

TABLE 16.—ALLOCATION OF SPENDING AUTHORITY
SENATE COMMITTEES OTHER THAN APPROPRIATIONS—Continued
[Fiscal year 2016, \$ billions]

	2016	2016–2020	2016–2025
Outlays	1,891.005	9,512.616	20,901.395

Includes entitlements funded in annual appropriations acts.

TOM PRICE,
TODD ROKITA,
MARIO DIAZ-BALART,
DIANE BLACK,
JOHN R. MOOLENAAR,
Managers on the Part of the House.

MICHAEL B. ENZI,
CHUCK GRASSLEY,
JEFF SESSIONS,
MIKE CRAPO,
LINDSEY GRAHAM,
ROB PORTMAN,
PATRICK J. TOOMEY,
RON JOHNSON,
KELLY AYOTTE,
ROGER F. WICKER,
BOB CORKER,
DAVID PERDUE,
Managers on the Part of the Senate.

RESIGNATION AS MEMBER OF
COMMITTEE ON FINANCIAL
SERVICES

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following resignation as a member of the Committee on Financial Services:

CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES,
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
Washington, DC, April 27, 2015.
Attn: Trevor Kolego,
Hon. JOHN BOEHNER,
Speaker, House of Representatives,
The Capitol, Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. SPEAKER: It is a tremendous privilege to represent the people of the Tenth District of Illinois in the U.S. House of Representatives.

I have greatly appreciated the opportunity to serve on the Financial Services Committee. However, due to my appointment to the Committee on Ways and Means, I hereby resign my seat on the Financial Services Committee.

I believe that this new position will better allow me to represent the interests of my constituents, and I look forward to getting to work with my colleagues on the Ways and Means Committee.

Very truly yours,
ROBERT J. DOLD,
Member of Congress.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Without objection, the resignation is accepted.
There was no objection.

ELECTING MEMBERS TO CERTAIN
STANDING COMMITTEES OF THE
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Ms. FOXX. Mr. Speaker, by direction of the House Republican Conference, I send to the desk a privileged resolution and ask for its immediate consideration.

The Clerk read the resolution, as follows:

H. RES. 229

Resolved, That the following named Members be, and are hereby, elected to the following standing committees of the House of Representatives:

COMMITTEE ON HOUSE ADMINISTRATION: Mr. Walker.
COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS: Mr. Dold.
The resolution was agreed to.
A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION AND
VETERANS AFFAIRS AND RE-
LATED AGENCIES APPROPRIA-
TIONS ACT, 2016

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. DENT. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and to include extraneous material on H.R. 2029 and that I may include tabular material on the same.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. GRAVES of Louisiana). Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Pennsylvania?

There was no objection.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to House Resolution 223 and rule XVIII, the Chair declares the House in the Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union for the consideration of the bill, H.R. 2029.

The Chair appoints the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN) to preside over the Committee of the Whole.

□ 1430

IN THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Accordingly, the House resolved itself into the Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union for the consideration of the bill (H.R. 2029) making appropriations for military construction, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2016, and for other purposes, with Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN in the chair.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The CHAIR. Pursuant to the rule, the bill is considered read the first time.

The gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. DENT) and the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. BISHOP) each will control 30 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Pennsylvania.

Mr. DENT. Madam Chair, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Today, it is my honor and privilege to bring H.R. 2029, the fiscal year 2016 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies Appropriations bill, to the House of Representatives.

I present this bill alongside my good friend and ranking member on the subcommittee, SANFORD BISHOP from Georgia, who has been an essential

partner all along the way. I greatly appreciate the participation and support of our committee members, both sides of the aisle, as we considered priorities and funding levels for the important programs in our bill.

We analyzed the budget request, developed questions, held oversight hearings to hear directly from members of all the services, the Department of Defense leadership, the Secretary of the VA, the VA inspector general, and the directors of four related agencies. We received over 700 requests from Members—again, from both sides of the aisle—and gave full consideration to each one. It has been a busy spring, and we did our best to accommodate those Member requests.

As we consider this bill, I can't proceed further without noticing that this subcommittee has a formidable level of support from the chair and ranking member of the full committee. Thank you, Chairman ROGERS and Mrs. LOWEY. Your attention to oversight and genuine care for the military and veterans has been inspiring.

To round out our team, we have some great support from our professional staff: Sue Quantius, Sarah Young, Tracey Russell, Maureen Holohan, and Matt Washington on the committee staff and Heather Smith, Drew Kent, and Sean Snyder on my personal staff. We couldn't do it without all of them.

H.R. 2029 demonstrates our firm commitment to fully supporting the Nation's veterans and servicemembers. Our investment of nearly \$77 billion for military construction and Veterans Affairs that is 6 percent—6 percent—over last year's level is unprecedented. This bill provides comprehensive support for servicemembers, military families, and veterans. It supports our troops with facilities and services necessary to maintain readiness and morale at bases here in the States and around the world.

It provides for Defense Department schools and health clinics that take care of our military families, and the bill funds our veterans health care systems to ensure that our promise to care for those who have sacrificed in defense of this great Nation continues as those men and women return home. We owe this to our veterans and are committed to sustained oversight so that programs deliver what they promise and taxpayers are well served by the investments we make.

On the military construction side, this bill provides a total of \$7.7 billion for military construction projects and family housing, including base and overseas contingency operations funding, an increase of \$904 million. That is nearly 12 percent above the enacted fiscal year 2015 level and \$755 million

below the President's request. This funding meets DOD's most critical needs, including priorities for the combatant commanders in EUCOM, CENTCOM, AFRICOM, and PACOM.

It provides \$607 million for military medical facilities, including the one at Landstuhl, Germany. It provides \$334 million for the Department of Defense education facilities, for construction or renovation of 10 schools. It supports our Guard and Reserve through \$512 million for facilities in 28 States. It fully funds military family housing at \$1.4 billion. And it provides \$150 million for the NATO security investment program, which is \$30 million over the budget request.

On the Veterans Affairs side, the legislation includes a total of \$163.2 billion in combined discretionary and mandatory funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs. Discretionary funding alone for veterans programs in the bill is \$68.7 billion. Total fiscal year 2016 discretionary funding is \$3.6 billion above 2015. It is a 5.6 percent increase and \$1.4 billion below the request. Three billion dollars of this increase was advance funded.

On the VA medical services side, the bill funds VA medical services at \$48.6 billion. That includes \$970 million that the VA came back and asked for on top of the advanced funding from last year. We stretched pretty far to do this, and we haven't funded this second bite in the House before. It is tough to find \$970 million in any budget environment, but this committee did, showing again the level of bipartisan commitment we have to our veterans.

For disability claims, we provide the full request for the Veterans Benefits Administration, which is a \$163 million increase over fiscal year 2015, and the full request for the Board of Veterans Appeals.

The bill will enhance transparency and accountability at the VA through further oversight and an increase for the VA Office of Inspector General's independent audits and investigations. I can assure you the inspector general's office has been very, very busy.

This legislation also contains \$233 million for the modernization of the

VA electronic health record and includes language restricting funding until the VA demonstrates progress on the system's functionality and interoperability. This is a major concern to all of us on both sides of the aisle, and I know the chairman, in particular, has been outspoken about this matter, but it is something that all of us, Republican and Democrat, want to see fixed.

On construction issues, major construction within the VA is funded at \$562 million, which is the same level as fiscal year 2015. The bill provides funding for hospital replacement and allows the VA to continue to correct seismic safety issues and deficiencies. We did not fund the more-than-double budget request for construction, as we face the impact of gross mismanagement of the Colorado VA Hospital construction, which resulted in a \$930 million cost overrun. That is not a typo: a \$930 million cost overrun, which is nearly twice the entire VA major construction line item. We have also cracked down on oversight with multiple restrictions.

We fund the American Battle Monuments Commission, the Armed Forces Retirement Home, Arlington National Cemetery, and the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims at the requested funding levels.

In closing, this is a very solid bipartisan bill that is focused on the needs of servicemembers, veterans, and all their families. We are \$4.6 billion over the fiscal year 2015 level; again, a nearly 6 percent increase. Not a cut. We have provided for our military and veterans to the very best level we can.

Did we fund every last dime requested? No. Not every idea has merit, and not every project is mission critical. We did not fund some projects. We cut some requested increases, and we rescinded funds. These were fair decisions and part of our responsibility as appropriators.

We have received a lot of criticism for the actions we have taken very recently. It started with an email campaign from the VA legislative affairs office; then a Statement of Administration Policy; and last, some of the VSOs have joined in. Let me tell you,

in my time, before I was chairman of the subcommittee, and certainly in my time since I took over this position, I can say with absolute certainty, the VA's problems stem from poor management, not too little money. Poor management, not too little money. I will say that again. The problems we encounter at the VA time after time—whether it is the Phoenix patient wait list scandal, the claims and benefits mess in Philadelphia, or the Denver hospital construction debacle—show that the VA's problem is management, not money, and for the VA to complain about a 6 percent increase rather than an 8 percent increase and to call a 6 percent increase a cut—they call that a cut.

Only in Washington, D.C., can someone call a 6 percent increase over last year a cut. Everywhere else in America it is a 6 percent increase, but not in this town. Amazing to me, and particularly from a Department that has so many severe managerial problems at this time. We need to be diligent with oversight and at the same time be a helping hand to the Department. There is a way out of the morass, but more money without the necessary management reforms is not the answer.

I have talked to many Members about the VA, and just last night in the Committee on Rules, I got quite an earful there. Truly, Members are in agreement that we must help the VA transform because that transformation is crucial to serve veterans properly and to respect the taxpayers footing the bill. By the way, that frustration I have heard from Members is from both sides of the aisle, as was the case I heard last night in the Committee on Rules.

We will do a lot of good with this bill. It is fair, it is balanced, and, at a 6 percent increase over last year, it is generous. On behalf of our servicemembers, military families, and veterans, I urge your support of this legislation. Let's take care of those who sacrifice for our country. It is time to do the right thing and support the bill.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, FY 2016 (H.R. 2029) (Amounts in thousands)					
	FY 2015 Enacted	FY 2016 Request	Bill	Bill vs. Enacted	Bill vs. Request
TITLE I - DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE					
Military construction, Army.....	528,427	743,245	663,245	+134,818	-80,000
Military construction, Navy and Marine Corps.....	1,018,772	1,669,239	1,349,678	+330,906	-319,561
Military construction, Air Force.....	811,774	1,389,185	1,237,055	+425,281	-152,130
Military construction, Defense-Wide.....	1,991,690	2,300,767	1,931,456	-60,234	-369,311
Total, Active components.....	4,350,663	6,102,436	5,181,434	+830,771	-921,002
Military construction, Army National Guard.....	128,920	197,237	167,437	+38,517	-29,800
Military construction, Air National Guard.....	92,663	138,738	138,738	+46,075	---
Military construction, Army Reserve.....	103,946	113,595	104,295	+349	-9,300
Military construction, Navy Reserve.....	51,528	36,078	36,078	-15,450	---
Military construction, Air Force Reserve.....	49,492	65,021	65,021	+15,529	---
Total, Reserve components.....	426,549	550,669	511,569	+85,020	-39,100
Total, Military construction.....	4,777,212	6,653,105	5,693,003	+915,791	-960,102
North Atlantic Treaty Organization Security Investment Program.....	199,700	120,000	150,000	-49,700	+30,000
Family housing construction, Army.....	78,609	99,695	99,695	+21,086	---
Family housing operation and maintenance, Army.....	350,976	393,511	393,511	+42,535	---
Family housing construction, Navy and Marine Corps....	16,412	16,541	16,541	+129	---
Family housing operation and maintenance, Navy and Marine Corps.....	354,029	353,036	353,036	-993	---
Family housing construction, Air Force.....	---	160,498	160,498	+160,498	---
Family housing operation and maintenance, Air Force....	327,747	331,232	331,232	+3,485	---
Family housing operation and maintenance, Defense-Wide	61,100	58,668	58,668	-2,432	---
Department of Defense Family Housing Improvement Fund.....	1,662	---	---	-1,662	---
Total, Family housing.....	1,190,535	1,413,181	1,413,181	+222,646	---
Chemical demilitarization construction, Defense-Wide..	38,715	---	---	-38,715	---
Department of Defense Base Closure Account.....	315,085	251,334	251,334	-63,751	---
ADMINISTRATIVE PROVISIONS					
Military Construction - fiscal year 2014 (Sec. 127)...	125,000	---	---	-125,000	---
Military Construction - fiscal year 2015 (Sec. 128)...	117,000	---	---	-117,000	---
Military Construction, Army (Sec. 125).....	-49,533	---	-96,000	-46,467	-96,000
Military Construction, Navy and Marine Corps (Sec. 130).....	-25,522	---	---	+25,522	---
Defense Access Roads (Sec. 131).....	---	---	30,000	+30,000	+30,000
Military Construction, Air Force (Sec. 126).....	-41,392	---	-52,600	-11,208	-52,600
Military Construction, Defense-Wide (Sec. 127).....	---	---	-134,000	-134,000	-134,000
NATO Security Investment Program (Sec. 132).....	-25,000	---	---	+25,000	---
42 USC 3374 (Sec. 128).....	-63,800	---	-103,918	-40,118	-103,918
Total, Administrative Provisions.....	36,753	---	-356,518	-393,271	-356,518
Appropriations.....	(242,000)	---	(30,000)	(-212,000)	(+30,000)
Rescissions.....	(-205,247)	---	(-386,518)	(-181,271)	(-386,518)
Total, title I, Department of Defense.....	6,558,000	8,437,620	7,151,000	+593,000	-1,286,620
Appropriations.....	(6,763,247)	(8,437,620)	(7,537,518)	(+774,271)	(-900,102)
Rescissions.....	(-205,247)	---	(-386,518)	(-181,271)	(-386,518)
TITLE II - DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS					
Veterans Benefits Administration					
Compensation and pensions.....	79,071,000	79,124,675	79,124,675	+53,675	---
Advance appropriation, FY 2017.....	---	87,146,761	87,146,761	+87,146,761	---

Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, FY 2016 (H.R. 2029)
(Amounts in thousands)

	FY 2015 Enacted	FY 2016 Request	Bill	Bill vs. Enacted	Bill vs. Request
Readjustment benefits.....	14,997,136	15,344,922	15,344,922	+347,786	---
Advance appropriation, FY 2017.....	---	16,743,904	16,743,904	+16,743,904	---
Veterans insurance and indemnities.....	63,257	77,160	77,160	+13,903	---
Advance appropriation, FY 2017.....	---	91,920	91,920	+91,920	---
Veterans housing benefit program fund:					
(indefinite).....	---	---	---	---	---
(Limitation on direct loans).....	(500)	(500)	(500)	---	---
Administrative expenses.....	160,881	164,558	164,558	+3,677	---
Vocational rehabilitation loans program account.....	10	31	31	+21	---
(Limitation on direct loans).....	(2,877)	(2,952)	(2,952)	(+75)	---
Administrative expenses.....	361	367	367	+6	---
Native American veteran housing loan program account..	1,130	1,134	1,134	+4	---
=====	=====	=====	=====	=====	=====
Total, Veterans Benefits Administration.....	94,293,775	198,695,432	198,695,432	+104,401,657	---
Appropriations.....	(94,293,775)	(94,712,847)	(94,712,847)	(+419,072)	---
Advance appropriations, FY 2017.....	---	(103,982,585)	(103,982,585)	(+103,982,585)	---
=====	=====	=====	=====	=====	=====
Veterans Health Administration					
Medical services:					
Advance from prior year.....	(45,015,527)	(47,603,202)	(47,603,202)	(+2,587,675)	---
Current year request.....	209,189	1,124,197	969,554	+760,365	-154,643
Advance appropriation, FY 2017.....	47,603,202	51,673,000	51,673,000	+4,069,798	---
Subtotal.....	47,812,391	52,797,197	52,642,554	+4,830,163	-154,643
Medical support and compliance:					
Advance from prior year.....	(5,879,700)	(6,144,000)	(6,144,000)	(+264,300)	---
Current year request.....	---	69,961	---	---	-69,961
Advance appropriation, FY 2017.....	6,144,000	6,524,000	6,524,000	+380,000	---
Subtotal.....	6,144,000	6,593,961	6,524,000	+380,000	-69,961
Medical facilities:					
Advance from prior year.....	(4,739,000)	(4,915,000)	(4,915,000)	(+176,000)	---
Current year request.....	---	105,132	---	---	-105,132
Advance appropriation, FY 2017.....	4,915,000	5,074,000	5,074,000	+159,000	---
Subtotal.....	4,915,000	5,179,132	5,074,000	+159,000	-105,132
Medical and prosthetic research.....	588,922	621,813	621,813	+32,891	---
Medical care cost recovery collections:					
Offsetting collections.....	-2,456,000	-2,445,000	-2,445,000	+11,000	---
Appropriations (indefinite).....	2,456,000	2,445,000	2,445,000	-11,000	---
Subtotal.....	---	---	---	---	---
DoD-VA Joint Medical Funds (transfers out).....	(-276,251)	(-286,000)	(-286,000)	(-9,749)	---
DoD-VA Joint Medical Funds (by transfer).....	(276,251)	(286,000)	(286,000)	(+9,749)	---
DoD-VA Health Care Sharing Incentive Fund (Transfer out).....	(-15,000)	(-15,000)	(-15,000)	---	---
DoD-VA Health Care Sharing Incentive Fund (by transfer).....	(15,000)	(15,000)	(15,000)	---	---
=====	=====	=====	=====	=====	=====
Total, Veterans Health Administration.....	59,460,313	65,192,103	64,862,367	+5,402,054	-329,736
Appropriations.....	(798,111)	(1,921,103)	(1,591,367)	(+793,256)	(-329,736)
Advance appropriations, FY 2017.....	(58,662,202)	(63,271,000)	(63,271,000)	(+4,608,798)	---
Advances from prior year appropriations.....	(55,634,227)	(58,662,202)	(58,662,202)	(+3,027,975)	---
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National Cemetery Administration					
National Cemetery Administration.....	256,800	266,220	266,220	+9,420	---

Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, FY 2016 (H.R. 2029)
(Amounts in thousands)

