

I would like to thank Chairman FILNER, as well as Disability and Memorial Affairs Subcommittee Chairman JOHN HALL, and Ranking Member DOUG LAMBORN for their efforts to bring this bill to the House floor in an expeditious manner. Our action on this bill today will be the final action before the bill is presented to the President for signature, and I encourage all my colleagues to support passage of S. 2617, the Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2008.

Mr. HALL of New York. Mr. Speaker, I rise, today in support of S. 2617, the Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act. With today's military and veteran community facing increasing deployments, a struggling economy, rising gas prices, and other hardships that together create tough financial situations, this legislation could not have come at a better time.

For many of our Nation's veterans and their families, these payments are a necessity in order to make ends meet. They provide for veterans with service-connected disabilities and the survivors of certain disabled veterans. Specifically, this COLA increase will boost wartime disability compensation, additional compensation for benefits, and even things such as clothing allowances.

Again, in these increasingly tough times, we cannot allow rising costs to strip our brave veterans of this crucial resource. For those who have done so much by sacrificing mind, body, and family in service of this Nation, this COLA is the least we can do to honor their sacrifices.

I commend Senator AKAKA for his hard work passing this crucially needed legislation through the Senate, and urge my colleagues to pass this in the House with equal success.

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

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I would ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on S. 2617.

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

There was no objection.

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to unanimously support it and yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER) that the House suspend the rules and pass the Senate bill, S. 2617.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds being in the affirmative, the yeas have it.

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX and the Chair's prior announcement, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

VETERANS' PROGRAMS EXTENSION AND CONSTRUCTION AUTHORIZATION ACT OF 2008

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill

(H.R. 6832) to authorize major medical facility projects and major medical facility leases for the Department of Veterans Affairs for fiscal year 2009, to extend certain authorities of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 6832

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

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE; TABLE OF CONTENTS.

(a) SHORT TITLE.—This Act may be cited as the "Veterans' Programs Extension and Construction Authorization Act of 2008".

(b) TABLE OF CONTENTS.—The table of contents for this Act is as follows:

Sec. 1. Short title; table of contents.

TITLE I—AUTHORIZATION OF MEDICAL FACILITY PROJECTS AND MAJOR MEDICAL FACILITY LEASES

Sec. 101. Authorization for fiscal year 2009 major medical facility projects.

Sec. 102. Modification of authorization amounts for certain major medical facility construction projects previously authorized.

Sec. 103. Authorization of fiscal year 2009 major medical facility leases.

Sec. 104. Authorization of construction of major medical facility, Okaloosa County, Florida.

Sec. 105. Authorization of appropriations.

Sec. 106. Report on facilities administration.

Sec. 107. Annual report on outpatient clinics.

TITLE II—EXTENSION OF CERTAIN AUTHORITIES

Sec. 201. Repeal of sunset on inclusion of noninstitutional extended care services in definition of medical services.

Sec. 202. Extension of recovery audit authority.

Sec. 203. Permanent authority for provision of hospital care, medical services, and nursing home care to veterans who participated in certain chemical and biological testing conducted by the Department of Defense.

Sec. 204. Extension of expiring collections authorities.

Sec. 205. Extension of nursing home care.

Sec. 206. Extension of authority to carry out income verification.

Sec. 207. Permanent authority to establish research corporations.

Sec. 208. Extension of certain veterans home loan guaranty programs.

Sec. 209. Extension of requirement to submit annual report on the Special Committee on Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Sec. 210. Extension of requirement to submit annual report on the Committee on Care of Severely Chronically Mentally Ill Veterans.

Sec. 211. Permanent requirement for biannual report on Women's Advisory Committee.

Sec. 212. Permanent authority for Advisory Committee on Minority Veterans.

Sec. 213. Extension of temporary increase in maximum loan guaranty amount for certain housing loans guaranteed by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

TITLE III—OTHER MATTERS

Sec. 301. Increase in cap of number of veterans participating in independent living program.

Sec. 302. Enhancement of refinancing of home loans by veterans.

Sec. 303. Technical amendments.

TITLE I—AUTHORIZATION OF MEDICAL FACILITY PROJECTS AND MAJOR MEDICAL FACILITY LEASES

SEC. 101. AUTHORIZATION FOR FISCAL YEAR 2009 MAJOR MEDICAL FACILITY PROJECTS.

The Secretary of Veterans Affairs may carry out the following major medical facility projects in fiscal year 2009 in the amount specified for each project:

(1) Seismic corrections, Building 2, at the Department of Veterans Affairs Palo Alto Health Care System, Palo Alto Division Palo Alto, California, in an amount not to exceed \$54,000,000.

