extension of treatment authority would go a long way towards increasing the VA's dismal record in helping our veterans exposed to these harmful agents, a record that the veterans serv-

ice associations in this country have called shocking, disgraceful and disappointing.

I hope that the chairman can assure me that he will work together with us to find the appropriate vehicle to extend this important provision.

Mr. EDWARDS of Texas. Let me thank Mr. REHBERG of Montana and Mr. THOMPSON, a distinguished Vietnam veteran, for raising this important issue. I am glad the House has taken action on this issue in another measure. I am disappointed the other body has not. Given that fact, we could not add this provision to this bill under the rules of the House, but I will make a good faith effort to work with both of the gentleman to address what is a serious problem.

These great Americans should be honored by our actions. I hope at the end of the day we can look them in the eye and say we have served them, just as they have served our country so honorably.

Mr. REHBERG. We thank the gentleman from Texas.

Mr. THOMPSON of California. I thank the gentleman, Mr. EDWARDS. I would just remind everybody that these veterans are sick today, they are dying, they need the medical care that they deserve and the medical care that they earned. I appreciate your willingness to work with us on this.

I yield back the remainder of my time.

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

The Acting CHAIRMAN. The gentleman from Indiana is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. VISCLOSKY. Mr. Chairman, I rise to engage the gentleman from Texas, my good friend Chairman EDWARDS, in a colloquy, and I would like to thank the chairman for agreeing to engage in this. I also want to thank Mr. STUPAK for his continued support and dedication on the issue of steel safety, and look forward to working with both gentlemen on requiring that all iron and steel purchased by the Federal Government be made in the United States. This will keep Americans safe and help our country prosper.

Mr. Chairman, I understand that there is a provision in this measure that requires American steel producers, fabricators and manufacturers to have the opportunity to compete for steel funded through the Department of Defense under this act. While I am encouraged and grateful for this provision and believe that it is a critically important aspect for all government procurements, frankly, I do not believe it is enough.

China disobeys international trading rules, for example, and the playing field is not level. Therefore, it is not possible for our steel producers to compete fairly.

This last April, the Congressional Steel Caucus held a hearing on substandard steel from China. We learned from U.S. Customs and Border Protec-

tion about how our government does not have an established process to monitor the safety of steel imports. We also heard from representatives of the domestic steel industry about how some Chinese steel companies do not adhere to international standards and guidelines when they manufacture steel, and that the steel may be used in our military barracks, veterans hospitals, and other vital infrastructure.

I also would mention that this last October it was reported that substandard Chinese steel was used in the construction of a gymnasium at San Pedro High School in California, prompting the California Department of General Services to post an alert on defective Chinese steel tubing fabricated for school construction projects.

Last year, China had a major earthquake and we saw pictures of how their schools and hospitals survived. We cannot wait to take action on this issue until a hospital or school collapses in the United States. Does it cost too much to require the use of American steel if it saves lives? The government that we fund must set an example and make sure that the buildings we build use American steel that can stand the test of time.

When considering the construction of facilities that hospitalize, house and take care of our veterans, we owe them every possibility to ensure their health and safety. We owe them the requirement that safe American steel is used, and that is why Representative STUPAK and I have raised this issue.

Again, I thank the chairman for engaging in this colloquy and for his good work on this bill.

Mr. EDWARDS of Texas. I would like to thank Chairman VISCLOSKY for his leadership on this issue and Mr. STUPAK as well. We all know that a healthy steel industry in the United States is not only terribly important for our economy, but it is critical to our Nation's defense. It is an industry we must have.

So I look forward to working with the gentleman in good faith to see if we can take the language in this bill that already is supportive of the use of U.S. steel and see if we can't improve that language as we go forward.

Mr. VISCLOSKY. I thank the gentleman very much, and would yield back my time.

The Acting CHAIRMAN. The Committee will rise informally.

The Speaker pro tempore (Mr. FILLNER) assumed the chair.

FURTHER MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

A further message from the Senate by Ms. Curtis, one of its clerks, announced that the Senate agrees to the report of the committee of conference on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses on the amendment of the Senate to the bill (H.R. 4040) entitled "An Act to establish consumer product