	FY 2015 Enacted	FY 2016 Request	Bill	Bill vs. Enacted	Bill vs. Request
Departmental Administration					
General administration.....	321,591	346,659	336,659	+15,068	-10,000
Board of Veterans Appeals.....	99,294	107,884	107,884	+8,590	---
General operating expenses, VBA.....	2,534,254	2,697,734	2,697,734	+163,480	---
Information technology systems.....	3,903,344	4,133,363	4,038,363	+135,019	-95,000
Office of Inspector General.....	126,411	126,766	131,766	+5,355	+5,000
Construction, major projects.....	561,800	1,143,800	561,800	---	-582,000
Construction, minor projects.....	495,200	406,200	406,200	-89,000	---
Grants for construction of State extended care facilities.....	90,000	80,000	80,000	-10,000	---
Grants for the construction of veterans cemeteries....	46,000	45,000	45,000	-1,000	---
Total, Departmental Administration.....	8,177,894	9,087,406	8,405,406	+227,512	-682,000
Administrative Provisions					
Section 226					
Medical services.....	1,400,000	1,400,000	1,400,000	---	---
(Rescission).....	-1,400,000	-1,400,000	-1,400,000	---	---
Medical support and compliance.....	100,000	100,000	100,000	---	---
(Rescission).....	-100,000	-100,000	-100,000	---	---
Medical facilities.....	250,000	250,000	250,000	---	---
(Rescission).....	-250,000	-250,000	-250,000	---	---
Bonus limit rescission (Sec. 233).....	-41,000	---	-101,000	-60,000	-101,000
JIF rescission (Sec. 238).....	-15,000	---	-15,000	---	-15,000
Contract disability exams.....	40,000	---	---	-40,000	---
Payraise absorption (Sec. 240 and 241).....	---	---	-313,626	-313,626	-313,626
Total, Administrative Provisions.....	-16,000	---	-429,626	-413,626	-429,626
Total, title II.....	162,172,782	273,241,161	271,799,799	+109,627,017	-1,441,362
Appropriations.....	(105,316,580)	(107,737,576)	(106,412,214)	(+1,095,634)	(-1,325,362)
Rescissions.....	(-1,806,000)	(-1,750,000)	(-1,866,000)	(-60,000)	(-116,000)
Advance Appropriations, FY 2017:					
Mandatory.....	---	103,982,585	103,982,585	+103,982,585	---
Discretionary.....	(58,662,202)	(63,271,000)	(63,271,000)	(+4,608,798)	---
Advances from prior year appropriations:					
Mandatory.....	---	---	---	---	---
Discretionary.....	(55,634,227)	(58,662,202)	(58,662,202)	(+3,027,975)	---
(Limitation on direct loans).....	(3,377)	(3,452)	(3,452)	(+75)	---
Discretionary.....	(68,041,389)	(74,711,819)	(73,270,457)	(+5,229,068)	(-1,441,362)
Advances from prior year less FY 2017 advances	(-3,027,975)	(-4,608,798)	(-4,608,798)	(-1,580,823)	---
Net discretionary.....	(65,013,414)	(70,103,021)	(68,661,659)	(+3,648,245)	(-1,441,362)
Mandatory.....	(94,131,393)	(198,529,342)	(198,529,342)	(+104,397,949)	---
Advances from prior year less FY 2017 advances	---	(-103,982,585)	(-103,982,585)	(-103,982,585)	---
Net mandatory.....	(94,131,393)	(94,546,757)	(94,546,757)	(+415,364)	---
Total mandatory and discretionary.....	159,144,807	164,649,778	163,208,416	+4,063,609	-1,441,362
TITLE III - RELATED AGENCIES					
American Battle Monuments Commission					
Salaries and expenses.....	74,100	75,100	75,100	+1,000	---

Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, FY 2016 (H.R. 2029)
(Amounts in thousands)

	FY 2015 Enacted	FY 2016 Request	Bill	Bill vs. Enacted	Bill vs. Request
Foreign currency fluctuations account.....	1,900	2,000	2,000	+100	---
Total, American Battle Monuments Commission.....	76,000	77,100	77,100	+1,100	---
U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims					
Salaries and expenses.....	31,386	32,141	32,141	+755	---
Department of Defense - Civil					
Cemeterial Expenses, Army					
Salaries and expenses.....	65,800	70,800	70,800	+5,000	---
Armed Forces Retirement Home - Trust Fund					
Operation and maintenance.....	62,400	63,300	63,300	+900	---
Capital program.....	1,000	1,000	1,000	---	---
Total, Armed Forces Retirement Home.....	63,400	64,300	64,300	+900	---
Total, title III.....	236,586	244,341	244,341	+7,755	---
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TITLE IV - OVERSEAS CONTINGENCY OPERATIONS					
Military Construction, Navy and Marine Corps.....	---	---	244,004	+244,004	+244,004
Military Construction, Air Force.....	---	---	75,000	+75,000	+75,000
Military Construction, Defense-Wide.....	46,000	---	212,996	+166,996	+212,996
European Reassurance Initiative Military Construction.	175,000	---	---	-175,000	---
Total, title IV.....	221,000	---	532,000	+311,000	+532,000
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Grand total.....	169,188,368	281,923,122	279,727,140	+110,538,772	-2,195,982
Appropriations.....	(112,316,413)	(116,419,537)	(114,194,073)	(+1,877,660)	(-2,225,464)
Rescissions.....	(-2,011,247)	(-1,750,000)	(-2,252,518)	(-241,271)	(-502,518)
Advance appropriations, FY 2017.....	(58,662,202)	(167,253,585)	(167,253,585)	(+108,591,383)	---
Overseas contingency operations.....	(221,000)	---	(532,000)	(+311,000)	(+532,000)
Advances from prior year appropriations.....	(55,634,227)	(58,662,202)	(58,662,202)	(+3,027,975)	---
(By transfer).....	(291,251)	(301,000)	(301,000)	(+9,749)	---
(Transfer out).....	(-291,251)	(-301,000)	(-301,000)	(-9,749)	---
(Limitation on direct loans).....	(3,377)	(3,452)	(3,452)	(+75)	---
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Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Madam Chair, let me say that I am delighted to have the opportunity to work with Chairman DENT of the subcommittee as well as the chairman and ranking member of the full committee.

Madam Chair, as you know, this bill has a strong reputation for common ground and bipartisanship. We are pleased with several aspects of the bill. For example, the bill maintains tough but fair reporting requirements for VistA modernization, which closely tracks the VA's development of its electronic health record.

The bill continues to prioritize the elimination of the veterans claims backlog by fully funding the fiscal year 2016 requests: \$18.3 million for a centralized mail initiative which consolidates inbound paper mail from regional offices to a centralized intake site, as well as \$140.8 million for the Veterans Claims Intake Program to scan and convert paper claims into a digital format. I believe that these are all positive steps to making the VA function better.

Furthermore, Chairman DENT has avoided including contentious legislative riders, which is very much appreciated. Unfortunately, however, the chairman was forced to write a bill under the majority's fiscal year 2016 budget resolution, which chose to lock in the Budget Control Act levels and to use gimmicks to boost defense funding. Because of the budget resolution's failure to provide relief from these budget caps—which were established in 2011 and later adjusted in 2013—the chairman was forced to make some tough choices due to the allocation that he was given.

While military construction is provided \$7.2 billion, an increase of \$593 million above 2015, it is still \$1.2 billion below the budget request. In an effort to avoid the defense budget cap, the bill shifts \$532 million to the overseas contingency operations funding stream, even though the fiscal year 2016 budget request did not include an OCO request. This is a gimmick, purely a gimmick to boost defense spending by pumping up the OCO budget, which is not limited by the budget law.

The Department of Veterans Affairs is funded at \$68.7 billion, and while it is \$3.6 billion above fiscal year 2015, the enacted level, it is also \$1.4 billion below the fiscal year 2016 budget request. The inadequate fiscal year 2016 allocation again forced the chairman to slice the request for military construction by \$582 billion. That is hospital construction.

Furthermore, the bill includes language that directs that only replacement, safety, and security projects can receive budgeted funding. This is troubling language, and it eliminates all national cemetery projects for fiscal year 2016 and puts several other projects in jeopardy.

□ 1445

The majority claims they reduced the construction account because the

half-built Veterans Affairs Denver hospital project is drastically over budget and riddled with mistakes.

I certainly agree that the VA needs to be held accountable for the poor job in managing the Denver hospital project; however, no funds for the Denver hospital were allocated within the MILCON-VA bill.

Additionally, I am not aware of any similar issues with any of the other requested projects in the bill for FY12, including replacement, clinic construction, seismic improvements, or cemetery construction.

I believe the majority's budget caps and resulting inadequate allocation—not the problems in Denver—led to cutting construction in half. I am concerned that, if the reduction stands, it will further contribute to the gaps in access, utilization, and safety that were already identified in the VA's annual Strategic Capital Investment program process.

Madam Chair, this committee can no longer afford to function under the Budget Control Act caps. The reductions to VA will cause gaps in access, utilization, and safety and could lower the standard of care due our veterans.

Madam Chairman, as I pointed out during the MILCON-VA markup, the FY 2017 advance funding will consume \$4.6 billion of the nondefense discretionary cap next year, so this problem will only get worse. Certainly, the Department of Defense cannot be the only winner.

Using the FY 2016 budget levels will produce a long summer and an early fall, with no real progress on the FY 2016 bills. If so, it is inevitable that a continuing resolution or a series of continuing resolutions will be needed to keep the government open and running in place long past the new fiscal year starts on October 1.

We cannot continue to govern in this fashion. I believe that it is well past time to be strategic about how we handle our Federal budget, and now, we need to take the next step toward a more responsible budget process so we can eventually stop lurching from one crisis to the next.

I believe that Chairman DENT crafted the best bill he could with the allocation he was given. I also believe that this is the first step in a long process, and I am concerned about the impact these reductions to the VA construction account could have, and we believe they will have to be addressed before the process.

To that end, I am prepared to offer an amendment to the bill restoring the full funding of the request so that we can, in fact, do justice by our veterans and do what is necessary for our military construction without using budget gimmicks. At the appropriate time, I will offer an amendment to do that.

Madam Chairman, at this time, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. DENT. Madam Chairman, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from Kentucky (Mr. ROGERS), the full committee chairman, and I want to thank him for all his support and leadership in putting this bill together.

Mr. ROGERS of Kentucky. Mr. Chairman, thank you for yielding time.

Madam Chairman, I rise in support of this bill, the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs bill for 2016. In doing that, I want to congratulate Chairman DENT, the new chairman of this subcommittee. This is his maiden voyage as chairman of this subcommittee. He is a cardinal now. He has done a great job putting together this bill.

I also want to thank Mr. BISHOP, the ranking member on the other side, for his cooperation in making this bill what it is today.

This is the first bill of the process, and I am pleased that we are off to a very early start—I am told the earliest start since 1974—continuing our good work from last year. I am optimistic that we are going to have a successful appropriations year, finishing on time and under regular order.

We are beginning the year on the right foot with a bipartisan bill, Madam Chairman, that I believe we can all get behind. The FY 2016 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations bill includes, as has been said, \$76.6 billion in discretionary funding for important veterans benefits and services and for the infrastructure that supports the brave men and women serving in our Armed Forces and their families.

This is a total of \$4.6 billion over last year. No one can call this a cut and be realistic about it. We have increased the funding by \$4.6 billion year-to-year. We can't say that for all the other bills. Yes, we went overboard with what we had to work with in providing funds for the veterans and for military construction. That is a demonstration of our commitment to our warfighters and to our veterans and their loved ones, who sacrifice so much to protect this great Nation.

Within the total, the bill includes \$7.7 billion for the DOD's construction projects in the U.S. and around the world, which provide our servicemembers with the infrastructure they need to remain at the ready.

The legislation also provides a total of \$68.7 billion in discretionary funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs. That is a 5.6 percent increase over last year to guarantee the VA has the resources they need to care for every single qualified veteran, including meeting growing healthcare needs.

To that end, VA medical services are funded at \$3.8 billion above the current level. That will treat 6.9 million eligible patients, providing mental health care, helping prevent suicide, and supporting research into prosthetics and traumatic brain injuries, among numerous other health initiatives. However, it is critical that we make sure the VA is being responsible with these taxpayer dollars.

It is clear that the VA is facing some considerable management challenges,

and so this bill provides the oversight that will hold the Department accountable for its mistakes and takes the necessary steps to address and correct these problems.

For instance, the bill keeps a close eye on how the VA is spending its construction dollars by requiring reports on construction costs, savings, and changes in scope.

This is a good bill, Madam Chairman. I urge its adoption.

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Madam Chair, at this time, I yield 4 minutes to the gentlewoman from New York (Mrs. LOWEY), the full committee ranking member.

Mrs. LOWEY. Madam Chair, before I begin, I would like to thank Subcommittee Chairman DENT and Ranking Member BISHOP, who worked so well together, and full Committee Chairman ROGERS.

The House Republican “work harder for less” budget resolution was opposed by every Member on my side of the aisle, in part because it makes it impossible to provide the funding necessary in the 12 appropriations bills to grow our economy and give hard-working Americans the opportunity to succeed.

Democrats preferred the approach taken by the President, calling for an end to sequestration and more reasonable and realistic budgeting that can help families afford college, a home, and a secure retirement.

Refusing to adopt a sufficient overall allocation for discretionary investments has a significant impact on the initiatives in all the appropriation bills that grow the economy and create jobs.

The bill we consider today presents a false choice. The VA needs more resources in 2016 than 2015 to sustain its level of services for the brave men and women it serves. The majority invests a disproportionate share of the allocation’s nondefense funds in the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs bill; yet it still falls far short of meeting VA’s actual needs.

The equivalent of 70,000 fewer veterans would receive medical care under this bill, compared to the President’s request. In addition, it further reduces funds available for priorities in the other spending bills for transportation infrastructure, job training, higher education, biomedical research, and clean energy, just as an example. All these initiatives are key to economic growth and creating opportunity for hard-working Americans, especially veterans.

Additionally, \$532 million in today’s bill would be shifted to overseas contingency operations in a gimmick to boost defense spending.

Even with these tricks, the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs bill would have a profound impact on military families and veterans, forcing a \$2.7 billion cut below what the President says is necessary, including \$754 million less for military construction, \$155 million less for medical services,

\$70 million less for medical support and compliance, \$105 million less for medical facilities, and \$582 million less for VA construction projects.

These cuts, which hurt those who have sacrificed for our country, are unacceptable. Not everything requested by the President is sacrosanct, and Congress has a duty—it is an important part of our responsibility—to evaluate each and every line item in a budget proposal. Such an assessment of this bill makes clear that many accounts are clearly underfunded.

Despite the abundant shortcomings, there are some positive aspects, including reporting requirements for electronic health records and prioritizing the elimination of the veterans claims backlog.

It is imperative that, as the bill progresses toward enactment, improvements are made and that, as the entire appropriations process continues, we reach an agreement that will ensure these bills invest in our hard-working families’ economic security.

Mr. DENT. Madam Chair, at this time, I yield 3 minutes to the gentlewoman from Alabama (Mrs. ROBY), who has been a tireless advocate for the needs of the veterans in her community in Alabama.

Mrs. ROBY. First, I thank the chairman and the ranking member for their hard work on this bill, and I thank the chairman for yielding.

Madam Chairman, I am so grateful for this opportunity to stand here today in support of H.R. 2029, the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies Appropriations Act.

This bill undeniably provides much-needed funding for both our veterans programs and military projects, while staying within the strict limits of our House-passed budget resolution.

I am especially proud because there is funding that we were able to secure in this bill for the folks in Alabama, right at home, including new school construction both at Fort Rucker, the home of Army aviation excellence, and \$33 million for new school construction at Maxwell Air Force Base, much-needed dollars for our military families at this post and this base, and also funding for a new squadron operations facility at Dannelly Field.

These are all extremely important to our critical military functions in Alabama. Anybody who has been on post at Rucker or at the base at Maxwell knows that these schools are in disrepair and are in need of replacing.

Our military families deserve quality on-base facilities, and these projects are going to go a long way to help improve their quality of life right there in Alabama.

I want to address, though, what I was struck with—and everyone else in this institution—when I woke up this morning, Madam Chair. I was extremely disappointed, alongside my colleagues, to see that the President, yet again, has threatened to veto this bill.

This bill provides critical, much-needed funding for our military families and our veterans, and the President should not play around with that.

□ 1500

Under this administration we have failed our veterans miserably. And only in Washington, D.C., when you see an increase of \$3.6 billion for our VA to provide these critical needs for our men and women who have worn the uniform and put their lives on the line for the freedom and liberty that allow us to stand in this room today, only in Washington, D.C., will a \$3.6 billion increase on behalf of our veterans be called a cut.

You know why, Madam Chair?

It is being called a cut because it is the only way to shift the blame away from this administration’s failure to our veterans back to the Republican-led House. It is clearly politics that is driving us, and I am asking, Madam Chair, that the President seriously rethink his position.

The administration needs to take responsibility, and they are trying, once again, to point fingers at leadership in this House that is doing all that we can to ensure that our veterans get timely care and the best care that we can provide them. This is cynical, and it is shameful, and I believe—I believe—that the American people can see straight through it.

So I hope, again, Madam Chair, that the President will reconsider this position because there is no place—no place—here in this bill for political gamesmanship when it comes to our military families and our veterans.

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Madam Chair, at this time I yield 3 minutes to the gentlewoman from California (Ms. LEE), a member of the Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs.

Ms. LEE. Madam Chairman, let me thank the ranking member for yielding, for his unwavering leadership for our veterans on this committee, and for your friendship. Thank you very much, Mr. BISHOP.

Let me also thank Chairman DENT, in addition to Ranking Member BISHOP, really for working very hard in a bipartisan way on a variety of issues facing our veterans, including empowering our vets in their transition back to civilian life and ensuring adequate and accessible access to care.

As the daughter of a veteran, I understand the enormous sacrifices that our servicemembers and their families make to serve our Nation, so this subcommittee is extremely important.

I want to thank the ranking member and chair for working with me and my colleagues on the subcommittee to include important report language on the backlog at the Oakland VA regional office, which is, of course, one of the worst in the Nation.

I want to thank our ranking member, Congresswoman BROWN, who is here today, for her leadership on the committee in shedding some light also on

what is taking place at the Oakland VA regional office.

This language will ensure that the Oakland office not only has to provide Congress with accurate information on what has happened with these backlogged claims, but it will require the Veterans Benefits Administration to outline the lessons learned and what the new protocols are to ensure that no veteran faces delays in accessing care.

Yet, of course, insufficient allocations in this bill leave much work to be done. The 2016 MILCON-VA approps bill includes a \$582 million cut from the major construction account. Now, that is half of the President's request of \$1.1 billion.

Simply put, the level of funds allocated in this bill is totally insufficient and, yes, it undermines the responsibility we have to provide our veterans with the best and most innovative care. As a result, the construction of vital medical facilities that will serve our veterans will be delayed. This includes the initial phase of construction for the state-of-the-art Alameda Point outpatient clinic in my own congressional district, which serves thousands of veterans in the northern California area.

The CHAIR. The time of the gentleman has expired.

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. I yield the gentleman an additional 1 minute.

Ms. LEE. Thank you very much.

I just want to thank the ranking member and the chair for continuing to work with me to ensure that the limitation language in the report with regard to major construction funds for the VA does not preclude clinics like, for example, the Alameda Point outpatient clinic.

Addressing the limitation language and restoring funding to the President's request level for major construction is really vital to ensuring that our Nation keeps the promise that we have made to our brave veterans to give them access to the best care.

Madam Chair, we really can't afford what these cuts will do with our veterans. We can't afford to allow this dangerous and harmful impact of sequestration now to be locked in by these allocations before us today. These dismal numbers, they directly affect our veterans' access to care that they need and that they have earned.

So I hope that, as this process moves forward, these insufficient allocations are resolved.