(2) Construction of a polytrauma healthcare and rehabilitation center at the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center, San Antonio, Texas, in an amount not to exceed \$66,000,000.

(3) Seismic corrections, Building 1, at the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center, San Juan, Puerto Rico, in an amount not to exceed \$225,900,000.

SEC. 102. MODIFICATION OF AUTHORIZATION AMOUNTS FOR CERTAIN MAJOR MEDICAL FACILITY CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS PREVIOUSLY AUTHORIZED.

(a) MODIFICATION OF MAJOR MEDICAL FACILITY AUTHORIZATIONS.—Section 801(a) of the Veterans Benefits, Health Care, and Information Technology Act of 2006 (Public Law 109-461) is amended—

(1) in paragraph (1)—

(A) by striking "\$300,000,000" and inserting "\$625,000,000"; and

(B) by striking the second sentence; and

(2) in paragraph (3), by striking "\$98,000,000" and inserting "\$769,200,000".

(b) MODIFICATION OF AUTHORIZATION FOR CERTAIN MAJOR MEDICAL FACILITY CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS PREVIOUSLY AUTHORIZED IN CONNECTION WITH CAPITAL ASSET REALIGNMENT INITIATIVE.—

(1) CORRECTION OF PATIENT PRIVACY DEFICIENCIES AT THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS MEDICAL CENTER, GAINESVILLE, FLORIDA.—Paragraph (5) of section 802 of the Veterans Benefits, Health Care, and Information Technology Act of 2006 (Public Law 109-461) is amended by striking "\$85,200,000" and inserting "\$136,700,000".

(2) CONSTRUCTION OF A NEW MEDICAL CENTER FACILITY AT THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS MEDICAL CENTER, LAS VEGAS, NEVADA.—Paragraph (7) of such section is amended by striking "\$406,000,000" and inserting "\$600,400,000".

(3) CONSTRUCTION OF A NEW OUTPATIENT CLINIC, LEE COUNTY, FLORIDA.—Paragraph (8) of such section is amended—

(A) by striking "ambulatory" and all that follows through "purchase," and inserting "outpatient clinic in"; and

(B) by striking "\$65,100,000" and inserting "\$131,800,000".

(4) CONSTRUCTION OF A NEW MEDICAL CENTER FACILITY, ORLANDO, FLORIDA.—Paragraph (11) of such section is amended by striking "\$377,700,000" and inserting "\$656,800,000".

(5) CONSOLIDATION OF CAMPUSES AT THE UNIVERSITY DRIVE AND H. JOHN HEINZ III DIVISIONS, PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA.—Paragraph (12) of such section is amended by striking "\$189,205,000" and inserting "\$295,600,000".

SEC. 103. AUTHORIZATION OF FISCAL YEAR 2009 MAJOR MEDICAL FACILITY LEASES.

The Secretary of Veterans Affairs may carry out the following major medical facility leases in fiscal year 2009 at the locations specified, and in an amount for each lease not to exceed the amount shown for such location:

(1) For an outpatient clinic, Brandon, Florida, \$4,326,000.

(2) For an outpatient clinic, Colorado Springs, Colorado, \$3,995,000.

(3) For an outpatient clinic, Eugene, Oregon, \$5,826,000.

(4) For the expansion of an outpatient clinic, Green Bay, Wisconsin, \$5,891,000.

(5) For an outpatient clinic, Greenville, South Carolina, \$3,731,000.

(6) For an outpatient clinic, Mansfield, Ohio, \$2,212,000.

(7) For an outpatient clinic, Mayaguez, Puerto Rico, \$6,276,000.

(8) For an outpatient clinic, Mesa, Arizona, \$5,106,000.

(9) For interim research space, Palo Alto, California, \$8,636,000.

(10) For the expansion of an outpatient clinic, Savannah, Georgia, \$3,168,000.

(11) For an outpatient clinic, Sun City, Arizona, \$2,295,000.

(12) For a primary care annex, Tampa, Florida, \$8,652,000.

SEC. 104. AUTHORIZATION OF CONSTRUCTION OF MAJOR MEDICAL FACILITY, OKALOOSA COUNTY, FLORIDA.

(a) **AUTHORIZATION.**—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall carry out a major medical facility project to construct a new medical facility of the Department of Veterans Affairs in Okaloosa County, Florida, in an amount not to exceed \$54,475,000.

(b) **FACILITY LOCATION.**—The facility authorized to be constructed pursuant to subsection (a) shall be built in accordance with option 2 of the report to Congress dated June 26, 2007, required to be submitted under section 823 of the Veterans Benefits, Health Care, and Information Technology Act of 2006 (Public Law 109-461; 120 Stat. 3449).

