

The committee will continue to be vigorous in our oversight. But in the meantime, we cannot allow the American taxpayer or the veterans of south Florida to suffer because of a bureaucratic failing or lack of leadership.

The Department has proposed using approximately \$12.1 million in prior-year major construction advance planning funds to complete the remainder of the Miami project; and I've been assured repeatedly by VA officials that the use of this money will in no way negatively impact the planning or design of any other project.

I've also been assured by the Department that once congressional authorization is received, the project can be completed in 120 days. I'm hopeful that the Department is correct in its assessment of the work that remains and that this provision will allow for the completion of this project to better serve the veterans in the Miami area.

Section 103 of this bill would authorize the appropriation of \$377.2 million for VA major construction projects. Title II of this bill would extend expiring authorities for several programs within VA, including programs designed to help veterans keep their homes, gain greater access to compensation and pension examinations, better serve veterans living in the Philippines, and provide supportive services to those who are homeless.

This legislation represents a bipartisan effort; and I'd like to express my thanks to the ranking member, Mr. FILNER, and Mr. MICHAUD for his hard work and leadership in quickly advancing this important legislation to the floor.

And before I yield, I'd like to point out that the bill before us today does not include major medical facility lease authorizations, as it normally would, due to concerns raised late last week by the Congressional Budget Office about how to properly account for the total cost of VA's lease authorization.

Mr. Speaker, I want to assure our veterans and stakeholders that I am committed to working closely with my colleagues in the Senate, the administration's Office of Management and Budget, and the Congressional Budget Office to find a way forward on those important authorizations in the very near future.

I urge all of my colleagues to join me in support of H.R. 6375, as amended.

I reserve the balance of my time.

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

I'd like to thank my colleagues for the hard work and effort on this very important bill as well.

Each year, as we assess the construction needs of the Department of Veterans Affairs, we do so with the safety and health of our veterans in mind, as well as fulfilling our statutory requirements to authorize major medical facility projects. This is a responsibility that we do not take lightly.

□ 1600

H.R. 6375, the VA Major Construction Authorization and Expiring Authorities Extension Act of 2012, would authorize approximately over \$377 million for major medical facility projects. Specifically included is the authorization for a mental health building at the VA Medical Center in Seattle, Washington, and for a spinal cord injury facility at the VA Medical Center in Dallas, Texas. Mr. Speaker, these authorizations provide the Department of Veterans Affairs the ability to provide state-of-the-art health care and services to our Nation's veterans wherever they choose to live.

I would like to take a few moments to comment on section 102, which provides the authority for the renovation of the surgical suite and the operating rooms at the VA Medical Center in Miami, Florida.

Earlier this year, it was brought to the committee's attention that VA was going to need additional authorization to finish the renovation of the operating suites in Miami. It is my understanding that, during the design phase of the original projects, an assessment was conducted, and the recommendation was to completely close down the surgical suite because of infection control and safety issues related to construction. Because of these, two smaller Miami projects were combined, and the cost exceeded the monetary threshold of \$10 million that governs the need to seek congressional authority. Working in a bipartisan manner, with the concerns for the safe continuation of surgery in the Miami VA Medical Center always first and foremost in our minds, we have included this project so that VA can move forward without delay.

In addition to major facility projects, H.R. 6375 provides for the extension of certain expiring authorities. I am pleased to strongly support the extensions of the programs that directly affect some of our most vulnerable veterans—the serious mentally ill and homeless. Finally, Mr. Speaker, we have also included an extension of VA's contract authority with private providers of compensation and pension exams.

I support these provisions, but I also want to ensure that we remain vigilant in our oversight of this authority. As such, I am pleased to see 1-year extensions of these authorities, and I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 6375.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, we have no more speakers on this particular piece of legislation.

Mr. MICHAUD. Mr. Speaker, in closing, I would encourage my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to support this particular piece of legislation, which is very important for our veterans.

I would be remiss, though, if I didn't say that, like my colleague from New York earlier, I am disappointed that we are leaving Washington when we have a

lot of work to do, such as the middle class tax cuts, the farm bill, the Violence Against Women Act, and responsible deficit reduction, as well as my bill that addresses the issue of our military, members of which are supposed to be clothed from head to toe with American-made clothing. The fact that the administration is not complying with the Berry amendment is very disappointing. Hopefully, we will be able to address these issues before the end of the year so that we can take care of a lot of the concerns that my constituents have brought forth.

With that, I yield back the balance of my time.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks on H.R. 6375, as amended.

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

There was no objection.

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague for helping to point out the fact that the Senate, itself, has not acted on many of the pieces of legislation that, in fact, this House has passed and sent over to it. It is a shame that, for the last 3 years, they have not taken up such good legislation.

With that, I thank my colleagues once again for their support, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MILLER) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 6375, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

The title was amended so as to read: "A bill to authorize certain Department of Veterans Affairs major medical facility projects, to amend title 38, United States Code, to extend certain authorities of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes."

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

CONFIRMING FULL OWNERSHIP RIGHTS TO ARTIFACTS FROM ASTRONAUTS' SPACE MISSIONS

Mr. HALL. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that the ordering of the yeas and nays on the motion that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 4158) to confirm full ownership rights for certain United States astronauts to artifacts from the astronauts' space missions, be vacated, to the end that the Chair put the question de novo.

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

There was no objection.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by

the gentleman from Texas (Mr. HALL) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 4158.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

CUTTING FEDERAL UNNECESSARY AND EXPENSIVE LEASING ACT OF 2012

Mr. CHAFFETZ. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 6324) to reduce the number of nonessential vehicles purchased and leased by the Federal Government, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 6324

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

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Cutting Federal Unnecessary and Expensive Leasing Act of 2012” or the “Cutting FUEL Act”.