Mr. DENT. I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from California (Mr. DENHAM) for a colloquy.

Mr. DENHAM. Madam Chair, every Member of this body recognizes the special obligation this House has to take care of our veterans. We also have an obligation to ensure that the funds we entrust to the Department of Veterans Affairs are actually properly spent.

The shocking waste of funds at the Aurora Hospital in Denver has rightly earned the outrage of both this body

and the American public. The \$930 million in cost overruns in Denver will have to be paid for by taking funds that could otherwise have accelerated critical access projects across the country or assisted the Department as it attempts to tackle the backlog in claims at the Veterans Benefits Administration.

I am particularly concerned that the complete failure of project management of the Denver hospital is negatively impacting veterans in my district. They have already suffered from a lack of access to care.

Specifically, I am seeking clarity on what the committee intends with the major construction funding appropriated under this bill. The Committee report includes language requiring the funding provided for major construction to be used for new hospital construction and seismic corrections.

One of the projects included in this request is the Livermore Realignment and Closure project. This project would utilize FY 2016 funding to provide for the complete construction of a new medical facility at French Camp in the Central Valley. The facility would provide direct medical care to more than 87,000 veterans in its service area and dramatically reduce the nearly 6-hour commute faced by veterans in my district for even routine health care.

Madam Chairman, does the Livermore Realignment and Closure project, a project that was authorized more than a decade ago by this Congress, meet the criteria for funding set by the committee in the report accompanying this appropriations bill?

Mr. DENT. Will the gentleman yield?

Mr. DENHAM. I yield to the gentleman from Pennsylvania.

Mr. DENT. Madam Chair, I thank the gentleman from California for offering this opportunity to clarify the meaning of our report language. I do share your concern about the mismanagement of construction projects by the VA. It is delaying vital projects such as Livermore.

In this report, we simply made clear the priority for funding hospital construction and seismic corrections. Within the funds provided in the bill, unallocated major construction funding remains available, and the VA has the ability to allocate those funds towards French Camp as well as other projects in the budget request. The report instructs the VA to make that determination and provide a list of projects to this committee.

I have heard similar concerns from other Members, including the gentleman, Ms. LEE, who just spoke a few moments ago, who have projects included in this request, such as Alameda Clinic and a rehabilitative therapy clinic in St. Louis, which the administration could also choose to fund.

I appreciate these concerns and the opportunity to provide some clarity. I hope that is helpful. But nothing precludes funding.

Madam Chair, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Madam Chair, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Florida (Ms. BROWN), who is the ranking member of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee and a strong supporter of our veterans.

Ms. BROWN of Florida. Madam Chair and Members of the House, I rise in strong opposition to the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations bill.

After taking steps forward with the new Choice Act program, this Republican budget takes two steps back with its cuts to veterans health care, just another example of Republicans talking the talk but not walking the walk. But don't take my word for it. If you ask the veterans service organizations who represent the interests of veterans, every one of them is opposing this bill.

The national commanders of the Veterans of Foreign Wars said the following about the Republican Veterans bill:

The VA cannot fulfill its mission without proper funding, but the House, for whatever reason, now wants to ration care, eliminate infrastructure projects, and stop improving upon the programs and services that the VA was created to provide. This is a bad bill for veterans, and anyone that votes for it should really take a second look.

And let me just say one other thing. I often say, if you are not in the room, you are on the menu, and I am sure that veterans never thought that Republicans would put them on the menu.

Mr. DENT. Madam Chair, I yield myself such time as I may consume, and I just want to respond to the gentleman from Florida's comments.

You know, a lot of people have been saying that we cut spending in this bill. The President requested an 8 percent increase. We provided for a 6 percent increase.

You know, because the President makes a request does not mean that Congress has to behave like potted plants and simply accede to every item that the President has asked for. That is not our role as Members of Congress.

Our job is to provide some real serious oversight over a department that has failed in many respects. And Members on both sides of the aisle agree with that, given the problems of Denver, Phoenix, Philadelphia, Oakland, and elsewhere. I can go through a long list.

But some of the oversight mechanisms in this bill, I should mention, include things like requiring a spending plan before construction dollars can be spent. We did that because of what has happened all across the country.

We prohibit increases in the scope of construction projects. We prohibit transfer of funds between construction projects. We fence 75 percent of funding until conditions are met, cut funding for poorly performing offices, require detailed quarterly reports regarding disability compensation claims. We have tightened restrictions on reprogramming. We have also rescinded

\$415 million from VA pay accounts, that is pay and bonuses, limiting the amount of money available for pay increases and bonuses.

Should we reward failure at the VA?

I mean, there are management problems at the VA. It is not simply about money. We all know this. And given you can open up a newspaper every day, just 2 weeks ago in the city of Philadelphia, at the regional office there, a scathing inspector general's report about the failures, and to simply reward that would be unconscionable on our part.

Ms. BROWN of Florida. Will the gentleman yield?

Mr. DENT. I yield to the gentleman.

Ms. BROWN of Florida. My question is: Will you admit that this budget will deny 70,000 veterans from receiving health care?

Mr. DENT. Reclaiming my time, I will tell you that this budget adequately meets—more than adequately meets—the needs of our servicemembers and our veterans and their families.

Madam Chair, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Madam Chair, I have no further speakers.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. DENT. Madam Chair, again, just urging all Members to support this important legislation. It is the right thing to do. We have no further speakers at this time.

I yield back the balance of my time.

The CHAIR. All time for general debate has expired.

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

During consideration of the bill for amendment each amendment shall be debatable for 10 minutes equally divided and controlled by the proponent and an opponent and shall not be subject to amendment. No pro forma amendment shall be in order except that the chair and ranking minority member of the Committee on Appropriations or their respective designees may offer up to 10 pro forma amendments each at any point for the purpose of debate. The Chair of the Committee of the Whole may accord priority in recognition on the basis of whether the Member offering an amendment has caused it to be printed in the portion of the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD designated for that purpose. Amendments so printed shall be considered read.

The Clerk will read.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 2029

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, 2016, and for other purposes, namely:

TITLE I

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, ARMY

For acquisition, construction, installation, and equipment of temporary or permanent public works, military installations, facilities, and real property for the Army as currently authorized by law, including personnel in the Army Corps of Engineers and other personal services necessary for the purposes of this appropriation, and for construction and operation of facilities in support of the functions of the Commander in Chief, \$663,245,000, to remain available until September 30, 2020: *Provided*, That of this amount, not to exceed \$109,245,000 shall be available for study, planning, design, architect and engineer services, and host nation support, as authorized by law, unless the Secretary of the Army 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.

□ 1515

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. BISHOP OF GEORGIA

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Madam Chairman, I rise to offer an amendment.

The CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

Page 2, line 18, after the dollar amount, insert “(reduced by \$1) (increased by \$1)”.

Page 27, line 9, after the dollar amount, insert “(increased by \$154,643,000)”.

Page 28, line 15, after the dollar amount, insert “(increased by \$69,691,000)”.

Page 29, line 9, after the dollar amount, insert “(increased by \$105,132,000)”.

Page 30, line 15, after the first dollar amount, insert “(increased by \$10,000,000)”.

Page 32, line 5, after the dollar amount, insert “(increased by \$95,000,000)”.

Page 36, line 5, after the first dollar amount, insert “(increased by \$582,000,000)”.

Strike section 233.

Strike section 238.

Strike section 240.

Strike section 241.

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia (during the reading). Madam Chair, I ask unanimous consent to dispense with the reading.

The CHAIR. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Georgia?

There was no objection.

Mr. DENT. Madam Chairman, I reserve a point of order on the gentleman's amendment.

The CHAIR. A point of order is reserved.

Pursuant to House Resolution 223, the gentleman from Georgia and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Georgia.

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Madam Chair, the amendment that I am offering should be supported by every Member of this House. Very simply, it would restore the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs funding bill to the full amount requested by the administration and to the full amount deemed necessary by the affected agencies.

Last night, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, one of the largest veterans serv-

ice organizations in the United States, put out a letter calling this year's MILCON-VA bill “bad for veterans.” They oppose the bill.

The Independent Budget group, which consists of the AMVETS, the Disabled American Veterans, the Paralyzed Veterans of America, and Veterans of Foreign Wars, expressed serious concerns with this bill. The Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America also expressed their serious concerns with this bill. In their letter, they called on Congress to provide the entire \$1.5 billion that was cut from the budget request for the VA, which this House should do immediately.

Without this necessary funding, much-needed investments in veterans health care will be shortchanged, and important services will be compromised.

I understand that House rules make it difficult to add money to a spending bill's allocation, but I sincerely hope that we don't hide behind that as an excuse.

We should be doing the right thing on behalf of our Nation's veterans. We have the power to do it. We need to pass a law to change the law which limits us and puts this cap on what we can do to take care of our veterans and our military construction. This amendment addresses that, and I urge all of my colleagues to vote “yes” and to demonstrate to the veteran community that the message has been received.

Madam Chair, I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. BROWN of Florida. Madam Chair, I rise in strong support of this amendment, which increases funding for all the VA programs that the Republicans cut in this year's Mil Con-VA Appropriations bill.

Our troops continue the fight to keep our country safe and to ensure the blessings of liberty that we enjoy. And after their service in the military ends, many are in desperate need of quality health care to make a healthy transition to civilian life.

As Members of Congress, it is our job to make sure that the men and women who fought for our freedom have access to high quality, comprehensive health care services. One of our first obligations to meeting this demand is ensuring that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has the resources it needs to provide top-notch care to our veterans. Just a few months ago, President Barack Obama proposed a budget for 2016 which will help to meet the needs of the VA by providing \$70.2 billion in discretionary funding for VA, a 7.5 percent increase from 2015. This proposed budget would also provide \$3.2 billion in estimated medical care collections and \$95.3 billion for VA's mandatory benefit programs.

However, I am deeply disappointed in that H.R. 2029, the House MilCon, VA and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee's proposal cuts \$1.4 billion from the President's budget request. This is simply a desperate attempt to balance our nation's budget on the backs of our veterans, and it is not acceptable.

The Veterans have fought for our nation, and now is the time we need to fight for them.

I ask my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to stand with me and the millions of our

nations' veterans and support this amendment to appropriately fund the VA and provide services to our veterans that they earned from their years of service.

[April 28, 2015]

VFW CALLS NEW VA APPROPRIATIONS BILL
'BAD FOR VETERANS'

WASHINGTON.—The national commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States said the U.S. House of Representatives is set to penalize disabled veterans this week if it votes to reduce the Department of Veterans Affairs budget request by more than \$1.5 billion.

"The nationwide crisis in care and confidence that erupted in the VA last year was caused in many ways by a lack of adequate resourcing that only Congress is authorized to provide," said John W. Stroud, who leads the 1.9 million-member VFW and its Auxiliaries. "That's why the VFW is demanding that the House amend this bill to appropriate a funding level that fully funds VA."

In its current form, the fiscal year 2016 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Bill makes across-the-board cuts to all VA discretionary accounts, and drastically underfunds medical care, major construction and Information Technology accounts. Stroud said across-the-board cuts to discretionary spending is what Congress created back in 2011, but by another name, sequestration. Now the House wants to impose its own sequester on a federal department whose sole mission is to care for wounded, ill and injured veterans.

"The VA cannot fulfill its mission without proper funding, but the House for whatever reason now wants to ration care, eliminate infrastructure projects, and stop improving upon the programs and services that the VA was created to provide," said the VFW national commander. "This bill is bad for veterans and any vote for it is unconscionable, which is why we want veterans and advocates everywhere to get involved by urging their elected officials to fully fund the VA."

IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN
VETERANS OF AMERICA,
April 28, 2015.

Hon. JOHN BOEHNER,
Speaker, House of Representatives,
Washington, DC.

Hon. NANCY PELOSI,
Minority Leader, House of Representatives,
Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. SPEAKER AND MADAM MINORITY LEADER: On behalf of the 400,000 members of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA), we write to express concern over the House Committee on Appropriations' April 22, 2015 markup and vote on the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) appropriations bill for Fiscal Year (FY) 2016.

Over the expressed objections of the administration, the committee reduced the president's FY 2016 VA budget request by more than \$1.4 billion. If allowed, this cut could hamper the services ten of thousands of veterans receive, and impact VA's ability to activate new and replacement facilities with sufficient staff and equipment and to adequately maintain facility infrastructure.

Secretary McDonald has been upfront and, above all, realistic in asking for full funding of the president's FY 2016 VA request. Reform of the VA, its facilities and its infrastructure are monumental tasks. Unfortunately these challenges become almost unobtainable with a reduction in funding outlined in the House's mark.

During Congress' first 100 days, great strides have been made to address the needs of our nation's veterans. Passage of the Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for American Veterans (SAV) Act was a huge bipartisan vic-

tory in the House and Senate. It showed the American people what is possible if we work together.

In that same vein, we ask that you again work in a bipartisan manner and request the House, in making its final adjustments or as a part of a conference on this legislation, to find the means to fund the VA's realistic request so that the institution can meet its congressional mandate next year. To that end, we ask the leadership of the House to restore VA's overall funding at least to the level recommended by the administration in its FY 2016 budget.

Sincerely,

MATTHEW M. MILLER,
Chief Policy Officer, Iraq and
Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA).

THE INDEPENDENT BUDGET,
April 27, 2015.

Hon. JOHN BOEHNER,
Speaker, House of Representatives, Washington,
DC.

Hon. NANCY PELOSI,
Minority Leader, House of Representatives,
Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. SPEAKER AND MADAM MINORITY LEADER: As partner organizations in the Independent Budget for Fiscal Year 2016, we write to express our concerns about the results of the Committee on Appropriations' April 22, 2015 markup and vote on the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) appropriations bill for Fiscal Year (FY) 2016.

Over the expressed objections of the Administration, the Committee made a rushed determination to reduce the President's FY 2016 VA Medical Care request by over \$600 million. This reduction is equivalent to the cost of providing care for tens of thousands of veterans next year. If enacted, the bill would harm these services and others, including reducing VA's ability to activate new and replacement facilities with sufficient staff and equipment and to adequately maintain facility infrastructure.

In the separate capital infrastructure accounts (for major and minor projects as well as for state veterans home construction grants), the Committee reduced the Administration's request by \$582 million. We are deeply concerned that VA will not receive enough resources to enable the system to properly maintain its existing health care facilities, nor to build any new ones. Despite the VA's well publicized deficits in addressing the overdue and over-budget medical center construction project in Denver, dozens of other VA centers are much older and in poorer condition than the Colorado facility that is being replaced, but no funds would be made available in the FY 2016 appropriation to begin these priority projects. Also, lack of maintenance, repairs, and improvements in existing VA facilities now carrying backlogged projects costing billions of dollars would be much more expensive in future years due to funding inadequacies brought about by this bill. The Congress should note that over the past decade, Congress has funded VA infrastructure needs at a level that was \$7.9 billion less than what we collectively recommended in Independent Budgets over that period.

In the long run, Congress will be forced to appropriate much larger sums to enable VA to catch up to the deficits being created by this bill. In a related vein, please see VA's letter to the Speaker and President of the Senate, dated April 14, 2015, requesting several high priority construction authorizations and supportive appropriations, and the expenditure of unobligated balances from section 801 of Public Law 113-146, to be used to complete the construction of the Denver facility, and for other purposes that we strongly support.

Strangling the VA's appropriated accounts for infrastructure, but refusing to allow any flexibility in the use of funds already provided by Congress in prior acts, places VA in double jeopardy. It means VA simply cannot build, and cannot expand—even when funds are available and could be used. This barrier penalizes and denies care in some way to every veteran who relies on VA. As VA Secretary McDonald said last week, this situation will "harm veterans." We agree.

On the topic of VA's Medical and Prosthetic Research program, we appreciate the Committee's approval of an amendment to match the Administration's request of \$622 million for FY 2016. Without these new funds, VA clinician-scientists would have needed to significantly reduce recruitment and analysis in the Million Veteran Program, delaying the benefits of precision medicine to veterans. Also, these funds will be used for completion of genetic studies on functional disability in schizophrenia and bipolar disorder; to initiate studies aimed at finding the root cause of a known genetic susceptibility to post-traumatic stress disorder; and, to conduct new studies aimed at predicting susceptibility to opioid abuse. Despite this good news, as advocates we are concerned that these funds were shifted in an unprecedented manner from the VA information technology (IT) account—an appropriation that was already reduced \$80 million from the President's requested level during the Committee's consideration. Also, holding VA accountable for making significant progress in developing the next generation of electronic health records in coordination with the Department of Defense, while suppressing the IT funding to make that very progress possible, is deeply troubling.

In addition to these concerns, we note that in the bill's administrative provisions, the Appropriations Committee would further reduce VA funding, even when it appears that the bill would be providing higher levels at the top line. For example, if this administrative language is adopted by Congress, VA will find itself in the odd position come January 2016 of needing to decide (in the Committee's words, "if it chooses to do so") whether over 300,000 VA employees will be due a comparability increase, without any funding appropriated for it. We know of no statute that makes federal employee comparability increases discretionary once the President announces the comparability rate. In the research program, for example, the appropriation would be reduced by a rescission of over \$3 million even while the Committee voted to approve an amendment to restore the account to the Administration's full requested level. Other administrative provisions have similar effects, all deleterious to any VA flexibility in funding its many requirements in FY 2016. In fact the total rescissions from these administrative provisions would be more than \$400 million, with nearly \$200 million directed at the Medical Services account atop the \$600 million discussed above.

This is a particularly important moment in VA history, given the events of the past year. Suffocating the system now with a dearth of funding (well over \$1 billion less than requested by the Administration), and restricting or rescinding the use of available funds—even those to be appropriated in this bill—while demanding reforms, only proves to make VA's intended and ongoing efforts more challenging.

As indicated, we respectfully request the House, in making its final adjustments, or as a part of a conference on this legislation, to find the means to sufficiently fund these crucial VA accounts so that the institution can meet its Congressional mandate next year. To that end, we ask the Leadership of the

House to restore VA's overall funding at least to the level recommended by the Administration in its FY 2016 budget, although even that level is almost \$1.4 billion below our joint recommendations in the Independent Budget for next year.

When the nation sends our soldiers and Marines into live combat in hostile territory, we do not skimp on their training, weapons, or ammunition for the fight. Now that these veterans are home, we should do no less.

On behalf of the millions of veterans who make up our memberships, we will appreciate the House Leadership and Members taking into account our concerns about funding levels needed by the VA in FY 2016, and acting to fully fund the VA system.

Sincerely,

STEWART M. HICKEY,
National Executive Director, AMVETS.
HOMER S. TOWNSEND, JR.,
Executive Director, Paralyzed Veterans of America.

GARRY J. AUGUSTINE,
Executive Director, Washington Headquarters, DAV (Disabled American Veterans).

ROBERT E. WALLACE,
Executive Director, Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

POINT OF ORDER

Mr. DENT. Madam Chairman, I make a point of order against the amendment because it proposes to amend portions of the bill not yet read.

Section 17 of chapter 2 of the House Practice book states in part:

"It is not in order to strike out or otherwise amend portions of a bill not yet read for amendment."