(c) **PLAN FOR SHARING OF INPATIENT AND OUTPATIENT SERVICES.**—Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of the Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and House of Representatives a plan that sets forth terms and conditions for the sharing of inpatient and outpatient services at the medical facility authorized to be constructed pursuant to subsection (a).

SEC. 105. AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.

(a) **AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS FOR FISCAL YEAR 2009 MAJOR MEDICAL FACILITY PROJECTS.**—There is authorized to be appropriated for the Secretary of Veterans Affairs for fiscal year 2009 for the Construction, Major Projects, account—

(1) \$345,900,000 for the projects authorized in section 101;

(2) \$1,694,295,000 for the increased amounts authorized for projects whose authorizations are modified by section 102; and

(3) \$54,475,000 for the project authorized in section 104.

(b) **AUTHORIZATION FOR APPROPRIATIONS FOR FISCAL YEAR 2009 MAJOR MEDICAL FACILITY LEASES.**—There is authorized to be appropriated for the Secretary of Veterans Affairs for fiscal year 2009 for the Medical Facilities account, \$60,114,000, for the leases authorized in section 103.

SEC. 106. REPORT ON FACILITIES ADMINISTRATION.

Not later than 60 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and House of Representatives a report updating the progress of the Secretary in complying with section 312A of title 38, United States Code.

SEC. 107. ANNUAL REPORT ON OUTPATIENT CLINICS.

(a) **ANNUAL REPORT REQUIRED.**—Subchapter I of chapter 81 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new section:

“§ 8119. Annual report on outpatient clinics

“(a) **ANNUAL REPORT REQUIRED.**—The Secretary shall submit to the committees an annual report on community-based outpatient clinics and other outpatient clinics of the Department. The report shall be submitted each year not later than the date on which the budget for the next fiscal year is submitted to the Congress under section 1105 of title 31.

“(b) **CONTENTS OF REPORT.**—Each report required under subsection (a) shall include the following:

“(1) A list of each community-based outpatient clinic and other outpatient clinic of the Department, and for each such clinic, the type of clinic, location, size, number of health professionals employed by the clinic, workload, whether the clinic is leased or constructed and operated by the Secretary, and the annual cost of operating the clinic.

“(2) A list of community-based outpatient clinics and other outpatient clinics that the Secretary opened during the fiscal year preceding the fiscal year during which the report is submitted and a list of clinics the Secretary proposes opening during the fiscal year during which the report is submitted and the subsequent fiscal year, together with the cost of activating each such clinic and the information required to be provided under paragraph (1) for each such clinic and proposed clinic.

“(3) A list of proposed community-based outpatient clinics and other outpatient clinics that are, as of the date of the submission of the report, under review by the National Review Panel and a list of possible locations for future clinics identified in the Department's strategic planning process, including any identified locations in rural and underserved areas.

“(4) A prioritized list of sites of care identified by the Secretary that the Secretary could establish without carrying out construction or entering into a lease, including—

“(A) any such sites that could be expanded by hiring additional staff or allocating staff to Federal facilities or facilities operating in collaboration with the Federal Government; and

“(B) any sites established, or able to be established, under sections 8111 and 8153 of this title.”.

(b) **DEADLINE FOR FIRST ANNUAL REPORT.**—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit the first report required under section 8119(a) of title 38, United States Code, as added by subsection (a), by not later than 90 days after the date of the enactment of this Act.

(c) **CLERICAL AMENDMENT.**—The table of sections at the beginning of such chapter is amended by adding at the end of the items relating to subchapter I the following new item:

“8119. Annual report on outpatient clinics.”.

TITLE II—EXTENSION OF CERTAIN AUTHORITIES

SEC. 201. REPEAL OF SUNSET ON INCLUSION OF NONINSTITUTIONAL EXTENDED CARE SERVICES IN DEFINITION OF MEDICAL SERVICES.

Section 1701 of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) by striking paragraph (10); and

(2) in paragraph (6)—

(A) by redesignating subparagraphs (E) and (F) as subparagraphs (F) and (G), respectively; and

(B) by inserting after subparagraph (D) the following new subparagraph (E):

“(E) Noninstitutional extended care services, including alternatives to institutional extended care that the Secretary may furnish directly, by contract, or through provi-

sion of case management by another provider or payer.”.

SEC. 202. EXTENSION OF RECOVERY AUDIT AUTHORITY.

Section 1703(d)(4) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by striking “September 30, 2008” and inserting “September 30, 2013”.

SEC. 203. PERMANENT AUTHORITY FOR PROVISION OF HOSPITAL CARE, MEDICAL SERVICES, AND NURSING HOME CARE TO VETERANS WHO PARTICIPATED IN CERTAIN CHEMICAL AND BIOLOGICAL TESTING CONDUCTED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE.