SEC. 2. REDUCTION OF THE NUMBER OF NON-ESSENTIAL VEHICLES PURCHASED AND LEASED BY THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT.

(a) REVIEW OF NONESSENTIAL VEHICLE PURCHASE.—The Director of the Office of Management and Budget, in consultation with the head of the relevant Executive agency, shall complete each of the following:

(1) Determine the total dollar amount obligated by each Executive agency to purchase civilian vehicles in fiscal year 2010.

(2) Determine the total dollar amount obligated by each Executive agency to lease civilian vehicles in fiscal year 2010.

(3) Determine the total number of civilian vehicles purchased by each Executive agency in fiscal year 2010.

(4) Determine the total number of civilian vehicles leased by each Executive agency in fiscal year 2010.

(5) Determine the total dollar amount that would be 20 percent less than the dollar amount determined under paragraphs (1) and (2) for each Executive agency.

(b) REDUCTION OF NONESSENTIAL VEHICLE PURCHASE.—For each of fiscal years 2013 through 2017, each Executive agency may not obligate more than the dollar amount identified pursuant to subsection (a)(5) to purchase and lease civilian vehicles.

(c) SHARING.—The Administrator of General Services shall ensure that an Executive agency may share excess or unused vehicles with another Executive agency that may need temporary or long-term use of additional vehicles through the Federal Fleet Management System.

(d) NATIONAL SECURITY EXCEPTION.—The limits on the purchase and procurement of vehicles provided in this section shall not apply to the purchase or procurement of any vehicle that has been determined by the President to be essential for reasons of national security.

(e) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

(1) CIVILIAN VEHICLE.—The term “civilian vehicle” means a vehicle that is not used for purposes of military combat, the training or deployment of uniformed military personnel, or such other uses as determined by the Director of the Office of Management and Budget, in consultation with the Administrator of General Services.

(2) EXECUTIVE AGENCY.—The term “Executive agency” has the meaning given that term under section 105 of title 5, United States Code.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. POE of Texas). Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Utah (Mr. CHAFFETZ) and the gentlewoman from New York (Mrs. MALONEY) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Utah.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. CHAFFETZ. 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 materials on the bill under consideration.

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

There was no objection.

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

H.R. 6324, the Cutting Federal Unnecessary and Expensive Leasing Act, or Cutting FUEL Act, of 2012 is a bipartisan piece of legislation introduced by Mr. HANNA of New York and Mr. BARROW of Georgia.

With a \$16 trillion debt, Congress and the Federal Government need to spend taxpayer dollars more efficiently and help reduce costs. Federal agencies currently own or lease roughly 660,000 cars, vans, sport utility vehicles, trucks, buses, and ambulances; and I’m sure there are a host of other items as well. During fiscal year 2011, the Federal Government spent roughly \$4.4 billion to maintain and operate these vehicles, including \$1.3 billion in fuel costs alone. During the last 5 years, Federal agencies purchased an average of approximately 68,000 new vehicles annually at a cost of roughly \$1.5 billion per year.

The Bowles-Simpson National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform recommended reducing the number of nonessential vehicles owned or leased by Federal agencies, other than the Department of Defense or the postal service, by 20 percent. According to some estimates, this proposal could save up to \$500 million over the next 10 years.

The Cutting FUEL Act would reduce the government’s spending on civilian vehicle purchases and leases by 20 percent and would maintain that reduced level of spending for 5 years. This reduction would not apply to military or postal vehicles, and there is an exception provided for national security vehicles as well.

Mr. Speaker, I think this is a good, commonsense piece of legislation, and we want to encourage Members to support this bill.

I reserve the balance of my time.

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

I rise in opposition to H.R. 6324, the Cutting FUEL Act. This bill is being rushed to the floor without any hearings or considerations by the Oversight

and Government Reform Committee. The result is a poorly drafted bill that may have harmful, unintended consequences. This bill would require all Federal agencies to reduce their purchases and leases of vehicles by 20 percent, below 2010 expenditure levels. This reduction would not apply to military vehicles, and an exception is provided for vehicles necessary for national security purposes.

While my colleagues’ goal is to cut government spending and force agencies to spend their money more efficiently, this bill is not the way to achieve those objectives. This bill does not take into account agencies that have already decreased their fleet sizes by improving fleet management procedures. According to a recent GAO report, agencies such as the Air Force have implemented various fleet downsizing policies and have made efforts to eliminate vehicles that are not mission critical. Instead of examining the needs of each individual agency, this bill simply makes a sweeping 20 percent cut applicable to all agencies regardless of whether they have already made significant improvements.

□ 1610

The GAO also noted that some agencies, like the Department of Veterans Affairs, have increased their fleet sizes due to expanded programs essential to assisting our disabled veterans. This bill would prevent agencies, such as the VA, from effectively serving our veterans when they return home from war.

Mr. Speaker, we come to the House floor only to bring up legislation that was recently introduced in August. There have been no hearings in committee, no amendments, no markups, no substantive debate, all of which could have made significant improvements to the bill.

The American people are asking their elected officials to be bipartisan and pass legislation to add more jobs to our economy. We should focus on extending the tax cuts for the middle class, or passing legislation to resolve the looming crisis in the postal service. But, no, the Republican majority and their leadership would rather focus on passing messaging bills before the election. They prefer to leave Washington and campaign, rather than take up the real issues that confront our country.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to oppose this legislation, and I ask that we get back to doing the work of the people.

With that, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. CHAFFETZ. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the chief sponsor of this legislation, the gentleman from New York (Mr. HANNA).

Mr. HANNA. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 6324, the Cutting Federal Unnecessary and Expensive Leasing Act. I sponsored this legislation with my friend and colleague from Georgia (Mr. BARROW).