I ask for a ruling from the Chair.

The CHAIR. Does any other Member wish to be heard on the point of order?

Mrs. LOWEY. I wish to be heard on the point of order.

The CHAIR. The gentlewoman from New York is recognized to be heard on the point of order.

Mrs. LOWEY. Madam Chair, I rise in strong support of the amendment.

The bill falls far short of providing the resources that the President requested and veterans earned. The National Commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars has demanded that "the House amend the bill to appropriate a funding level that fully funds the VA." The gentleman from Georgia's (Mr. BISHOP) amendment does just that.

The VFW went on to say the bill "drastically underfunds medical care, major construction, and information technology accounts. . . . The VA cannot fulfill its mission without proper funding; but the House, for whatever reason, now wants to"_____

The CHAIR. The gentlewoman will suspend.

The gentlewoman must confine her remarks to the point of order.

Does the gentlewoman wish to be heard on the point of order?

Mrs. LOWEY. Yes.

I just want to emphasize that the VFW strongly supports the amendment for the reasons that I suggested.

The CHAIR. Does any other Member wish to be heard on the point of order?

If not, the Chair is prepared to rule.

To be considered en bloc pursuant to clause 2(f) of rule XXI, an amendment must propose only to transfer appropriations among objects in the bill. Because the amendment offered by the gentleman from Georgia proposes also another kind of change in the bill, namely: striking sections from the bill, it may not avail itself of clause 2(f) to address portions of the bill not yet read.

The point of order is sustained.

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Madam Chair, I move to appeal the ruling of the Chair.

The CHAIR. The question is, Shall the decision of the Chair stand as the judgment of the Committee?

The question was taken; and the Chair announced that the ayes appeared to have it.

RECORDED VOTE

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Madam Chair, I demand a recorded vote.

A recorded vote was ordered.

The vote was taken by electronic device, and there were—ayes 237, noes 180, not voting 14, as follows:

[Roll No. 178]

AYES—237

Abraham	Duncan (TN)	Kelly (PA)
Aderholt	Ellmers (NC)	King (IA)
Allen	Emmer (MN)	King (NY)
Amash	Farenthold	Kinzinger (IL)
Amodei	Fincher	Kline
Babin	Fitzpatrick	Knight
Barletta	Fleischmann	Labrador
Barr	Fleming	LaMalfa
Barton	Flores	Lamborn
Benish	Forbes	Lance
Bilirakis	Fortenberry	Latta
Bishop (MI)	Fox	LoBiondo
Bishop (UT)	Franks (AZ)	Long
Black	Frelinghuysen	Loudermilk
Blackburn	Garrett	Lucas
Blum	Gibbs	Luetkemeyer
Bost	Gibson	Lummis
Boustany	Gohmert	MacArthur
Brady (TX)	Goodlatte	Marchant
Brat	Gosar	Marino
Bridenstine	Gowdy	Massie
Brooks (AL)	Granger	McCarthy
Brooks (IN)	Graves (GA)	McCaul
Buchanan	Graves (LA)	McClintock
Buck	Graves (MO)	McHenry
Bucshon	Griffith	McKinley
Burgess	Grothman	McMorris
Byrne	Guthrie	Rodgers
Calvert	Hanna	McSally
Carter (GA)	Hardy	Meadows
Carter (TX)	Harper	Meehan
Chabot	Harris	Messer
Chaffetz	Hartzler	Mica
Clawson (FL)	Heck (NV)	Miller (FL)
Coffman	Hensarling	Miller (MI)
Cole	Herrera Beutler	Moolenaar
Collins (GA)	Hice, Jody B.	Mooney (WV)
Collins (NY)	Hill	Mullin
Comstock	Holding	Mulvaney
Conaway	Hudson	Murphy (PA)
Cook	Huelskamp	Neugebauer
Costello (PA)	Huizenga (MI)	Newhouse
Cramer	Hultgren	Noem
Crawford	Hunter	Nugent
Crenshaw	Hurd (TX)	Nunes
Culberson	Hurt (VA)	Olson
Curbelo (FL)	Issa	Palmer
Davis, Rodney	Jenkins (KS)	Paulsen
Denham	Jenkins (WV)	Pearce
Dent	Johnson (OH)	Perry
DeSantis	Johnson (OH)	Pittenger
DesJarlais	Johnson, Sam	Pitts
Diaz-Balart	Jolly	Poliquin
Dold	Jones	Pompeo
Duffy	Jordan	Posey
Duncan (SC)	Joyce	Price, Tom
	Katko	

Ratcliffe	Scott, Austin	Walden
Reed	Sensenbrenner	Walker
Reichert	Sessions	Walorski
Renacci	Shimkus	Walters, Mimi
Ribble	Shuster	Weber (TX)
Rice (SC)	Simpson	Webster (FL)
Rigell	Smith (MO)	Wenstrup
Roby	Smith (NE)	Westerman
Roe (TN)	Smith (NJ)	Westmoreland
Rogers (AL)	Smith (TX)	Whitfield
Rogers (KY)	Stefanik	Williams
Rohrabacher	Stewart	Wilson (SC)
Rokita	Stivers	Wittman
Rooney (FL)	Stutzman	Womack
Ros-Lehtinen	Thompson (PA)	Woodall
Ross	Thornberry	Yoder
Rothfus	Tiberi	Yoho
Rouzer	Tipton	Young (AK)
Russell	Trott	Young (IA)
Ryan (WI)	Turner	Young (IN)
Salmon	Upton	Zeldin
Sanford	Valadao	Zinke
Scalise	Wagner	
Schweikert	Walberg	

NOES—180

Adams	Fudge	Nadler
Aguilar	Gabbard	Napolitano
Ashford	Gallego	Neal
Bass	Garamendi	Nolan
Beatty	Graham	Norcross
Becerra	Grayson	O'Rourke
Bera	Green, Al	Pallone
Bishop (GA)	Green, Gene	Pascarell
Blumenauer	Grijalva	Pelosi
Bonamici	Gutiérrez	Perlmutter
Boyle, Brendan F.	Hahn	Peters
Brady (PA)	Heck (WA)	Pingree
Brown (FL)	Higgins	Pocan
Brownley (CA)	Himes	Polis
Bustos	Hinojosa	Price (NC)
Butterfield	Honda	Quigley
Capps	Hoyer	Rice (NY)
Capuano	Huffman	Richmond
Cárdenas	Israel	Royal-Allard
Carney	Jackson Lee	Ruiz
Carson (IN)	Jeffries	Ruppersberger
Cartwright	Johnson (GA)	Ryan (OH)
Castor (FL)	Johnson, E. B.	Sánchez, Linda T.
Castro (TX)	Kaptur	Sanchez, Loretta
Chu, Judy	Keating	Sarbanes
Cicilline	Kelly (IL)	Schakowsky
Clark (MA)	Kennedy	Schiff
Clarke (NY)	Kildee	Schrader
Clay	Kilmer	Scott (VA)
Clyburn	Kind	Scott, David
Cohen	Kirkpatrick	Serrano
Connolly	Kuster	Sewell (AL)
Conyers	Langevin	Sherman
Cooper	Larsen (WA)	Sinema
Costa	Larson (CT)	Sires
Courtney	Lawrence	Slaughter
Crowley	Lee	Speier
Cuellar	Levin	Swalwell (CA)
Cummings	Lewis	Takai
Davis (CA)	Lieu, Ted	Takano
Davis, Danny	Lipinski	Thompson (CA)
DeFazio	Loeb sack	Thompson (MS)
DeGette	Lofgren	Titus
Delaney	Love	Tonko
DeLauro	Lowenthal	Torres
DeBene	Lowey	Tsongas
DeSaulnier	Lujan Grisham	Van Hollen
Deutch	(NM)	Vargas
Dingell	Luján, Ben Ray	Veasey
Doggett	(NM)	Vela
Doyle, Michael F.	Lynch	Velázquez
Duckworth	Maloney,	Visclosky
Edwards	Carolyn	Walz
Ellison	Maloney, Sean	Wasserman
Engel	Matsui	Schultz
Eshoo	McCollum	Waters, Maxine
Esty	McDermott	Watson Coleman
Farr	McGovern	Welch
Fattah	McNerney	Wilson (FL)
Foster	Meng	Yarmuth
Frankel (FL)	Moore	
	Moulton	
	Murphy (FL)	

NOT VOTING—14

Beyer	Palazzo	Roskam
Cleaver	Payne	Royce
Guinta	Peterson	Rush
Hastings	Poe (TX)	Smith (WA)
Meeks	Rangel	

□ 1545

Mr. QUIGLEY changed his vote from "aye" to "no."

Messrs. HURT of Virginia, MEADOWS, and LABRADOR changed their vote from "no" to "aye."

So the decision of the Chair stands as the judgment of the Committee.

The result of the vote was announced as above recorded.

The CHAIR. The Clerk will read.

The Clerk read as follows:

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, \$1,349,678,000, to remain available until September 30, 2020: *Provided*, That of this amount, not to exceed \$91,649,000 shall be available for study, planning, design, and architect and engineer services, as authorized by law, unless the Secretary of the Navy determines that additional obligations are necessary for such purposes and notifies the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress of the determination and the reasons therefor.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, AIR FORCE

For acquisition, construction, installation, and equipment of temporary or permanent public works, military installations, facilities, and real property for the Air Force as currently authorized by law, \$1,237,055,000, to remain available until September 30, 2020: *Provided*, That of this amount, not to exceed \$89,164,000 shall be available for study, planning, design, and architect and engineer services, as authorized by law, unless the Secretary of the Air Force determines that additional obligations are necessary for such purposes and notifies the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress of the determination and the reasons therefor.

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

For acquisition, construction, installation, and equipment of temporary or permanent public works, installations, facilities, and real property for activities and agencies of the Department of Defense (other than the military departments), as currently authorized by law, \$1,931,456,000, to remain available until September 30, 2020: *Provided*, That such amounts of this appropriation as may be determined by the Secretary of Defense may be transferred to such appropriations of the Department of Defense available for military construction or family housing as the Secretary may designate, to be merged with and to be available for the same purposes, and for the same time period, as the appropriation or fund to which transferred: *Provided further*, That of the amount appropriated, not to exceed \$160,404,000 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 none of the funds made available by this title may be used to construct any fiscal year 2016 special operations command military construction projects until the Commander of the Special Operations Command has certified in writing and submits to the

Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress a report that includes the following:

(1) A definition of "Special Operations Forces-peculiar" as it applies to the use of United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) funding to meet military construction requirements for facilities that provide healthcare services or support fitness activities.

(2) A description of the decision-making process used to determine whether a military construction project that provides healthcare facilities or supports fitness activities should be funded by the USSOCOM or the military departments.

(3) Provides a schematic of the human performance centers by installation, a listing of the planned equipment related to training and resiliency and a description of the mission-critical benefit of each item, an explanation of why the unique physical and psychological health services incorporated could not be provided by the Defense Health Agency or military services, and a planned staffing breakdown.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MS. STEFANIK

Ms. STEFANIK. Madam Chair, I have an amendment at the desk.

The CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

page 4, line 14, insert after the dollar amount "(reduced by \$30,000,000)(increased by \$30,000,000)" and insert on line 23, after the dollar amount "(increased by \$30,000,000)".

The CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 223, the gentlewoman from New York and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from New York.

Ms. STEFANIK. Madam Chair, I would like to thank the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. DENT) and his staff for allowing this important discussion of an east coast missile defense site, as well as the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. TURNER) for his continued efforts and support.

Madam Chair, my amendment would provide for the planning, design, and construction of an additional missile defense site. Simply put, missile defense shields our Nation from hostile incoming warheads. And with the escalation of threats of rogue nations like North Korea and Iran, the United States must be ready not just to retaliate, but to actually stop an attack. We must be able to defend our Nation and shoot it down. North Korea does, indeed, have a nuclear weapons capability and is a real concern, given their unstable and erratic behavior. Iran has clearly demonstrated key technologies required for ICBM development.

This is about maintaining our Nation's readiness, and an east coast missile defense site provides increased battle space, more decision time, increased reliability, more inventory, and a different angle of intercept.

General Jacoby stated that a third site would give him an increased battle space and increased opportunity for him to engage threats from either Iran or North Korea. An east coast missile defense site would increase our Nation's defense capability against those very real threats.

Madam Chair, this amendment provides for the security and protection that our Nation needs.

I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. TURNER).

Mr. TURNER. Madam Chair, I want to thank Congresswoman STEFANIK and also Chairman DENT for their support for this amendment providing funding for the planning, design, and construction of an additional missile defense site capable of protecting the homeland from a long-range ballistic missile attack.

As Congresswoman STEFANIK is very well aware, we currently possess only two sites, both located on the west coast, limiting our ability to target and intercept incoming ICBMs either that are targeting the east coast or that are originating from the east.

Dating back to 2007, the United States Northern Command in charge of defending the homeland recommended the construction of the east coast site. One thing that we know: under President Obama's plan for missile defense, he canceled President Bush's third site that was to be located in Poland and provide ICBM coverage for the east coast of the United States continental. He then canceled phase 4 of his own phase adaptive approach that would have similarly provided that coverage.

The only opportunity that we have left with those two options gone is to look to the east coast site. Two Presidents and three Secretaries of Defense have all recognized the advantages of an additional missile coast defense site in order to provide further protection against long-range ballistic missile threats from regions such as the Middle East.

As China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea push for more advanced launch vehicles, the construction of an east coast site will dramatically improve the ability of our military to intercept incoming threats by increasing the opportunity to engage and defeat those threats.

I urge support for this amendment.

Mr. DENT. Will the gentlewoman yield?

Ms. STEFANIK. I yield to the gentleman from Pennsylvania.

Mr. DENT. Madam Chair, I rise in support of the gentlewoman's amendment.

With advantages in launch capabilities, we should explore protecting the east coast from our adversaries, as Mr. TURNER and Ms. STEFANIK have stated. She has been very articulate and a great advocate for her district in Fort Drum.

Ms. STEFANIK. Madam Chair, I yield back the balance of my time.

The CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentlewoman from New York (Ms. STEFANIK).

The amendment was agreed to.

Ms. LEE. Madam Chair, as the designee of the ranking member, I move to strike the last word.

The CHAIR. The gentlewoman from California is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. LEE. Madam Chair, I am first seeking clarity from Chairman DENT on what the committee intends with the major construction account funding in this bill.

Included in the committee report is language that the funding provided for major construction be used for hospital construction and seismic corrections. One of the projects in the request is the Alameda Clinic. This clinic would provide direct medical care to veterans in my district.

Mr. Chairman, does the Alameda Clinic project meet the criteria for funding set by the committee in the report accompanying this bill?

Mr. DENT. Will the gentlewoman yield?

Ms. LEE. I yield to the gentleman from Pennsylvania.

Mr. DENT. It does, yes.

Ms. LEE. I want to thank the gentleman for this clarification, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The CHAIR. The Clerk will read.

The Clerk read as follows:

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, ARMY NATIONAL GUARD

For construction, acquisition, expansion, rehabilitation, and conversion of facilities for the training and administration of the Army National Guard, and contributions therefor, as authorized by chapter 1803 of title 10, United States Code, and Military Construction Authorization Acts, \$167,437,000, to remain available until September 30, 2020: *Provided*, That of the amount appropriated, not to exceed \$20,337,000 shall be available for study, planning, design, and architect and engineer services, as authorized by law, unless the Director of the Army National Guard determines that additional obligations are necessary for such purposes and notifies the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress of the determination and the reasons therefor.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, AIR NATIONAL GUARD

For construction, acquisition, expansion, rehabilitation, and conversion of facilities for the training and administration of the Air National Guard, and contributions therefor, as authorized by chapter 1803 of title 10, United States Code, and Military Construction Authorization Acts, \$138,738,000, to remain available until September 30, 2020: *Provided*, That of the amount appropriated, not to exceed \$5,104,000 shall be available for study, planning, design, and architect and engineer services, as authorized by law, unless the Director of the Air National Guard determines that additional obligations are necessary for such purposes and notifies the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress of the determination and the reasons therefor.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, ARMY RESERVE

For construction, acquisition, expansion, rehabilitation, and conversion of facilities for the training and administration of the Army Reserve as authorized by chapter 1803 of title 10, United States Code, and Military Construction Authorization Acts, \$104,295,000, to remain available until September 30, 2020: *Provided*, That of the amount appropriated, not to exceed \$9,318,000 shall be available for study, planning, design, and architect and engineer services, as authorized by law, unless the Chief of the Army Reserve determines that additional obligations are necessary for such purposes and notifies the Committees on Appropriations of both

Houses of Congress of the determination and the reasons therefor.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, NAVY RESERVE

For construction, acquisition, expansion, rehabilitation, and conversion of facilities for the training and administration of the reserve components of the Navy and Marine Corps as authorized by chapter 1803 of title 10, United States Code, and Military Construction Authorization Acts, \$36,078,000, to remain available until September 30, 2020: *Provided*, That of the amount appropriated, not to exceed \$2,208,000 shall be available for study, planning, design, and architect and engineer services, as authorized by law, unless the Secretary of the Navy determines that additional obligations are necessary for such purposes and notifies the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress of the determination and the reasons therefor.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, AIR FORCE RESERVE

For construction, acquisition, expansion, rehabilitation, and conversion of facilities for the training and administration of the Air Force Reserve as authorized by chapter 1803 of title 10, United States Code, and Military Construction Authorization Acts, \$65,021,000, to remain available until September 30, 2020: *Provided*, That of the amount appropriated, not to exceed \$13,400,000 shall be available for study, planning, design, and architect and engineer services, as authorized by law, unless the Chief of the Air Force Reserve 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.

NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION

SECURITY INVESTMENT PROGRAM

For the United States share of the cost of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization Security Investment Program for the acquisition and construction of military facilities and installations (including international military headquarters) and for related expenses for the collective defense of the North Atlantic Treaty Area as authorized by section 2806 of title 10, United States Code, and Military Construction Authorization Acts, \$150,000,000, to remain available until expended.

FAMILY HOUSING CONSTRUCTION, ARMY

For expenses of family housing for the Army for construction, including acquisition, replacement, addition, expansion, extension, and alteration, as authorized by law, \$99,695,000, to remain available until September 30, 2020.

FAMILY HOUSING OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE, ARMY

For expenses of family housing for the Army for operation and maintenance, including debt payment, leasing, minor construction, principal and interest charges, and insurance premiums, as authorized by law, \$393,511,000.

FAMILY HOUSING CONSTRUCTION, NAVY AND MARINE CORPS

For expenses of family housing for the Navy and Marine Corps for construction, including acquisition, replacement, addition, expansion, extension, and alteration, as authorized by law, \$16,541,000, to remain available until September 30, 2020.

FAMILY HOUSING OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE, NAVY AND MARINE CORPS

For expenses of family housing for the Navy and Marine Corps for operation and maintenance, including debt payment, leasing, minor construction, principal and interest charges, and insurance premiums, as authorized by law, \$353,036,000.