(a) **PERMANENT AUTHORITY.**—Subsection (e)(3) of section 1710 of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) in subparagraph (B), by inserting “and” after the semicolon;

(2) in subparagraph (C), by striking “; and” and inserting a period; and

(3) by striking subparagraph (D).

(b) **CONFORMING AMENDMENT.**—Subsection (e)(1)(E) of such section is amended by striking “paragraphs (2) and (3)” and inserting “paragraph (2)”.

SEC. 204. EXTENSION OF EXPIRING COLLECTIONS AUTHORITIES.

(a) **HEALTH CARE COPAYMENTS.**—Section 1710(f)(2)(B) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by striking “September 30, 2008” and inserting “September 30, 2010”.

(b) **MEDICAL CARE COST RECOVERY.**—Section 1729(a)(2)(E) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by striking “October 1, 2008” and inserting “October 1, 2010”.

SEC. 205. EXTENSION OF NURSING HOME CARE.

Section 1710A(d) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by striking “December 31, 2008” and inserting “December 31, 2013”.

SEC. 206. EXTENSION OF AUTHORITY TO CARRY OUT INCOME VERIFICATION.

Section 5317(g) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by striking “September 30, 2008” and inserting “September 30, 2010”.

SEC. 207. PERMANENT AUTHORITY TO ESTABLISH RESEARCH CORPORATIONS.

(a) **REPEAL.**—Title 38, United States Code, is amended by striking section 7368.

(b) **CLERICAL AMENDMENT.**—The table of sections at the beginning of chapter 73 of such title is amended by striking the item relating to section 7368.

SEC. 208. EXTENSION OF CERTAIN VETERANS HOME LOAN GUARANTY PROGRAMS.

(a) **EXTENSION OF DEMONSTRATION PROJECT ON ADJUSTABLE RATE MORTGAGES.**—Section 3707(a) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by striking “2008” and inserting “2012”.

(b) **EXTENSION OF DEMONSTRATION PROJECT ON HYBRID ADJUSTABLE RATE MORTGAGES.**—Section 3707A(a) of such title is amended by striking “2008” and inserting “2012”.

SEC. 209. EXTENSION OF REQUIREMENT TO SUBMIT ANNUAL REPORT ON THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON POST-TRAUMATIC-STRESS DISORDER.

Section 110(e)(2) of the Veterans' Health Care Act of 1984 (38 U.S.C. 1712A note; Public Law 98-528) is amended by striking “through 2008” and inserting “through 2012”.

SEC. 210. EXTENSION OF REQUIREMENT TO SUBMIT ANNUAL REPORT ON THE COMMITTEE ON CARE OF SEVERELY CHRONICALLY MENTALLY ILL VETERANS.

Section 7321(d)(2) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by striking “through 2008” and inserting “through 2012”.

SEC. 211. PERMANENT REQUIREMENT FOR BIENNIAL REPORT ON WOMEN'S ADVISORY COMMITTEE.

Section 542(c)(1) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by striking “through 2008”.

SEC. 212. PERMANENT AUTHORITY FOR ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON MINORITY VETERANS.

Section 544 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by striking subsection (e).

SEC. 213. EXTENSION OF TEMPORARY INCREASE IN MAXIMUM LOAN GUARANTY AMOUNT FOR CERTAIN HOUSING LOANS GUARANTEED BY THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

Section 2201 of the Housing and Economic Recovery Act of 2008 (Public Law 110-289) is amended by striking “December 31, 2008” and inserting “December 31, 2011”.

TITLE III—OTHER MATTERS

SEC. 301. INCREASE IN CAP OF NUMBER OF VETERANS PARTICIPATING IN INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAM.

Section 3120(e) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by striking “2,500 veterans” and inserting “2,600 veterans”.

SEC. 302. ENHANCEMENT OF REFINANCING OF HOME LOANS BY VETERANS.

(a) INCLUSION OF REFINANCING LOANS AMONG LOANS SUBJECT TO GUARANTY MAXIMUM.—Section 3703(a)(1)(A)(i)(IV) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by inserting “(5),” after “(3),”.

(b) INCREASE IN MAXIMUM PERCENTAGE OF LOAN TO-VALUE OF REFINANCING LOANS SUBJECT TO GUARANTY.—Section 3710(b)(8) of such title is amended by striking “90 percent” and inserting “100 percent”.

SEC. 303. TECHNICAL AMENDMENTS.