FAMILY HOUSING CONSTRUCTION, AIR FORCE

For expenses of family housing for the Air Force for construction, including acquisition, replacement, addition, expansion, extension, and alteration, as authorized by law, \$160,498,000, to remain available until September 30, 2020.

FAMILY HOUSING OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE, AIR FORCE

For expenses of family housing for the Air Force for operation and maintenance, including debt payment, leasing, minor construction, principal and interest charges, and insurance premiums, as authorized by law, \$331,232,000.

FAMILY HOUSING OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE, DEFENSE-WIDE

For expenses of family housing for the activities and agencies of the Department of Defense (other than the military departments) for operation and maintenance, leasing, and minor construction, as authorized by law, \$58,668,000.

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BASE CLOSURE ACCOUNT

For deposit into the Department of Defense Base Closure Account, established by section 2906(a) of the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Act of 1990 (10 U.S.C. 2687 note), \$251,334,000, to remain available until expended.

ADMINISTRATIVE PROVISIONS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SEC. 108. None of the funds made available in this title may be used for the procurement

of steel for any construction project or activity for which American steel producers, fabricators, and manufacturers have been denied the opportunity to compete for such steel procurement.

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

SEC. 110. None of the funds made available in this title may be used to initiate a new installation overseas without prior notification to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress.

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

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

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

SEC. 114. Funds appropriated to the Department of Defense for construction in prior years shall be available for construction authorized for each such military department by the authorizations enacted into law during the current session of Congress.

SEC. 115. For military construction or family housing projects that are being completed with funds otherwise expired or lapsed for obligation, expired or lapsed funds may be used to pay the cost of associated supervision, inspection, overhead, engineering and design on those projects and on subsequent claims, if any.

SEC. 116. Notwithstanding any other provision of law, any funds made available to a military department or defense agency for the construction of military projects may be obligated for a military construction project or contract, or for any portion of such a project or contract, at any time before the end of the fourth fiscal year after the fiscal year for which funds for such project were made available, if the funds obligated for such project: (1) are obligated from funds available for military construction projects; and (2) do not exceed the amount appropriated for such project, plus any amount by which the cost of such project is increased pursuant to law.

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 117. Subject to 30 days prior notification, or 14 days for a notification provided in an electronic medium pursuant to sections

480 and 2883 of title 10, United States Code, to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress, such additional amounts as may be determined by the Secretary of Defense may be transferred to: (1) the Department of Defense Family Housing Improvement Fund from amounts appropriated for construction in "Family Housing" accounts, to be merged with and to be available for the same purposes and for the same period of time as amounts appropriated directly to the Fund; or (2) the Department of Defense Military Unaccompanied Housing Improvement Fund from amounts appropriated for construction of military unaccompanied housing in "Military Construction" accounts, to be merged with and to be available for the same purposes and for the same period of time as amounts appropriated directly to the Fund: *Provided*, That appropriations made available to the Funds shall be available to cover the costs, as defined in section 502(5) of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974, of direct loans or loan guarantees issued by the Department of Defense pursuant to the provisions of subchapter IV of chapter 169 of title 10, United States Code, pertaining to alternative means of acquiring and improving military family housing, military unaccompanied housing, and supporting facilities: *Provided further*, That the transfer authority in this provision shall also be applicable to amounts appropriated for construction in "Family Housing" accounts in section 2002 of Public Law 112-10.

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 118. In addition to any other transfer authority available to the Department of Defense, amounts may be transferred from the Department of Defense Base Closure Account to the fund established by section 1013(d) of the Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Development Act of 1966 (42 U.S.C. 3374) to pay for expenses associated with the Homeowners Assistance Program incurred under 42 U.S.C. 3374(a)(1)(A). Any amounts transferred shall be merged with and be available for the same purposes and for the same time period as the fund to which transferred.

SEC. 119. Notwithstanding any other provision of law, funds made available in this title for operation and maintenance of family housing shall be the exclusive source of funds for repair and maintenance of all family housing units, including general or flag officer quarters: *Provided*, That not more than \$15,000 per unit may be spent annually for the maintenance and repair of any general or flag officer quarters without 30 days prior notification, or 14 days for a notification provided in an electronic medium pursuant to sections 480 and 2883 of title 10, United States Code, to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress, except that an after-the-fact notification shall be submitted if the limitation is exceeded solely due to costs associated with environmental remediation that could not be reasonably anticipated at the time of the budget submission.

SEC. 120. Amounts contained in the Ford Island Improvement Account established by subsection (h) of section 2814 of title 10, United States Code, are appropriated and shall be available until expended for the purposes specified in subsection (i)(1) of such section or until transferred pursuant to subsection (i)(3) of such section.

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 121. During the 5-year period after appropriations available in this Act to the Department of Defense for military construction and family housing operation and maintenance and construction have expired for obligation, upon a determination that such appropriations will not be necessary for the liquidation of obligations or for making au-

thorized adjustments to such appropriations for obligations incurred during the period of availability of such appropriations, unobligated balances of such appropriations may be transferred into the appropriation "Foreign Currency Fluctuations, Construction, Defense", to be merged with and to be available for the same time period and for the same purposes as the appropriation to which transferred.

SEC. 122. (a) Except as provided in subsection (b), none of the funds made available in this Act may be used by the Secretary of the Army to relocate a unit in the Army that—

(1) performs a testing mission or function that is not performed by any other unit in the Army and is specifically stipulated in title 10, United States Code; and

(2) is located at a military installation at which the total number of civilian employees of the Department of the Army and Army contractor personnel employed exceeds 10 percent of the total number of members of the regular and reserve components of the Army assigned to the installation.

(b) EXCEPTION.—Subsection (a) shall not apply if the Secretary of the Army certifies to the congressional defense committees that in proposing the relocation of the unit of the Army, the Secretary complied with Army Regulation 5-10 relating to the policy, procedures, and responsibilities for Army stationing actions.

SEC. 123. Amounts appropriated or otherwise made available in an account funded under the headings in this title may be transferred among projects and activities within the account in accordance with the reprogramming guidelines for military construction and family housing construction contained in Department of Defense Financial Management Regulation 7000.14-R, Volume 3, Chapter 7, of February 2009, as in effect on the date of enactment of this Act.

SEC. 124. None of the funds made available in this title may be obligated or expended for planning and design and construction of projects at Arlington National Cemetery.

(RESCISSION OF FUNDS)

SEC. 125. Of the unobligated balances available for "Military Construction, Army", from prior appropriation Acts (other than appropriations designated by law as being for contingency operations directly related to the global war on terrorism or as an emergency requirement), \$96,000,000 are hereby rescinded.

(RESCISSION OF FUNDS)

SEC. 126. Of the unobligated balances available for "Military Construction, Air Force", from prior appropriation Acts (other than appropriations designated by law as being for contingency operations directly related to the global war on terrorism or as an emergency requirement), \$52,600,000 are hereby rescinded.

(RESCISSION OF FUNDS)

SEC. 127. Of the unobligated balances available for "Military Construction, Defense-Wide", from prior appropriation Acts (other than appropriations designated by law as being for contingency operations directly related to the global war on terrorism or as an emergency requirement), \$134,000,000 are hereby rescinded.

(RESCISSION OF FUNDS)

SEC. 128. Of the unobligated balances made available in prior appropriation Acts for the fund established in section 1013(d) of the Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Development Act of 1966 (42 U.S.C. 3374) (other than appropriations designated by law as being for contingency operations directly related to the global war on terrorism or as an emergency requirement), \$103,918,000 are hereby rescinded.

SEC. 129. For the purposes of this Act, the term “congressional defense committees” means the Committees on Armed Services of the House of Representatives and the Senate, the Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs of the Committee on Appropriations of the Senate, and the Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs of the Committee on Appropriations of the House of Representatives.

SEC. 130. None of the funds made available by this title may be used to carry out the closure or realignment of Lajes Air Force Base, Azores, and, unless and until the Secretary of Defense certifies in writing to the congressional defense committees that, based on operational requirements, Lajes Air Force Base is not an optimal location for the Joint Intelligence Analysis Complex, none of the funds made available by this title may be used to construct phase two of the Joint Intelligence Analysis Complex Consolidation at Royal Air Force Croughton, United Kingdom.

SEC. 131. Notwithstanding section 124, for an additional amount for “Military Construction, Army” in this title, \$30,000,000 is provided for advances to the Federal Highway Administration, Department of Transportation, for construction of access roads as authorized by section 210 of title 23, United States Code.

TITLE II

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS VETERANS BENEFITS ADMINISTRATION COMPENSATION AND PENSIONS (INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

For the payment of compensation benefits to or on behalf of veterans and a pilot program for disability examinations as authorized by section 107 and chapters 11, 13, 18, 51, 53, 55, and 61 of title 38, United States Code; pension benefits to or on behalf of veterans as authorized by chapters 15, 51, 53, 55, and 61 of title 38, United States Code; and burial benefits, the Reinstated Entitlement Program for Survivors, emergency and other officers’ retirement pay, adjusted-service credits and certificates, payment of premiums due on commercial life insurance policies guaranteed under the provisions of title IV of the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (50 U.S.C. App. 541 et seq.) and for other benefits as authorized by sections 107, 1312, 1977, and 2106, and chapters 23, 51, 53, 55, and 61 of title 38, United States Code, \$166,271,436,000, to remain available until expended, of which \$87,146,761,000 shall become available on October 1, 2016: *Provided*, That not to exceed \$15,562,000 of the amount made available for fiscal year 2016 and \$16,021,000 of the amount made available for fiscal year 2017 under this heading shall be reimbursed to “General Operating Expenses, Veterans Benefits Administration”, and “Information Technology Systems” for necessary expenses in implementing the provisions of chapters 51, 53, and 55 of title 38, United States Code, the funding source for which is specifically provided as the “Compensation and Pensions” appropriation: *Provided further*, That such sums as may be earned on an actual qualifying patient basis, shall be reimbursed to “Medical Care Collections Fund” to augment the funding of individual medical facilities for nursing home care provided to pensioners as authorized.

READJUSTMENT BENEFITS

For the payment of readjustment and rehabilitation benefits to or on behalf of veterans as authorized by chapters 21, 30, 31, 33, 34, 35, 36, 39, 41, 51, 53, 55, and 61 of title 38, United States Code, \$32,088,826,000, to remain available until expended, of which \$16,743,904,000 shall become available on October 1, 2016: *Provided*, That expenses for rehabilitation

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

VETERANS INSURANCE AND INDEMNITIES

For military and naval insurance, national service life insurance, servicemen’s indemnities, service-disabled veterans insurance, and veterans mortgage life insurance as authorized by chapters 19 and 21, title 38, United States Code, \$169,080,000, to remain available until expended, of which \$91,920,000 shall become available on October 1, 2016.

VETERANS HOUSING BENEFIT PROGRAM FUND

For the cost of direct and guaranteed loans, such sums as may be necessary to carry out the program, as authorized by subchapters I through III of chapter 37 of title 38, United States Code: *Provided*, That such costs, including the cost of modifying such loans, shall be as defined in section 502 of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974: *Provided further*, That during fiscal year 2016, within the resources available, not to exceed \$500,000 in gross obligations for direct loans are authorized for specially adapted housing loans.

In addition, for administrative expenses to carry out the direct and guaranteed loan programs, \$164,558,000.

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION LOANS PROGRAM ACCOUNT

For the cost of direct loans, \$31,000, as authorized by chapter 31 of title 38, United States Code: *Provided*, That such costs, including the cost of modifying such loans, shall be as defined in section 502 of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974: *Provided further*, That funds made available under this heading are available to subsidize gross obligations for the principal amount of direct loans not to exceed \$2,952,000.

In addition, for administrative expenses necessary to carry out the direct loan program, \$367,000, which may be paid to the appropriation for “General Operating Expenses, Veterans Benefits Administration”.

NATIVE AMERICAN VETERAN HOUSING LOAN PROGRAM ACCOUNT

For administrative expenses to carry out the direct loan program authorized by subchapter V of chapter 37 of title 38, United States Code, \$1,134,000.

VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION MEDICAL SERVICES

For necessary expenses for furnishing, as authorized by law, inpatient and outpatient care and treatment to beneficiaries of the Department of Veterans Affairs and veterans described in section 1705(a) of title 38, United States Code, including care and treatment in facilities not under the jurisdiction of the Department, and including medical supplies and equipment, bioengineering services, food services, and salaries and expenses of healthcare employees hired under title 38, United States Code, aid to State homes as authorized by section 1741 of title 38, United States Code, assistance and support services for caregivers as authorized by section 1720G of title 38, United States Code, loan repayments authorized by section 604 of the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010 (Public Law 111-163; 124 Stat. 1174; 38 U.S.C. 7681 note), and hospital care and medical services authorized by section 1787 of title 38, United States Code; \$969,554,000, which shall be in addition to funds previously appropriated under this heading that became available on October 1, 2015; and, in addition, \$51,673,000,000, plus reimbursements, shall become available on October 1, 2016, and shall remain available until

September 30, 2017: *Provided*, That notwithstanding any other provision of law, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall establish a priority for the provision of medical treatment for veterans who have service-connected disabilities, lower income, or have special needs: *Provided further*, That notwithstanding any other provision of law, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall give priority funding for the provision of basic medical benefits to veterans in enrollment priority groups 1 through 6: *Provided further*, That notwithstanding any other provision of law, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs may authorize the dispensing of prescription drugs from Veterans Health Administration facilities to enrolled veterans with privately written prescriptions based on requirements established by the Secretary: *Provided further*, That the implementation of the program described in the previous proviso shall incur no additional cost to the Department of Veterans Affairs.

□ 1600

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. GOSAR

Mr. GOSAR. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR (Mr. HULTGREN). The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

Page 27, line 9, after the dollar amount, insert “(increased by \$2,031,000)”.

Page 30, line 15, after the first dollar amount, insert “(reduced by \$2,031,000)”.

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

The Acting CHAIR. A point of order is reserved.

Pursuant to House Resolution 223, the gentleman from Arizona and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Arizona.

Mr. GOSAR. Mr. Chairman, I rise to offer an amendment which seeks to provide additional resources for the mental health services for our Nation’s veterans.

By way of background, the VA’s budget justification for FY16 requests an increase of \$3,231,000 over the enacted fiscal year ’15 levels for its Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs, but on the very next page of that document, the VA only mentions that it needs “\$1.2 million to address increased congressional and legislative workload.”

My amendment simply transfers the remaining \$2,031,000 unaccounted for from this request and prioritizes it to address the ongoing problems our veterans face from returning from combat.

Traumatic brain injuries and post-traumatic stress disorder have been consistently contributing to behavioral issues with our veterans, and, all too often, these ongoing mental health issues result in suicide. With an average of 18 to 20 veteran suicides per day, more resources are desperately needed. The Congressional Budget Office says the amendment would have no impact on the budget authority or outlays.

The VA does not need more money to hire more paper pushers to send letters to Capitol Hill to attempt to explain its inappropriate actions. Instead, let’s

appropriate the money to those whom the VA was created to serve, and let's help improve the mental health of our Nation's heroes.

I ask my colleagues to support this commonsense amendment. I thank Chairman DENT and Ranking Member BISHOP for their time.

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

POINT OF ORDER

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chairman, I wish to speak on the point of order.

The amendment proposes to amend portions of the bill not yet read.

The amendment may not be considered en bloc under clause 2(f) of rule XXI because the amendment proposes to increase the level of outlays in the bill.

I ask for a ruling from the Chair.

The Acting CHAIR. Does any other Member wish to be heard on the point of order?

To be considered en bloc pursuant to clause 2(f) of rule XXI, an amendment must not propose to increase the levels of budget authority or outlays in the bill. Because the amendment offered by the gentleman from Arizona proposes a net increase in the level of outlays in the bill, as argued by the chairman of the Subcommittee on Appropriations, it may not avail itself of clause 2(f) to address portions of the bill not yet read.

The point of order is sustained. The amendment is not in order.

The Clerk will read.

The Clerk read as follows:

MEDICAL SUPPORT AND COMPLIANCE

For necessary expenses in the administration of the medical, hospital, nursing home, domiciliary, construction, supply, and research activities, as authorized by law; administrative expenses in support of capital policy activities; and administrative and legal expenses of the Department for collecting and recovering amounts owed the Department as authorized under chapter 17 of title 38, United States Code, and the Federal Medical Care Recovery Act (42 U.S.C. 2651 et seq.), \$6,524,000,000, plus reimbursements, shall become available on October 1, 2016, and shall remain available until September 30, 2017.

MEDICAL FACILITIES

For necessary expenses for the maintenance and operation of hospitals, nursing homes, domiciliary facilities, and other necessary facilities of the Veterans Health Administration; for administrative expenses in support of planning, design, project management, real property acquisition and disposition, construction, and renovation of any facility under the jurisdiction or for the use of the Department; for oversight, engineering, and architectural activities not charged to project costs; for repairing, altering, improving, or providing facilities in the several hospitals and homes under the jurisdiction of the Department, not otherwise provided for, either by contract or by the hire of temporary employees and purchase of materials; for leases of facilities; and for laundry services, \$5,074,000,000, plus reimbursements, shall become available on October 1, 2016, and shall remain available until September 30, 2017.

MEDICAL AND PROSTHETIC RESEARCH

For necessary expenses in carrying out programs of medical and prosthetic research

and development as authorized by chapter 73 of title 38, United States Code, \$621,813,000, plus reimbursements, shall remain available until September 30, 2017.

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

The Acting CHAIR. The gentleman from Pennsylvania is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chairman, exactly 2 weeks ago, the VA Office of the Inspector General released its report on the gross mismanagement and claims manipulation that has long corroded the Philadelphia VA Regional Office. The issues revealed through that report reflect some of the worst instances of neglect and lack of accountability I have seen. These issues are unacceptable for our Nation's veterans. I have personally seen the consequences firsthand through my constituency served by the Philadelphia VA.

This bill takes a number of steps to address the issues raised by the inspector general and help to ensure that they will not be repeated at any VA facility. I remain steadfast in my work to bring accountability and reform to the VA.

Mr. Chairman, I yield to the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. MEEHAN).

Mr. MEEHAN. I want to thank the gentleman, and I want to thank him for his hard work on this bill.

Mr. Chairman, the gentleman from Pennsylvania has put together a fiscally responsible piece of legislation that will support the U.S. military, the military families, and the veterans who have served our country.

As you have heard in the discussions that have taken place with other colleagues, particularly with those from Pennsylvania, when red tape and mismanagement stand between a veteran and his or her care, we all have a responsibility to blow the whistle and to call for appropriate reforms.

The inspector general for Veterans Affairs released a report 2 weeks ago on the Philadelphia Veterans Affairs Regional Office, as my colleague identified, and the report was even more scathing than we were led to believe it would be. It confirmed our worst fears—that the Philadelphia VA Regional Office is rife with systematic mismanagement, poor morale, the deliberate manipulation of data, and individuals who are more focused on misleading the Nation than on serving our veterans.

I would like to thank Chairman MILLER on the Veterans' Affairs Committee for convening a hearing on these reports just last week in order to explore these matters in greater detail. Out of those hearings, we learned that the VA isn't planning on holding anyone responsible until after the completion of yet another report. This may be the nature of the process, but it is deeply troubling.

What the VA needs is not an endless loop of bureaucratic reviews and inquiries—it is competent management

that is needed, management that will hold the employees and the other management accountable. While we wait for the next report, with this bill, Congress has an opportunity to take reform action with VA H.R. 2029, which will give the VA employees the tools they need to expedite the veterans benefits and care process.

One of the findings from the IG report that stuck out at me was that, in Philadelphia, the average response time for some 31,000 inquiries was 312 days. According to policy, that response should have happened within 5 days. I asked the Director of the VA: What do you tell the veterans? He had no answer. That response time is completely unacceptable. The funding in this bill will provide additional staff to expedite the processing of these claims and get those veterans the benefits they deserve.

Again, I want to thank the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. DENT) for his hard work on this bill. I look forward to continuing to work with him, as well as with other colleagues, to bring about the important reforms that are needed at the Philadelphia benefits office.

Mr. DENT. I thank the gentleman from Pennsylvania for his dedication and determination to right the situation.

Mr. Chairman, I yield to the gentleman from Chester County, Pennsylvania (Mr. COSTELLO).

Mr. COSTELLO of Pennsylvania. Mr. Chairman, I rise today regarding Congressman DENT's fiscally responsible appropriations legislation and the positive impact it will have on the Philadelphia VA Regional Office.

The Acting CHAIR. The time of the gentleman has expired.

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

The Acting CHAIR. The gentleman from Pennsylvania is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chairman, I yield to the gentleman from Chester County, Pennsylvania (Mr. COSTELLO), who has been deeply concerned about this issue of the Philadelphia Veterans Affairs Regional Office.

Mr. COSTELLO of Pennsylvania. Mr. Chairman, I rise today regarding Congressman DENT's fiscally responsible appropriations legislation and the positive impact it will have on the Philadelphia VA Regional Office.

As you know, the Philadelphia VA has been plagued with a dysfunctional and toxic work environment, with management purposefully and blatantly displaying managerial wrongdoing. Mr. Chairman, it is our duty to right these wrongdoings and to ensure that the best care is provided to our veterans. This appropriations bill is a great start, and it gives Congress the opportunity to act on behalf of our veterans. Let's talk about this appropriations bill and the specifics of it.

It fully funds the Veterans Benefits Management System, which will result

in cutting the average processing time of a veteran's filed claim. It fully funds the Veterans Benefits Administration with an additional \$163 million to allow for more staffing for the processing of appeals claims. We have already heard about the backlog of the claims. This seeks to address that. It allocates funding for IT to permit the electronic modernization of appeals claims, and it allocates full funding for digital scanning and centralized mail. Lastly, this bill establishes strike force response teams to bring in experienced managers to implement corrective actions at struggling and low-performing VA facilities, like the Philadelphia VA.

Mr. Chairman, it is time for change at the Philadelphia VA RO, and I am fully committed to ensuring that there is a course correction of the wrongdoings there and that we effectively and expeditiously resolve the problems. I encourage my colleagues to do the same and support this bill.

I will also want to particularly thank Congressman DENT for his hard work on this bill. I look forward to continuing to work with you and with your respective committees to provide the best for the veterans in our Commonwealth and across the Nation.

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

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will read.

The Clerk read as follows:

NATIONAL CEMETERY ADMINISTRATION

For necessary expenses of the National Cemetery Administration for operations and maintenance, not otherwise provided for, including uniforms or allowances therefor; cemetery expenses as authorized by law; purchase of one passenger motor vehicle for use in cemetery operations; hire of passenger motor vehicles; and repair, alteration or improvement of facilities under the jurisdiction of the National Cemetery Administration, \$266,220,000, of which not to exceed \$26,600,000 shall remain available until September 30, 2017.

DEPARTMENTAL ADMINISTRATION

GENERAL ADMINISTRATION

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

For necessary operating expenses of the Department of Veterans Affairs, not otherwise provided for, including administrative expenses in support of Department-wide capital planning, management and policy activities, uniforms, or allowances therefor; not to exceed \$25,000 for official reception and representation expenses; hire of passenger motor vehicles; and reimbursement of the General Services Administration for security guard services, \$336,659,000, of which not to exceed \$10,100,000 shall remain available until September 30, 2017: *Provided*, That funds provided under this heading may be transferred to "General Operating Expenses, Veterans Benefits Administration".

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. MCNERNEY

Mr. MCNERNEY. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

Page 30, line 15, after the first dollar amount, insert "(reduced by \$15,068,000)".

Page 31, line 9, after the dollar amount, insert "(reduced by \$27,213,000)".

Page 32, lines 5 and 9, after each dollar amount, insert "(reduced by \$135,019,000)".

Page 36, line 5, after the first dollar amount, insert "(increased by \$177,300,000)".

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 223, the gentleman from California and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California.

□ 1615

Mr. MCNERNEY. Mr. Chairman, I want to thank Chairman DENT and Ranking Member BISHOP for all their hard work on this year's military construction and Veterans Affairs funding bill. I know that both of you had to make difficult decisions to get under the current financial constraints.

The President's budget included \$1.4 billion in funding for VA major construction projects. Unfortunately, this bill only includes \$561 million, which is \$582 million less than the request. This severely impacts access to care for veterans.

My amendment increases the VA major construction by \$177 million, although I would still prefer to restore full funding for major construction with the President's fiscal year 2016 budget request. The amendment is offset by reductions to the VA administration IT accounts, bringing them in line with the fiscal year 2015 enacted levels. In addition, the general operating expenses account would be reduced by \$27 million.

However, my amendment will ensure that more VA construction projects are funded, including the outpatient clinic and national cemetery in Alameda, California, and a 187,000-square-foot community-based outpatient clinic in French Camp, California.

Without this funding, more than 87,000 veterans in and around my district will have to continue to wait for the quality medical care that they have earned. For example, I recently drove with a veteran to the nearest VA medical center. His appointment was only 30 minutes, but including travel, it took us 8 hours. It took all day. This cannot continue.

The VA buildings are an average of 60 years old. Since 2004, use of Department facilities has risen 80 percent to 120 percent, while the condition of these facilities deteriorated over the same period of time. There are more than 3,900 infrastructure gaps that will cost between \$54 billion and \$66 billion to close, including \$10 billion in activation costs.

Moreover, the Veterans Health Administration has over 21 major construction projects dating to 2007 that have been only partially funded. To complete existing projects and to close future gaps, the VA will need to invest at least \$23 billion over the next 10 years. At current requested funding levels, it will take more than 67 years to complete the 10-year capital investment plan of the Department.

Our brave men and women deserve access to the best healthcare system

our Nation has to offer, and that is the VA healthcare system. Not adequately funding our future construction projects is a disservice to our Nation's heroes.

Now I share my colleagues' outrage at the VA boondoggle in Aurora, Colorado. This is unacceptable to taxpayers, to veterans and their families, and an embarrassment to the VA. While we are all frustrated with how this process has gone, further funding reductions to major construction does not help build additional facilities on schedule, fails to provide additional oversight of construction projects, and does nothing to reform VA construction processes. I am pleased that both the chairman and ranking member recognize the need to address this issue and have included important language to that effect, but there is still more work to be done, and that is something we plan to address in the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

In addition, the VA announced last week that it is working with the Army Corps of Engineers to identify projects in which the Corps will serve as the construction agent. The VA and the Corps are still working on the exact projects and criteria, but this is a step in the right direction.

Mr. Chairman, I understand the frustration, really, but cutting funding right now to these projects doesn't solve the problem. It is hurting our veterans. We need to think outside of that box. Let's focus on improving our construction process and not punishing the veterans across the country because of what occurred in Denver. I urge my colleagues to support this amendment.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chairman, I must rise reluctantly in opposition to the amendment.

The Acting CHAIR. The gentleman from Pennsylvania is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. DENT. I know the gentleman and others are disappointed that we did not provide the full administration request for major construction, but we felt that it was more important to provide necessary health services for veterans than to add to the poorly managed major construction account. This amendment, I believe, proves the wisdom of our choice.

To provide enough money for the French Camp project Mr. MCNERNEY is interested in, we would have to gut the VA IT program, which is already \$195 million below the request. I don't think many Members would be willing to accept the cuts that would need to be made to the electronic medical records system or the paperless disability claims processing system. We can't afford to sacrifice the good of the many veterans to accommodate a local or parochial project construction request.

I understand the gentleman's concern and frustration, but I do believe that this request would do a lot of damage to the IT program and affect a lot of

things that all of us are deeply concerned about in terms of an A-rated health record, EMR, and other important disability issues.

I yield back the balance of my time.

The Acting CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. MCNERNEY).

The amendment was rejected.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. GOSAR

Mr. GOSAR. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

Page 30, line 15, after the first dollar amount, insert “(reduced by \$8,000,000) (increased by \$8,000,000)”.

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 223, the gentleman from Arizona and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Arizona.

Mr. GOSAR. Mr. Chairman, I rise to offer an amendment that would transfer \$8 million within this bill to hire and train personnel for the purposes of reducing the veterans’ disability claims backlog.

By way of background, the VA’s budget justification for the fiscal year 2016 requests an increase of \$12 million for its Office of General Counsel, but on the very next page of that document, it says it needs \$4 million to “address increases in the legal workload.”

The VA budget justification also says that the VA’s goal is to have an additional 45 full-time equivalent lawyers for its Office of General Counsel, which would take the total number of attorneys up to 757. According to the committee report for the last 5 years, the committee has fully funded the President’s budget request for additional full-time equivalents, and yet the claim backlogs remain.

My amendment seeks to reprogram money within the Veterans Benefits Administration from the Office of General Counsel and put it towards the hiring and training of personnel who will work to reduce the VA claims backlog. The Congressional Budget Office says this amendment has no score.

I think most of us can agree that the appropriations would be better spent on the VA claims backlog reduction rather than hiring more lawyers. I urge my colleagues to support this amendment.

Mr. DENT. Will the gentleman yield?

Mr. GOSAR. I yield to the gentleman from Pennsylvania.

Mr. DENT. I agree with Mr. GOSAR that eliminating the backlog should be the VA’s highest priority. The bill provides the entire administration request for claims processing activities, and I would support your amendment.

Mr. GOSAR. I thank the gentleman.

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

The Acting CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. GOSAR).

The amendment was agreed to.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MS. TITUS

Ms. TITUS. I rise to offer an amendment. It is at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

Page 30, line 15, after the first dollar amount, insert “(reduced by \$500,000) (increased by \$500,000)”.

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 223, the gentlewoman from Nevada and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Nevada.

Ms. TITUS. I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Chair, I rise today in support of my amendment, which is designed to focus the VA’s attention on a critical issue, the treatment of our female veterans.

The population of women veterans is rapidly growing. Today women constitute approximately 20 percent of new recruits, 14.5 percent of the Active Duty component, and 18 percent of the Reserve component. Almost 280,000 women have served post-9/11 in Afghanistan and Iraq. While the number of male veterans is expected to decline by 2020, the number of women veterans is expected to grow dramatically to 11 percent of the veteran population.

From health care to child care, the needs of women veterans are different from those of their male counterparts. Unfortunately, the VA has faced challenges in meeting these needs. There are far too few OB/GYNs and a dearth of women’s healthcare clinics. Where clinics do exist, many lack sufficient privacy protections for the patient. The VA has also struggled to address shortages in mental health, child care, and housing services for female veterans.

Too many women who served either do not identify themselves as veterans or they lack sufficient information about the benefits and services that the VA provides. Fortunately, the VA has started to put an increased focus on this population. The VA Center for Women Veterans is charged with monitoring and coordinating VA’s administration of health care, benefits services, and programs for women veterans, as well as with raising awareness within the Department for their special needs.

In 2012 the Women Veterans Task Force published a report outlining strategies to meet the needs of our female veterans. The report highlighted barriers to providing services to women veterans, including a lack of data collection and analysis. Without knowing how to best serve and meet expectations of female veterans, the VA will never be able to give these heroes the care and support that they earned and deserve.

My amendment is designed simply to encourage the VA to fill the two unfunded data collection and analysis positions in the Center for Women Vet-

erans to ensure that the VA is able to identify and fulfill the needs of our Nation’s female heroes.

I thank the chairman and the ranking member for working with me on this amendment.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Mr. Chair, I move to strike the last word.

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

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Mr. Chair, thank you for allowing me to respond. I support the gentlewoman’s efforts to highlight the importance of women’s health. The VA women’s center has been underfunded for the last few years. As the gentlewoman correctly pointed out, their most recent working group recommends that they fill two statistician positions that have not yet been filled due to lack of budget.

Without these positions, it is challenging for the VA to get good data about female veterans, so many programs are shaped using faulty assumptions. I believe that these positions are very important for the VA when it comes to providing care for our female veterans. I support these efforts, and I urge all Members to support it.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chair, I claim the time in opposition to the amendment, but I am not opposed to the amendment.

The Acting CHAIR. Without objection, the gentleman from Pennsylvania is recognized for 5 minutes.

There was no objection.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chair, I commend the gentlelady for her work to improve the services VA provides to our women veterans. You really ought to be commended. I know your work on the authorizing committee is very important to you. Since women comprise nearly 15 percent of the Active-Duty military forces, VA must improve its services and infrastructure to accommodate gender-specific needs. I certainly strongly support the gentlelady’s amendment.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Ms. TITUS. Mr. Chairman, I just want to close by asking my other colleagues to support this amendment so we can send a strong message to our female veterans that the U.S. Congress is committed to ensuring that the VA is meeting their unique needs. It is critical that the VA is able to accurately look forward to the future and shape their programs so it is welcoming and supporting of all our veterans. I thank you for your support.

I yield back the balance of my time.

The Acting CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentlewoman from Nevada (Ms. TITUS).

The amendment was agreed to.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. GOSAR

Mr. GOSAR. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

Page 30, line 15, after the first dollar amount, insert “(reduced by \$2,000,000)”.

Page 30, line 22, after the dollar amount, insert “(increased by \$2,000,000)”.

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 223, the gentleman from Arizona and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Arizona.

□ 1630

Mr. GOSAR. Mr. Chairman, I rise to offer a straightforward amendment that would strengthen the ability of the Board of Veterans Appeals to reduce its backlog.

I applaud the committee for taking on the difficult task of prioritizing limited resources for our veterans. The committee rightfully recommends the budget request level for the Board of Veterans Appeals, but I will note that one of the primary concerns I hear from my casework staff and directly from the veterans is the need for increased resources to the Board of Veterans Appeals.

According to the committee report accompanying this bill, “appeals received by BVA are projected to increase from 49,611 in 2012 to 81,640 cases in 2016.” That is a 65 percent increase in just 4 short years.

With our troops returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, it is no wonder why there is such a significant spike in the claims and appeals. I simply want to heed the call of the veterans in my district and across this country and ensure that the Board of Veterans Appeals has the resources necessary to address the seemingly endless backlog. CBO says this amendment would have no impact on budget authority or outlays.

I encourage my colleagues to support this amendment. I thank the chairman and the ranking member for their diligent efforts.

Mr. DENT. Will the gentleman yield?

Mr. GOSAR. I yield to the gentleman from Pennsylvania.

Mr. DENT. I agree with the gentleman from Arizona’s emphasis on maximizing funding for the Board of Veterans Appeals. The board will be facing an enormous increase in caseload as the backlog of initial disability claims is cleared and veterans appeals those decisions.

We have provided a \$9 million, or 8.6 percent, increase in the board’s funding, as well as additional information technology funds to help modernize the board’s paperbound processing system.

I support the gentleman’s amendment.

Mr. GOSAR. I thank the gentleman and the ranking member, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The Acting CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. GOSAR).

The amendment was agreed to.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MS. SINEMA

Ms. SINEMA. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk, which I will offer at this time.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

Page 30, line 15, after the first dollar amount, insert “(reduced by \$50,000) (increased by \$50,000)”.

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 223, the gentlewoman from Arizona and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Arizona.

Ms. SINEMA. Mr. Chairman, the Sinema amendment is a commonsense fix that helps improve the transparency of the VA and the quality of services provided to veterans.

I appreciate Chairman DENT and Ranking Member BISHOP for all of the work that they are doing to pass this bill and for being so kind about this amendment.

The underlying bill requires quarterly reports on the financial status of the Veterans Health Administration. My amendment requires the VA to include, as part of these quarterly payments, any outstanding payments owed to contracted entities older than 60 days and a justification for the delay in payments.

Over the last year, we have seen that the VA is unable to provide the timely, high-quality care our veterans deserve on their own. By leveraging community providers and creating a seamless relationship between internal VA care providers and external non-VA care providers, we can ensure that veterans receive the timely access to quality care they deserve.

That is what the Choice Act is trying to create. That is what the Secretary hopes to build through the MyVA initiative.

Unfortunately, the VA continues to struggle with paying its bills in a timely way. In my district, I have heard from large hospitals and small businesses alike who don’t receive prompt payments from the VA.

A small business in my district, Interim HealthCare, provides home care, skilled medical care, and staffing services for the VA. Despite efforts by the Phoenix VA hospital, the larger VA system has failed to pay Interim HealthCare and others in a timely way. This threatens small businesses and the care that they provide to Arizona veterans. Ultimately, this undermines the seamless care we are attempting to provide to veterans.

Understanding why the VA struggles to provide timely payments to contracted service providers will help the VA address this issue and improve the quality of services for our veterans.

Additionally, we have learned that in 2014, over 55 percent of all veterans calling a national hotline for care never got through to a representative. Thus far, in 2015, that number has risen to 59 percent. This amendment would also allow the VA to provide a report on how many individuals who reached the call center are dropped and how many get the care they receive.

The Sinema amendment, Mr. Chair and others, which will improve over-

sight and accountability at the VA, is a step towards restoring the trust that we so dearly owe to our veterans.

I thank the chairman and ranking member for their support and their dedication to our Nation’s veterans.

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

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chairman, I ask unanimous consent to claim the time in opposition to the amendment, but I am not opposed the amendment.

The Acting CHAIR. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Pennsylvania?

There was no objection.

The Acting CHAIR. The gentleman from Pennsylvania is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chairman, I support the amendment, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The Acting CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentlewoman from Arizona (Ms. SINEMA).

The amendment was agreed to.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. GOSAR

Mr. GOSAR. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

Page 30, line 15, after the first dollar amount, insert “(reduced by \$3,200,000)”.

Page 32, line 5, after the dollar amount, insert “(increased by \$3,200,000)”.

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 223, the gentleman from Arizona and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Arizona.

Mr. GOSAR. Mr. Chairman, I rise to offer an amendment to provide additional resources for the information technology systems at the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Updates and upgrades to IT systems at the VA are paramount to meeting the goals of veterans claims backlog reduction.

I applaud the committee for recommending resources above and beyond last year’s enacted levels, but the recommended levels are significantly beneath the President’s budget request levels.