(a) TITLE 38.—Title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) in section 1712A—

(A) by striking subsection (g);

(B) by redesignating subsections (d) through (i) as subsections (c) through (f), respectively; and

(C) in subsection (f), as so redesignated, by striking “(including a Resource Center designated under subsection (h)(3)(A) of this section)”;

(2) in section 2065(b)(3)(C), by striking “(1)”;

(3) in the table of sections at the beginning of chapter 36, by striking the item relating to section 3684A and inserting the following new item:

“3684A. Procedures relating to computer matching program.”;

(4) in section 4110(c)(1), by striking “15” and inserting “16”;

(5) in the table of sections at the beginning of chapter 51, by striking the item relating to section 5121 and inserting the following new item:

“5121. Payment of certain accrued benefits upon death of a beneficiary.”;

(6) in section 7458(b)(2), by striking “pro rated” and inserting “pro-rated”;

(7) in section 8117(a)(1), by striking “such such” and inserting “such”; and

(8) in each of sections 1708(d), 7314(f), 7320(j)(2), 7325(i)(2), and 7328(i)(2), by striking “medical care account” and inserting “medical services account”.

(b) VETERANS BENEFITS, HEALTH CARE, AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY ACT OF 2006.—Section 807(e) of the Veterans Benefits, Health Care, and Information Technology Act of 2006 (Public Law 109-461) is amended by striking “Medical Care” each place it appears and inserting “Medical Facilities”.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER) and the gentleman from Kansas (Mr. MORAN) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California.

□ 1700

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, this is a very important bill that we simply must pass this year because it extends authorities for a whole number of veterans programs.

And I want to thank my ranking member, Mr. BUYER of Indiana, for his cooperation and support to get this bill on the floor today because, as I said, we have got to get this done before the end of this congressional session.

H.R. 6832 includes the text of several other pieces of legislation; for example, the text of H.R. 5856, the Department of Veterans Medical Facility Authorization and Lease Act of 2008, that we passed on this floor by a vote of 416-0 back in May. As the new fiscal year begins on October 1, it is essential that the VA have the legal authorities it needs to move forward in providing world-class facilities and better access for our veterans.

In addition to providing these authorizations, we extend a number of expiring authorities, including the authority to collect from insurance companies and third parties for the cost of certain health care. These provisions were slated to expire at the end of this month. It also extends the VA authority to receive data from the IRS and the Social Security Administration to verify income levels for veterans in certain programs.

We extend here also the authority of the VA to conduct recovery audits of fee basis and other medical service contracts when a veteran receives care at a non-VA facility, such as the bill we just passed with Mr. MORAN.

We make permanent here the VA authority to treat veterans who participated in tests conducted by the Department of Defense at the Deseret Test Center from 1962 to 1973, which included the program known as Project Shipboard Hazard and Defense, or Project SHAD. This authority expired last year. We have to do more for those who have been subject to those tests, and we will look at legislation, especially by Mr. THOMPSON of California, in the near future.

We extend the reporting requirements for the Special Committee on PTSD, Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, and the Committee on Care of Severely Chronically Mentally Ill Veterans. These committees are vitally important as we seek to provide the best care for our veterans in dealing with these mental health issues.

We repeal the sunset on inclusion of noninstitutional extended care services as part of the health care provided to our veterans, and extend the authority of the VA to provide nursing home care for certain veterans, which was also slated to expire at the end of this year.

We increase the number of veterans among our most severely disabled veterans who would be able to participate in the VA's Independent Living Program. Long-term care services are a vital component of our health care for veterans, and will only increase in importance in the years ahead.

H.R. 6832 also makes permanent the authority of the Advisory Committee on Minority Veterans and reporting requirements for the Women's Advisory Committee.

Mr. Speaker, I have often stressed the importance of the housing provisions in the original GI bill that was enacted in 1944. This act, of which over 8 million veterans took advantage of, probably created the prosperous and stable middle-class in our Nation. We recently passed an update of the GI bill that we called the 21st Century GI Bill, which brought education benefits up to the standards that this century requires, but we did not reform and improve the VA home loan program in that GI bill that would have in fact remained true to the spirit of the original GI bill. The housing crisis that is affecting all of our society in all areas of our country would be helped by broadening authority of the VA in this area.

Both my ranking member, Mr. BUYER, and I have introduced legislation to reform the home loan program, and H.R. 6832 brings both of our pieces of legislation together. We were able to provide temporary authority for the VA to make loans at levels that matched other Federal housing programs in an earlier bill this year, but that authority expires at the end of the year and VA will be forced once again to essentially limit its guarantee to a maximum loan amount of \$417,000. What we do here is to extend that authority until 2011 to guarantee loan amounts up to \$729,750 in certain parts of the country. We also extend the authority of the VA to make so-called hybrid adjustable rate and adjustable rate mortgages in their program, which also expires this year.