Last year, I offered an amendment to this same appropriation bill, House amendment 635, which transferred just over \$3.2 million from the general administration account at the VA to the IT systems account. That amendment was agreed to by a voice vote. Today, I offer essentially the same amendment.

I just want to note, as I have before, that many of our veterans are simply giving up. They are either giving up on trying to obtain the benefits they deserve or, worse, some of them are giving up on life altogether. It is a travesty, and this is an appalling trend that must be reversed.

I appreciate the committee’s hard work and its acknowledgment of the importance of reducing the backlog in this bill. Having said that, I think we can do more and should focus on

prioritizing funding for efforts that will lead to timelier care for our Nation's heroes, as opposed to administrative expenses.

My commonsense amendment proposes redirecting a fraction of the funds in the general administration account away from things like funding for conference expenses and bureaucrats and shifting those funds toward reducing the VA claims backlog.

I urge my colleagues to support this simple amendment to improve IT systems at the VA.

Mr. DENT. Will the gentleman yield?

Mr. GOSAR. I yield to the gentleman from Pennsylvania.

Mr. DENT. I understand the gentleman's focus on providing information technology resources for the VA in order to meet the goals of eliminating the backlog. I have no objection to the amendment.

Mr. GOSAR. I certainly thank the distinguished chair and the ranking member, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The Acting CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. GOSAR).

The amendment was agreed to.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will read.

The Clerk read as follows:

BOARD OF VETERANS APPEALS

For necessary operating expenses of the Board of Veterans Appeals, \$107,884,000, of which not to exceed \$10,788,000 shall remain available until September 30, 2017.

GENERAL OPERATING EXPENSES, VETERANS BENEFITS ADMINISTRATION

For necessary operating expenses of the Veterans Benefits Administration, not otherwise provided for, including hire of passenger motor vehicles, reimbursement of the General Services Administration for security guard services, and reimbursement of the Department of Defense for the cost of overseas employee mail, \$2,697,734,000: *Provided*, That expenses for services and assistance authorized under paragraphs (1), (2), (5), and (11) of section 3104(a) of title 38, United States Code, that the Secretary of Veterans Affairs determines are necessary to enable entitled veterans: (1) to the maximum extent feasible, to become employable and to obtain and maintain suitable employment; or (2) to achieve maximum independence in daily living, shall be charged to this account: *Provided further*, That of the funds made available under this heading, not to exceed \$134,800,000 shall remain available until September 30, 2017.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. RUIZ

Mr. RUIZ. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

Page 31, line 9, after the dollar amount, insert "(reduced by \$5,000,000) (increased by \$5,000,000)".

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 223, the gentleman from California and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California.

Mr. RUIZ. Mr. Chairman, I will start off by saying thank you to Chairman

DENT and Ranking Member BISHOP for their hard work on this appropriations bill.

I rise today to offer an amendment to H.R. 2029, the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies Appropriations Act for 2016. This amendment is for the brave men and women who have served and sacrificed for our country, our veterans.

California is home to almost 2 million veterans, and I am proud to represent more than 54,000 veterans in my district alone. There are 40,000 veterans expected to return to California every year for the next several years, including the fastest growing group of returning veterans, women.

As our troops come home and assimilate back into civilian life, it is critical that we do not abandon our veterans when they put down their weapons; instead, we must ensure they have timely access to the critical benefits they have earned and deserve.

Unconscionably, thousands of veterans who have sacrificed for our country are struggling to access benefits they have already earned. Due to the lingering claims backlog at the Veterans Health Administration, veterans across our Nation are waiting for pensions, prescription drugs, and even life-saving medical care.

Veterans are still waiting for the VA to process 448,000 benefit claims, and 176,000 of those veterans have been waiting longer than 125 days for a decision. Our work to clear this harmful backlog is not finished, and we owe it to these courageous men and women to do so as soon as possible.

These figures are staggering, but the people this is affecting are not mere statistics. They are men and women like retired Air Force Master Sergeant Andrew Walker and his family from Beaumont, California.

Mr. Walker and his family waited years on end without receiving the critical health care he was promised, earned, and desperately needed. While I am heartened that I was able to help resolve Mr. Walker's claim, the backlog remains an enduring nightmare for too many veterans across the country.

Reduced to a claim number and a seemingly endless line, veterans experience pain, frustration, hopelessness, and despair. Although the backlog has shrunk since Congress last passed a similar appropriations bill, we must not lose sight of the importance of getting veterans like Andrew Walker their hard-earned benefits as soon as possible.

As a member of the VA Committee, I am fighting to change the culture at the VA from the inside out. By focusing on veteran-centered care and ensuring that the VA continues working to eliminate this backlog, we can take much-needed steps in keeping faith with our veterans and getting them the benefits they have earned.

That is why I am offering this amendment to advocate for an additional \$5 million to fund the digital

scanning of health and benefits files to reduce the backlog by redirecting funding within the general operating expenses account of the Veterans Benefits Administration.

This amendment simply directs funds toward the digital scanning of health and benefit files that will reduce the claims backlog without any new spending.

As an emergency medicine physician, I understand the importance of efficiency in health care, and I know how dangerous such tribulations can be for a person with PTSD or depression.

By committing resources to digitizing health and benefits files, we will further increase VA's capacity to tackle the claims backlog, ensuring veterans receive the benefits they have earned in a timely manner.

Let us continue to bear in mind that these men and women have served this country and they have put their lives on the line. We must service them by making certain that Congress focuses on eliminating the claims backlog for good.

I encourage my colleagues to stand up for veterans and support my pragmatic amendment to reduce veterans claims processing times.

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

The Acting CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. RUIZ).

The amendment was agreed to.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. WALBERG

Mr. WALBERG. Mr. Chair, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

Page 31, line 9, after the dollar amount, insert "(reduced by \$5,000,000) (increased by \$5,000,000)".

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 223, the gentleman from Michigan and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Michigan.

Mr. WALBERG. Mr. Chairman, I would like to start by thanking subcommittee Chairman DENT and Chairman ROGERS for their work in developing this legislation to address the current and future needs of our Nation's veterans.

I rise today to offer an amendment that highlights the need for veterans job training as part of this appropriations bill. Simply, my amendment would designate \$5 million within the general operating expenses of the Veterans Benefits Administration account to support programs that help our veterans transition to the workforce.

Michigan is home to more than 660,000 veterans who contribute every day to the vitality of our communities.

□ 1645

These men and women have developed marketable skills, from technical training in mechanics, IT, and health care, to leadership qualities, ethics,

and problem-solving abilities, yet too many of them struggle to find employment after they have completed their service.

Those veterans recently returned from Iraq and Afghanistan face unique challenges to finding employment, as those who served in Active Duty since September 20, 2001, face a jobless rate that is 1.7 percentage points higher—7.2 percent veterans versus 5.5 percent national—than the general population.

The House has taken a number of good steps toward helping veterans transition to the civilian sector, from passing the Hire More Heroes Act to remove costly ObamaCare mandates that discourage the hiring of veterans, to working with employers to help them understand the benefits of hiring veterans. We can certainly do more to ensure these brave men and women have the opportunity for gainful employment when they return to our communities.

The VA should use these designated funds to focus on difficulties veterans face translating their valuable skills to suitable employment in the civilian sector. For example, as the committee rightly highlights in their report, the VA should refine and upgrade its Military Skills Translator tool to more accurately reflect the transferable skills of transitioning military veterans. The VA should also increase public awareness and access to this tool for our Nation's employers.

If we are to develop the 21st century workforce, our Nation cannot afford to leave our veterans behind; and if we are to meet our obligation to those who have put their lives on the line in service to our country, we must work to improve the transition from military service to the career field.

I hope my colleagues will support this commonsense amendment to help our veterans get back to work.

Mr. DENT. Will the gentleman yield?

Mr. WALBERG. I yield to the gentleman from Pennsylvania.

Mr. DENT. I know the gentleman from Michigan has a deep commitment to providing job training and employment assistance for our returning veterans, and I support the amendment, which highlights the importance of VA programs that provide this assistance.

Mr. WALBERG. I thank the chairman.

I yield back the balance of my time.

The Acting CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. WALBERG).

The amendment was agreed to.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will read.

The Clerk read as follows:

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SYSTEMS
(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

For necessary expenses for information technology systems and telecommunications support, including developmental information systems and operational information systems; for pay and associated costs; and for the capital asset acquisition of information technology systems, including manage-

ment and related contractual costs of said acquisitions, including contractual costs associated with operations authorized by section 3109 of title 5, United States Code, \$4,038,363,000, plus reimbursements: *Provided*, That \$1,115,757,000 shall be for pay and associated costs, of which not to exceed \$34,800,000 shall remain available until September 30, 2017: *Provided further*, That \$2,417,863,000 shall be for operations and maintenance, of which not to exceed \$167,900,000 shall remain available until September 30, 2017: *Provided further*, That \$504,743,000 shall be for information technology systems development, modernization, and enhancement, and shall remain available until September 30, 2017: *Provided further*, That amounts made available for information technology systems development, modernization, and enhancement may not be obligated or expended until the Secretary of Veterans Affairs or the Chief Information Officer of the Department of Veterans Affairs submits to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress a certification of the amounts, in parts or in full, to be obligated and expended for each development project: *Provided further*, That amounts made available for salaries and expenses, operations and maintenance, and information technology systems development, modernization, and enhancement may be transferred among the three subaccounts after the Secretary of Veterans Affairs requests from the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress the authority to make the transfer and an approval is issued: *Provided further*, That amounts made available for the "Information Technology Systems" account for development, modernization, and enhancement may be transferred among projects or to newly defined projects: *Provided further*, That no project may be increased or decreased by more than \$1,000,000 of cost prior to submitting a request to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress to make the transfer and an approval is issued, or absent a response, a period of 30 days has elapsed: *Provided further*, That funds under this heading may be used by the Interagency Program Office through the Department of Veterans Affairs to define data standards, code sets, and value sets used to enable interoperability: *Provided further*, That of the funds made available for information technology systems development, modernization, and enhancement for VistA Evolution, not more than 25 percent may be obligated or expended until the Secretary of Veterans Affairs submits to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress, and such Committees approve, a report that describes: (1) the status of and changes to the VistA Evolution program plan dated March 24, 2014 (hereinafter referred to as the "Plan"), the VistA 4 product roadmap dated February 26, 2015 ("Roadmap"), and the VistA 4 Incremental Life Cycle Cost Estimate, dated October 26, 2014; (2) any changes to the scope or functionality of projects within the VistA Evolution program as established in the Plan; (3) actual program costs incurred to date; (4) progress in meeting the schedule milestones that have been established in the Plan; (5) a Project Management Accountability System (PMAS) Dashboard Progress report that identifies each VistA Evolution project being tracked through PMAS, what functionality it is intended to provide, and what evaluation scores it has received throughout development; (6) the definition being used for interoperability between the electronic health record systems of the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs, the metrics to measure the extent of interoperability, the milestones and timeline associated with achieving interoperability, and the

baseline measurements associated with interoperability; (7) progress toward developing and implementing all components and levels of interoperability, including semantic interoperability; (8) the change management tools in place to facilitate the implementation of VistA Evolution and interoperability; and (9) any changes to the governance structure for the VistA Evolution program and its chain of decisionmaking authority: *Provided further*, That the funds made available under this heading for information technology systems development, modernization, and enhancement, shall be for the projects, and in the amounts, specified under this heading in the report accompanying this Act.

OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

For necessary expenses of the Office of Inspector General, to include information technology, in carrying out the provisions of the Inspector General Act of 1978 (5 U.S.C. App.), \$131,766,000, of which not to exceed \$12,600,000 shall remain available until September 30, 2017.

CONSTRUCTION, MAJOR PROJECTS

For constructing, altering, extending, and improving any of the facilities, including parking projects, under the jurisdiction or for the use of the Department of Veterans Affairs, or for any of the purposes set forth in sections 316, 2404, 2406 and chapter 81 of title 38, United States Code, not otherwise provided for, including planning, architectural and engineering services, construction management services, maintenance or guarantee period services costs associated with equipment guarantees provided under the project, services of claims analysts, offsite utility and storm drainage system construction costs, and site acquisition, where the estimated cost of a project is more than the amount set forth in section 8104(a)(3)(A) of title 38, United States Code, or where funds for a project were made available in a previous major project appropriation, \$561,800,000, of which \$527,800,000 shall remain available until September 30, 2020, and of which \$34,000,000 shall remain available until expended: *Provided*, That except for advance planning activities, including needs assessments which may or may not lead to capital investments, and other capital asset management related activities, including portfolio development and management activities, and investment strategy studies funded through the advance planning fund and the planning and design activities funded through the design fund, including needs assessments which may or may not lead to capital investments, and salaries and associated costs of the resident engineers who oversee those capital investments funded through this account, and funds provided for the purchase of land for the National Cemetery Administration through the land acquisition line item, none of the funds made available under this heading shall be used for any project which has not been approved by the Congress in the budgetary process: *Provided further*, That funds made available under this heading for fiscal year 2016, for each approved project shall be obligated: (1) by the awarding of a construction documents contract by September 30, 2016; and (2) by the awarding of a construction contract by September 30, 2017: *Provided further*, That the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall promptly submit to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress a written report on any approved major construction project for which obligations are not incurred within the time limitations established above.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MS. BROWNLEY OF CALIFORNIA

Ms. BROWNLEY of California. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

In the "Department of Veterans Affairs—Departmental Administration—Construction, Major Projects" account, strike the aggregate dollar amount and insert "\$1,143,800,000".

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chairman, I reserve a point of order on the gentlewoman's amendment.

The Acting CHAIR. A point of order is reserved.

Pursuant to House Resolution 223, the gentlewoman from California and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from California.

Ms. BROWNLEY of California. Mr. Chairman, I rise this afternoon to offer an amendment to H.R. 2029. My amendment would restore the funding for major construction projects in the Department of Veterans Affairs to \$1.14 billion to meet the level that the VA has requested.

As ranking member of the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Health, I share the outrage of many of my colleagues over the unacceptable mismanagement of the VA's major construction program.

I agree that VA management must be held accountable for their failure to manage construction costs for the Denver hospital. Congress must reform the VA construction program so that it uses taxpayer dollars wisely and efficiently. However, we cannot continue to ignore the sad state of disrepair in VA hospitals and clinics across our country which are in desperate need of funding for modernization and health and safety improvements.

Most of the VA's medical infrastructure is old and outdated. The average building age is approaching 60 years. Many VA health facilities urgently need seismic retrofitting or emergency repairs. Others are too small to accommodate the growing population of veterans returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan, and the aging population of veterans who served in Vietnam continues to put great stress on the VA.

Many veterans in underserved communities like Ventura County are counting on us, on Congress, to ensure that new construction projects are delivered and that their health care needs will be met. The funding levels in the bill would delay VA plans to expand health care facilities in many locations, harming VA's ability to provide care to veterans.

If the current funding level in this bill is made law, the VA would have to scuttle plans for a rehabilitative therapy building in St. Louis, Missouri, two outpatient clinics in Alameda and French Camp in California, and a community living center in Perry Point, Maryland. Delaying these projects is not the right way to honor our commitment to our Nation's veterans.

Mr. Chair, draconian funding cuts to the VA's major construction program

are not the only way that veterans are being shortchanged in this bill before us today. The majority's bill also fails to meet the administration's budget requests in other areas, including medical services, medical facilities, and information technology.

For example, the VA estimates that at the bill's current funding level, over 70,000 fewer veterans will receive medical care compared to the administration's request. In addition, the VA will not be able to pay for cemetery expansions in St. Louis, Portland, Riverside, Puerto Rico, and Pensacola, which would have enabled the Department to serve 18,000 veterans and their family members annually.

Veteran advocates, including AMVETS, Disabled American Veterans, Paralyzed Veterans of America, and the Veterans of Foreign Wars, agree that, in the long run, Congress will be forced to appropriate much larger sums to enable the VA to catch up on the deficits being created by this bill, not only in capital infrastructure, but in critical investments in other VA services in health care.

If we really want to change the culture of the VA and ensure that veterans everywhere can get the services and benefits they have earned, Congress must do its part by investing in our veterans.

When Congress cuts corners, we put the health and well-being of the men and women who have served this country at risk.

I realize, Mr. Chairman, that my amendment is subject to a point of order, so I intend to withdraw my amendment, but we must fix this bill before it moves forward.

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

The Acting CHAIR. Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from California?

There was no objection.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will read.

The Clerk read as follows:

CONSTRUCTION, MINOR PROJECTS

For constructing, altering, extending, and improving any of the facilities, including parking projects, under the jurisdiction or for the use of the Department of Veterans Affairs, including planning and assessments of needs which may lead to capital investments, architectural and engineering services, maintenance or guarantee period services costs associated with equipment guarantees provided under the project, services of claims analysts, offsite utility and storm drainage system construction costs, and site acquisition, or for any of the purposes set forth in sections 316, 2404, 2406, and chapter 81 of title 38, United States Code, not otherwise provided for, where the estimated cost of a project is equal to or less than the amount set forth in section 8104(a)(3)(A) of title 38, United States Code, \$406,200,000, to remain available until September 30, 2020, along with unobligated balances of previous "Construction, Minor Projects" appropriations which are hereby made available for any project where the estimated cost is equal to or less than the amount set forth in such section: *Provided*, That funds made available under this heading shall be for: (1)

repairs to any of the nonmedical facilities under the jurisdiction or for the use of the Department which are necessary because of loss or damage caused by any natural disaster or catastrophe; and (2) temporary measures necessary to prevent or to minimize further loss by such causes.

GRANTS FOR CONSTRUCTION OF STATE EXTENDED CARE FACILITIES

For grants to assist States to acquire or construct State nursing home and domiciliary facilities and to remodel, modify, or alter existing hospital, nursing home, and domiciliary facilities in State homes, for furnishing care to veterans as authorized by sections 8131 through 8137 of title 38, United States Code, \$80,000,000, to remain available until expended.

GRANTS FOR CONSTRUCTION OF VETERANS CEMETERIES

For grants to assist States and tribal organizations in establishing, expanding, or improving veterans cemeteries as authorized by section 2408 of title 38, United States Code, \$45,000,000, to remain available until expended.

ADMINISTRATIVE PROVISIONS (INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 201. Any appropriation for fiscal year 2016 for "Compensation and Pensions", "Readjustment Benefits", and "Veterans Insurance and Indemnities" may be transferred as necessary to any other of the mentioned appropriations: *Provided*, That before a transfer may take place, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall request from the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress the authority to make the transfer and such Committees issue an approval, or absent a response, a period of 30 days has elapsed.

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 202. Amounts made available for the Department of Veterans Affairs for fiscal year 2016, in this or any other Act, under the "Medical Services", "Medical Support and Compliance", and "Medical Facilities" accounts may be transferred among the accounts: *Provided*, That any transfers between the "Medical Services" and "Medical Support and Compliance" accounts of 1 percent or less of the total amount appropriated to the account in this or any other Act may take place subject to notification from the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress of the amount and purpose of the transfer: *Provided further*, That any transfers between the "Medical Services" and "Medical Support and Compliance" accounts in excess of 1 percent, or exceeding the cumulative 1 percent for the fiscal year, may take place only after the Secretary requests from the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress the authority to make the transfer and an approval is issued: *Provided further*, That any transfers to or from the "Medical Facilities" account may take place only after the Secretary requests from the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress the authority to make the transfer and an approval is issued.