Finally, H.R. 6832 will make it easier for veterans to refinance their home loans with the VA. We authorize the VA to provide the same maximum loan guarantee for veterans, refinancing non-VA loans, as it currently provides for loans guaranteed by the VA. It will enable veterans to refinance the loan at up to 100 percent of the value of the underlying property. Currently, the VA is only able to finance up to 90 percent.

I know that I speak for Mr. BUYER in that we wish we could do more right at this moment to help our veterans weather this housing crisis, but this bill provides real help, and will make a real difference in the lives of thousands of veterans facing the housing crisis and our economic slowdown. It is extremely important that we pass H.R. 6832, and meet our responsibilities to our Nation's veterans.

I thank the minority side for its great cooperation on this.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. MORAN of Kansas. Mr. Speaker, I support H.R. 6832, the Department of Veterans Affairs Construction and Extensions Act of 2008. I again thank Chairman FILNER and Ranking Member BUYER for bringing this bill forward today. And I also want to thank the leaders of the Subcommittee on Health, the gentleman from Maine (Mr. MICHAUD) and the ranking member, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MILLER) for their bipartisan efforts in crafting this important legislation.

The construction authorization provisions in title I of this bill are identical to previously passed legislation here in the House, the construction authorization bill H.R. 5856, and they would authorize major VA medical facility projects and leases for the fiscal year 2009. This legislation is similar to what we have done in the past on an annual basis. The Veterans' Affairs Committee report for that bill H.R. 5856 with further explanation of the legislation background and intent of these construction authorizations.

Collectively, the provisions authorize approximately \$2.2 billion over the next 5 years to improve access to health care for our Nation's veterans. The extension portion of this bill, the extension authorities in title III include a number of important authorizations. Ranking Member BUYER introduced a bill to extend the expiring authorities, H.R. 6802, on August 1 of this year, and this bill incorporates those extensions and others.

Among those that are significant and important are: Repeal of sunset on inclusion of non-institutional extended care services; permanent authority for provision of hospital care, medical services, and nursing home care to veterans who participated in certain chemical and biological testing; extension of nursing home care; and, extension of certain home loan guaranty programs.

The bill, in title III, would also increase the number of veterans participating in the independent living program and enhance refinancing of home loans by veterans.

Mr. Speaker, with House action on this construction authorization and the extension of authorities, as well as the veterans' COLA we just passed a few moments ago in the form of Senate bill 2617, the House will have taken what many consider the must-pass bills for the 2008 session for the 110th Congress. Our hope is that our Senate colleagues will take up H.R. 6832 promptly, so that we may complete the actions on these legislative items that are of great importance to veterans.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 6832.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as she may consume to one of the most passionate advocates for veterans in our country, Ms. BROWN of Florida.

Ms. CORRINE BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, first, let me thank the chairman for his leadership on this issue and for his tireless work on the committee and on behalf of the Nation's veterans.

I rise in support of H.R. 6832, the Veterans' Programs Extension and Construction Authorization Act of 2008. I am pleased at the construction that has occurred in the State of Florida. My State has the largest elderly veterans population in the country. Everyone enjoys the warm weather, and veterans are no different. It is high

time that we build the facilities that will take care of the heroes and sheroes.

In addition, this bill increases the authorization for the construction of a new VA medical center in Orlando. We have waited over 25 years for this facility, and we have construction delays. We cannot allow construction delays because of the lack of money due to increased energy costs or inflation. It would be criminal to do this.

In addition, this bill increases the authorization by \$51 million to fund patient privacy at the Gainesville Medical Center. We need to make sure our veterans are treated with respect.

Earlier this year, this Congress passed the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriation under the leadership of Chairman CHET EDWARDS. I appreciate him including funds for these projects in the bill, along with the continuing development of the medical centers in Florida.

I urge the passing of the bill and continued support for our Nation's veterans. May God continue to bless America.

Mr. MORAN of Kansas. Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to Mr. RODRIGUEZ of Texas.

Mr. RODRIGUEZ. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of this specific legislation.

Let me just indicate that the language that is on there regarding Project 112 efforts, those are studies that were supposedly conducted during the 1960s and 1970s on our own soldiers. There was a variety of studies that were conducted where, basically, we used nerve gas and other things with our own soldiers to see how they would react, and we have prioritized in terms of trying to provide the services and health care needs of these soldiers and to ID them. This allows extension of that language that is needed for us to continue to do the right thing when it comes to our veterans now that suffered under those studies.

Let me also say that this is a comprehensive piece of legislation that begins to fund a variety of different programs throughout the country, and including, Mr. Speaker, in your beloved area of Puerto Rico, which you know a large number of soldiers that served our country reside in and will have an opportunity to get extended health care needs there through the clinics.

In addition, I am proud to announce that we have four major polytrauma centers in this country, and the fifth one is located in San Antonio. This allows the opportunity for funding of that particular polytrauma center that will allow services to be extended to those soldiers coming both from Afghanistan and Iraq that are seriously injured.

So, once again, I want to take this opportunity to thank the leadership for their efforts, and I thank Mr. FILNER for the dedicated work he has providing these resources to our veterans throughout the country.

Mr. MORAN of Kansas. Mr. Speaker, I support this legislation.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I would add to what the gentleman from Texas said. You know better than anybody the problems with the facilities in San Juan, Puerto Rico. This does a seismic correction for one of the major buildings on the order of \$225 million, and establishes an outpatient clinic in Mayaguez, Puerto Rico. So we are taking some steps, we have a long way to go, for our citizens there in Puerto Rico.

Mr. STEARNS. Mr. Speaker, providing for our nation's veterans—the brave men and women who risk their lives to ensure our freedom—has always been a top priority for me in my service to the people of the sixth district of Florida. I am pleased that we are here today to pass legislation that will authorize much-needed funding for improvements to new and existing VA facilities throughout our country.

Included in this legislation is funding for a new Bed Tower at the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Gainesville, Florida. For years I have been working on securing funding for an addition to the Malcom Randall VA Hospital in my district, which will help to correct some of the patient privacy deficiencies this hospital has been experiencing over the years.

This facility will address the acute needs of our local veterans by providing them with state-of-the-art, private patient rooms, and the convenience of high quality VA medical care. The funding authorized by this legislation will go toward a five-story, 245,000 square foot facility consisting of four floors of new patient beds and one floor of supporting medical services. This new Bed Tower will have 228 new beds, and will also house a 10-bed ER, Chest Pain Unit, and ENT, Ophthalmology, Urology, and Hematology Clinics.

The Malcom Randall VA Hospital is one of the busiest and efficient VA facilities in the country, and the veterans in my district will benefit greatly from this new Bed Tower. I thank my colleague, Mr. FILNER, for introducing this important legislation, and I look forward to the completion of this new Bed Tower in Gainesville.

Mr. BUYER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 6832, the Department of Veterans Affairs Construction and Extensions Act of 2008.

This legislation, which I am cosponsoring along with Chairman FILNER is a bipartisan measure consisting of the construction bill the House of Representatives passed on May 21, 2008, as well as language from the bill I introduced on August 1, 2008, H.R. 6802, the Veterans Authorities Extension Act of 2008, and additional authorizations.

The provisions included from the Committee reported and House passed construction bill, H.R. 5856, would authorize major VA medical facility projects and leases for fiscal year 2009. Included in this legislation is an authorization of \$66 million for construction of a fifth Polytrauma Rehabilitation Center in San Antonio, Texas. VA's four existing Polytrauma Centers are located in Richmond, Virginia; Tampa, Florida; Minneapolis, Minnesota; and Palo Alto, California.

Mr. Speaker, this past February, I had the pleasure of visiting the Audie Murphy VA Medical Center in San Antonio for a briefing on

this new project, which will provide state-of-the-art care to our severely injured heroes. The VA Polytrauma Centers are designed to provide comprehensive inpatient rehabilitation services for individuals with complex, severe and disabling traumas. By creating a fifth Polytrauma Center in San Antonio, our commitment to veterans and servicemembers is reinforced by expanding access to the southwestern United States.

H.R. 6832 also will provide the extension of a number of important authorizations. These include: Repeal of the sunset on inclusion of non-institutional extended care services; Extension of recovery audit authority; Permanent authority for provision of hospital care, medical services, and nursing home care to veterans who participated in certain chemical and biological testing; Extension of expiring collections authorities; Extension of nursing home care; Extension of authority to carry out income verification; Extension of certain home loan guaranty programs; Extension of requirement to submit an annual report on the Special Committee on PTSD; Permanent requirement for the biannual report on the Women's Advisory Committee; and Permanent authority for VA's Advisory Committee on Minority Veterans (which was previously passed this last July in H.R. 674).

The bill will also increase the number of veterans participating in the VA's Independent Living Program, and will enhance the refinancing of home loans by veterans.

I would like to thank Chairman FILNER, as well as Health Subcommittee Chairman MICHAEL MICHAUD of Maine and Ranking Member JEFF MILLER of Florida, for their efforts to bring this legislation through the Committee and on to the House floor for consideration. I would also like to commend the Committee staff for their hard work and bipartisan efforts throughout this Congress.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 6832, the Department of Veterans Affairs Construction and Extensions Act of 2008.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. FILNER. I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 6832.

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

There was no objection.

Mr. FILNER. I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 6832.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds being in the affirmative, the ayes have it.

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX and the Chair's prior announcement, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

BARRING ACCESS OF LONG-HAUL MEXICAN TRUCKS

Mr. DEFAZIO. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 6630) to prohibit the Secretary of Transportation from granting authority to a motor carrier domiciled in Mexico to operate beyond United States municipalities and commercial zones on the United States-Mexico border unless expressly authorized by Congress, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 6630

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

SECTION 1. LIMITATION ON LONG-HAUL CROSS BORDER MOTOR CARRIER OPERATIONS.

(a) TERMINATION OF PILOT PROGRAM.—Not later than September 6, 2008, the Secretary of Transportation shall terminate the one-year cross border demonstration project the Secretary started on September 6, 2007, as described in the Federal Register notices dated May 1, 2007 (72 Fed. Reg. 23883), June 8, 2007 (72 Fed. Reg. 31877), and August 17, 2007 (72 Fed. Reg. 46263).

(b) CONGRESSIONAL AUTHORIZATION REQUIRED.—Unless expressly authorized by Congress, the Secretary may not grant authority to a motor carrier domiciled in Mexico to operate beyond United States municipalities and commercial zones on the United States-Mexico border after September 6, 2008.

SEC. 2. REPORTS TO CONGRESS.

Not later than 60 days after the date of enactment of this Act—

(1) the Inspector General of the Department of Transportation shall transmit to Congress the final report required by section 6901(c) of the U.S. Troop Readiness, Veterans' Care, Katrina Recovery, and Iraq Accountability Appropriations Act, 2007 (Public Law 110-28);

(2) the independent review panel established by the Secretary of Transportation to monitor the demonstration project referred to in section 1(a) shall transmit to Congress a report—

(A) evaluating the effects that the demonstration project has had on motor carrier safety, including an analysis of any accidents involving motor carriers participating in the demonstration project; and

(B) containing recommendations for modifications to the process of granting authority to a motor carrier domiciled in Mexico to operate beyond United States municipalities and commercial zones on the United States-Mexico border and for monitoring the future operations of such carriers in the United States, in order to enhance safety;

(3) the Secretary shall transmit to Congress a report detailing the implementation of and the participation of motor carriers in the demonstration project referred to in section 1(a), including—

(A) the number and names of United States and Mexico domiciled motor carriers that participated in the demonstration project and the number of vehicles each motor carrier utilized in the demonstration project;

(B) the number of border crossings by motor carriers participating in the demonstration project, including the number of crossings which resulted in a motor carrier traveling beyond United States municipalities and commercial zones on the United States-Mexico border;

(C) an itemization of safety and operational violations identified among motor carriers participating in the demonstration

project in pre-authorization safety audits, compliance reviews, and roadside inspections, including a review of the most frequent types of violations;

(D) an analysis of the cost to the Federal Government and State partners of implementing the demonstration project, including administrative costs, safety monitoring and enforcement costs, and the cost of installing global positioning system units on participating vehicles; and

(E) measures taken by the Secretary to terminate the authority of motor carriers participating in the demonstration project to operate beyond United States municipalities and commercial zones on the United States-Mexico border after September 6, 2008, and ensure that such motor carriers cease long-haul operations.

□ 1715

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. DEFAZIO) and the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. DUNCAN) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. DEFAZIO).

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. DEFAZIO. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 6630.

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

There was no objection.

Mr. DEFAZIO. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Last Saturday, September 6, marked a dark day in the transportation history and the safety of the traveling public in the United States of America. It was the 1-year anniversary of the so-called cross-border demonstration project of the Department of Transportation under the Bush administration.

When this pilot program began, 1 year and 5 days ago, they assured us it would be a 1-year pilot. They further assured us that they would fully evaluate the program before opening our border to all Mexican trucks. Unfortunately, Secretary Peters, under the tutelage of the Bush administration, announced last month that they intend to continue the program for two more years.

You know, given the fact that they have ignored Congress' will on this issue repeatedly, I wasn't surprised. But I am outraged. I am outraged that the Bush administration, for political purposes, would jeopardize the safety of the traveling public in the United States of America.

Since the beginning of this idea in the Bush administration, there has been strong and bipartisan congressional objection to the program. There are a number of concerns regarding Mexico's less stringent or nonexistent regulations on hours of service, vehicle safety, driver training and licensing, their nonexistent commercial driver's license database, or the meaningless database that they contend is a registration of commercial driver's licenses, and the fact that there is not