SEC. 203. Appropriations available in this title for salaries and expenses shall be available for services authorized by section 3109 of title 5, United States Code; hire of passenger motor vehicles; lease of a facility or land or both; and uniforms or allowances therefore, as authorized by sections 5901 through 5902 of title 5, United States Code.

SEC. 204. No appropriations in this title (except the appropriations for "Construction, Major Projects", and "Construction, Minor Projects") shall be available for the purchase of any site for or toward the construction of any new hospital or home.

SEC. 205. No appropriations in this title shall be available for hospitalization or examination of any persons (except beneficiaries entitled to such hospitalization or examination under the laws providing such benefits to veterans, and persons receiving such treatment under sections 7901 through 7904 of title 5, United States Code, or the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5121 et seq.)), unless reimbursement of the cost of such hospitalization or examination is made to the "Medical Services" account at such rates as may be fixed by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

SEC. 206. Appropriations available in this title for "Compensation and Pensions", "Readjustment Benefits", and "Veterans Insurance and Indemnities" shall be available for payment of prior year accrued obligations required to be recorded by law against the corresponding prior year accounts within the last quarter of fiscal year 2015.

SEC. 207. Appropriations available in this title shall be available to pay prior year obligations of corresponding prior year appropriations accounts resulting from sections 3328(a), 3334, and 3712(a) of title 31, United States Code, except that if such obligations are from trust fund accounts they shall be payable only from "Compensation and Pensions".

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 208. Notwithstanding any other provision of law, during fiscal year 2016, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall, from the National Service Life Insurance Fund under section 1920 of title 38, United States Code, the Veterans' Special Life Insurance Fund under section 1923 of title 38, United States Code, and the United States Government Life Insurance Fund under section 1955 of title 38, United States Code, reimburse the "General Operating Expenses, Veterans Benefits Administration" and "Information Technology Systems" accounts for the cost of administration of the insurance programs financed through those accounts: *Provided*, That reimbursement shall be made only from the surplus earnings accumulated in such an insurance program during fiscal year 2016 that are available for dividends in that program after claims have been paid and actuarially determined reserves have been set aside: *Provided further*, That if the cost of administration of such an insurance program exceeds the amount of surplus earnings accumulated in that program, reimbursement shall be made only to the extent of such surplus earnings: *Provided further*, That the Secretary shall determine the cost of administration for fiscal year 2016 which is properly allocable to the provision of each such insurance program and to the provision of any total disability income insurance included in that insurance program.

SEC. 209. Amounts deducted from enhanced-use lease proceeds to reimburse an account for expenses incurred by that account during a prior fiscal year for providing enhanced-use lease services, may be obligated during the fiscal year in which the proceeds are received.

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 210. Funds available in this title or funds for salaries and other administrative expenses shall also be available to reimburse the Office of Resolution Management of the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Office of Employment Discrimination Complaint Adjudication under section 319 of title 38, United States Code, for all services provided at rates which will recover actual costs but not to exceed \$43,700,000 for the Office of Resolution Management and \$3,400,000 for the Office of Employment Discrimination Complaint Adjudication: *Provided*, That pay-

ments may be made in advance for services to be furnished based on estimated costs: *Provided further*, That amounts received shall be credited to the "General Administration" and "Information Technology Systems" accounts for use by the office that provided the service.

SEC. 211. No appropriations in this title shall be available to enter into any new lease of real property if the estimated annual rental cost is more than \$1,000,000, unless the Secretary of Veterans Affairs submits a request to enter into such lease to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress and (1) the Committees approve the request; or (2) the Committees have not rejected the request before the date that is 15 days after the date on which the request is received.

SEC. 212. No funds of the Department of Veterans Affairs shall be available for hospital care, nursing home care, or medical services provided to any person under chapter 17 of title 38, United States Code, for a non-service-connected disability described in section 1729(a)(2) of such title, unless that person has disclosed to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, in such form as the Secretary may require, current, accurate third-party reimbursement information for purposes of section 1729 of such title: *Provided*, That the Secretary may recover, in the same manner as any other debt due the United States, the reasonable charges for such care or services from any person who does not make such disclosure as required: *Provided further*, That any amounts so recovered for care or services provided in a prior fiscal year may be obligated by the Secretary during the fiscal year in which amounts are received.

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 213. Notwithstanding any other provision of law, proceeds or revenues derived from enhanced-use leasing activities (including disposal) may be deposited into the "Construction, Major Projects" and "Construction, Minor Projects" accounts and be used for construction (including site acquisition and disposition), alterations, and improvements of any medical facility under the jurisdiction or for the use of the Department of Veterans Affairs. Such sums as realized are in addition to the amount provided for in "Construction, Major Projects" and "Construction, Minor Projects".

SEC. 214. Amounts made available under "Medical Services" are available—

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

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 215. Such sums as may be deposited to the Medical Care Collections Fund pursuant to section 1729A of title 38, United States Code, may be transferred to "Medical Services", to remain available until expended for the purposes of that account.

SEC. 216. The Secretary of Veterans Affairs may enter into agreements with Indian tribes and tribal organizations which are party to the Alaska Native Health Compact with the Indian Health Service, and Indian tribes and tribal organizations serving rural Alaska which have entered into contracts with the Indian Health Service under the Indian Self Determination and Educational Assistance Act, to provide healthcare, including behavioral health and dental care. The Secretary shall require participating veterans and facilities to comply with all appropriate rules and regulations, as established by the Secretary. The term "rural Alaska" shall mean those lands sited within the external boundaries of the Alaska Native re-

gions specified in sections 7(a)(1)–(4) and (7)–(12) of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, as amended (43 U.S.C. 1606), and those lands within the Alaska Native regions specified in sections 7(a)(5) and 7(a)(6) of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, as amended (43 U.S.C. 1606), which are not within the boundaries of the municipality of Anchorage, the Fairbanks North Star Borough, the Kenai Peninsula Borough or the Matanuska Susitna Borough.

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 217. Such sums as may be deposited to the Department of Veterans Affairs Capital Asset Fund pursuant to section 8118 of title 38, United States Code, may be transferred to the "Construction, Major Projects" and "Construction, Minor Projects" accounts, to remain available until expended for the purposes of these accounts.

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

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

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 220. Amounts made available under the "Medical Services", "Medical Support and Compliance", "Medical Facilities", "General Operating Expenses, Veterans Benefits Administration", "General Administration", and "National Cemetery Administration" accounts for fiscal year 2016 may be transferred to or from the "Information Technology Systems" account: *Provided*, That such transfers may not result in a more than 10 percent aggregate increase in the total amount made available by this Act for the "Information Technology Systems" account: *Provided further*, That before a transfer may take place, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall request from the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress the authority to make the transfer and an approval is issued.

SEC. 221. Of the amounts made available to the Department of Veterans Affairs for fiscal year 2016, in this or any other Act, under the "Medical Facilities" account for non-recurring maintenance, not more than 20 percent of the funds made available shall be obligated during the last 2 months of that fiscal year: *Provided*, That the Secretary may waive this requirement after providing written notice to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress.

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 222. Of the amounts appropriated to the Department of Veterans Affairs for fiscal year 2016 for "Medical Services", "Medical Support and Compliance", "Medical Facilities", "Construction, Minor Projects", and "Information Technology Systems", up to \$266,303,000, plus reimbursements, may be transferred to the Joint Department of Defense-Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Facility Demonstration Fund, established by section 1704 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2010 (Public Law 111-84; 123 Stat. 3571) and may be used for operation of the facilities designated as combined Federal medical facilities as described by section 706 of the Duncan Hunter National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2009 (Public Law 110-417; 122 Stat. 4500): *Provided*, That additional funds may be transferred from accounts designated in this section to the Joint Department of Defense-Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Facility Demonstration Fund upon

written notification by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress: *Provided further*, That section 223 of Title II of Division I of Public Law 113-235 is repealed.

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 223. Of the amounts appropriated to the Department of Veterans Affairs which become available on October 1, 2016, for “Medical Services”, “Medical Support and Compliance”, and “Medical Facilities”, up to \$265,675,000, plus reimbursements, may be transferred to the Joint Department of Defense-Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Facility Demonstration Fund, established by section 1704 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2010 (Public Law 111-84; 123 Stat. 3571) and may be used for operation of the facilities designated as combined Federal medical facilities as described by section 706 of the Duncan Hunter National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2009 (Public Law 110-417; 122 Stat. 4500): *Provided*, That additional funds may be transferred from accounts designated in this section to the Joint Department of Defense-Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Facility Demonstration Fund upon written notification by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress.

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 224. Such sums as may be deposited to the Medical Care Collections Fund pursuant to section 1729A of title 38, United States Code, for healthcare provided at facilities designated as combined Federal medical facilities as described by section 706 of the Duncan Hunter National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2009 (Public Law 110-417; 122 Stat. 4500) shall also be available: (1) for transfer to the Joint Department of Defense-Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Facility Demonstration Fund, established by section 1704 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2010 (Public Law 111-84; 123 Stat. 3571); and (2) for operations of the facilities designated as combined Federal medical facilities as described by section 706 of the Duncan Hunter National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2009 (Public Law 110-417; 122 Stat. 4500).

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 225. Of the amounts available in this title for “Medical Services”, “Medical Support and Compliance”, and “Medical Facilities”, a minimum of \$15,000,000 shall be transferred to the DOD-VA Health Care Sharing Incentive Fund, as authorized by section 8111(d) of title 38, United States Code, to remain available until expended, for any purpose authorized by section 8111 of title 38, United States Code.

(INCLUDING RESCISSIONS OF FUNDS)

SEC. 226. (a) Of the funds appropriated in title II of division I of Public Law 113-235, the following amounts which became available on October 1, 2015, are hereby rescinded from the following accounts in the amounts specified:

- (1) “Department of Veterans Affairs, Medical Services”, \$1,400,000,000.
- (2) “Department of Veterans Affairs, Medical Support and Compliance”, \$100,000,000.
- (3) “Department of Veterans Affairs, Medical Facilities”, \$250,000,000.

(b) In addition to amounts provided elsewhere in this Act, an additional amount is appropriated to the following accounts in the amounts specified to remain available until September 30, 2017:

- (1) “Department of Veterans Affairs, Medical Services”, \$1,400,000,000.
- (2) “Department of Veterans Affairs, Medical Support and Compliance”, \$100,000,000.

(3) “Department of Veterans Affairs, Medical Facilities”, \$250,000,000.

SEC. 227. The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall notify the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress of all bid savings for a major construction project within 15 days of being identified that total at least \$5,000,000, or 5 percent of the programmed amount of the project, whichever is less.

SEC. 228. None of the funds made available for “Construction, Major Projects” may be used for a project in excess of the scope specified for that project in the original justification data provided to the Congress as part of the request for appropriations unless the Secretary of Veterans Affairs receives approval from the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress.

SEC. 229. The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress a quarterly report that contains the following information from each Veterans Benefits Administration Regional Office: (1) the average time to complete a disability compensation claim; (2) the number of claims pending more than 125 days; (3) error rates; (4) the number of claims personnel; (5) any corrective action taken within the quarter to address poor performance; (6) training programs undertaken; and (7) the number and results of Quality Review Team audits: *Provided*, That each quarterly report shall be submitted no later than 30 days after the end of the respective quarter.

□ 1700

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. LAMALFA

Mr. LAMALFA. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

Page 53, line 2, strike “and” after the semicolon.

Page 53, line 3, insert the following before the colon: “; and (8) the number of informal claims that are unprocessed”.

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 223, the gentleman from California and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California.

Mr. LAMALFA. Mr. Chair, each quarter the Secretary of Veterans Affairs must submit a report that includes several metrics from every VA regional office to the House and Senate Appropriations Committees. The report includes the average time to complete a disability claim, the backlog, error rates, and other important details.

With this amendment, the Secretary of VA must also include the number of informal claims that are unprocessed. This amendment allows Congress to receive a more complete picture of the regional office’s workload.

We have seen troubling instances in Oakland and other VA regional offices of informal claims not being handled properly and even waiting decades for some of those claims to be processed.

Informal claims should be included in this quarterly report from the Secretary, and this amendment simply requires that that be done; therefore, giving Congress and veterans a better picture of what that load would be and then we can address that appropriately. So that is the amendment.

Mr. DENT. Will the gentleman yield?
Mr. LAMALFA. I yield to the gentleman from Pennsylvania.

Mr. DENT. I support the amendment.
Mr. LAMALFA. Again, Mr. Chair, it is a very simple amendment, and it will make a clear picture of what the real backlog is of informal claims, which has not gotten enough attention in the work of the VA in recent years. Again, we keep finding that it is an issue of importance and one of great concern as we have discovered what some of the regional offices have to deal with.

I yield back the balance of my time.
The Acting CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. LAMALFA).

The amendment was agreed to.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will read.

The Clerk read as follows:

SEC. 230. The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress a reprogramming request if at any point during fiscal year 2016 the funding allocated for a medical care program that is not estimated through the Enrollee Health Care Projection Model is adjusted by more than \$25,000,000 from the allocation shown in the corresponding congressional budget justification. Amounts may only be reprogrammed as requested under this section if (1) the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress approve the request; or (2) the Committees have not rejected the request before the date that is 15 days after the date on which the request is received.

SEC. 231. Of the funds provided to the Department of Veterans Affairs for fiscal year 2016 for “Medical Services” and “Medical Support and Compliance”, a maximum of \$5,000,000 may be obligated from the “Medical Services” account and a maximum of \$154,596,000 may be obligated from the “Medical Support and Compliance” account for the VistA Evolution and electronic health record interoperability projects: *Provided*, That funds in addition to these amounts may be obligated for the VistA Evolution and electronic health record interoperability projects upon written notification by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress.

SEC. 232. The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall provide written notification to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress 15 days prior to organizational changes which result in the transfer of 25 or more full-time equivalents from one organizational unit of the Department of Veterans Affairs to another.

(RESCISSION OF FUNDS)

SEC. 233. (a) There is hereby rescinded an aggregate amount of \$101,000,000 from the total budget authority provided for fiscal year 2016 for discretionary accounts of the Department of Veterans Affairs in—

- (1) this Act; or
 - (2) any advance appropriation for fiscal year 2016 in prior appropriation Acts.
- (b) The Secretary shall submit to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress a report specifying the account and amount of each rescission not later than 20 days following enactment of this Act.

SEC. 234. The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall provide on a quarterly basis to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress notification of any single national outreach and awareness marketing campaign in which obligations exceed \$2,000,000.

SEC. 235. None of the funds available to the Department of Veterans Affairs, in this or any other Act, may be used to replace the current system by which the Veterans Integrated Service Networks select and contract for diabetes monitoring supplies and equipment.

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 236. The Secretary of Veterans Affairs, upon determination that such action is necessary to address needs of the Veterans Health Administration, may transfer to the "Medical Services" account any discretionary appropriations made available for fiscal year 2016 in this title (except appropriations made to the "General Operating Expenses, Veterans Benefits Administration" account) or any discretionary unobligated balances within the Department of Veterans Affairs, including those appropriated for fiscal year 2016, that were provided in advance by appropriations Acts: *Provided*, That transfers shall be made only with the approval of the Office of Management and Budget: *Provided further*, That the transfer authority provided in this section is in addition to any other transfer authority provided by law: *Provided further*, That no amounts may be transferred from amounts that were designated by Congress as an emergency requirement pursuant to a concurrent resolution on the budget or the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985: *Provided further*, That such authority to transfer may not be used unless for higher priority items, based on emergent healthcare requirements, than those for which originally appropriated and in no case where the item for which funds are requested has been denied by Congress: *Provided further*, That, upon determination that all or part of the funds transferred from an appropriation are not necessary, such amounts may be transferred back to that appropriation and shall be available for the same purposes as originally appropriated: *Provided further*, That before a transfer may take place, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall request from the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress the authority to make the transfer and receive approval of that request.

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Mr. Chair, I move to strike the last word.

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

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. I yield to the gentleman from California (Mr. LOWENTHAL).

Mr. LOWENTHAL. Mr. Chair, I thank the ranking member and also the chairman for providing me this time to speak on the floor.

I am going to go back. My congressional district is home to the Long Beach Veterans Affairs hospital; the American Gold Star Manor, which is a manor that provides affordable housing for mothers who have lost their sons to war and for veterans; and my district is also the home of Los Alamitos Joint Forces Training Base.

Providing outstanding service to our veterans has been a top priority throughout my career. That is why I am cosponsoring this amendment to address the disability claims and appeals backlogs and hopefully provide funding for more full-time employees to address these issues.

I want to share with you just quickly my concerns.

There are long delays in Aid and Attendance claims, particularly with re-

gard to elderly, frail veterans with rapidly declining health issues. And approval is slow and sometimes comes, actually, too late, allowing the veterans to suffer for no reason.

This year, I had a 100 percent service-connected Purple Heart veteran with Parkinson's disease who filed for Aid and Attendance in July 2013. At that time, he needed caretaking assistance at his home but was initially denied.

In March of 2014, I received a call from his son who informed me that his father had fallen and broken his shoulder. During this time, my constituent had to produce multiple pieces of paper and doctor's confirmation of disability, even though he is an amputee. His son called my office and informed my caseworker in the district that he needed immediate assistance for his father. My caseworker called my staffer in D.C., who ran to the VA Congressional Liaison's office here at the Capitol to see what could be done during this emergency. I spoke to the VA about the situation, and my constituent received immediate assistance because I called. My constituent was finally awarded Aid and Attendance in May of 2014.

Mr. Chair, our veterans should not have to wait for medical care and suffer while they are waiting for months and years. Our veterans deserve better service than we are giving them. It is unnecessary for these types of emergencies to occur.

Last year, I encouraged the Department to use its funding to hire additional staff and stated that I do not believe that providing overtime pay for workers who are already stretched thin was enough. I am pleased to see there is funding to hire more full-time employees, but we still need more workers in order for the VA to respond faster. I am still concerned that the Veterans Benefits Administration is not requesting adequate resources to expeditiously handle the current backlog or new claims, which are expected to increase.

The VA is still contracting out claims to other regional offices rather than the home office. It is making progress. However, claims are still taking as long as 2 years for resolution. The VA is encouraging veterans to use electronic benefits, eBenefits, though many Vietnam-era veterans need assistance with this technology.

Mr. Chair, in closing, when we ask America's veterans to serve their country and sacrifice their lives on our behalf, our Nation needs to make a promise to take care of them throughout their lives. Ensuring that our veterans receive the best care after their years of service to our Nation is a moral responsibility which must happen. I pledge my continued support to work with Secretary McDonald and the Department of Veterans Affairs, my colleagues, stakeholder groups, and my constituents to address these issues.

Mr. Chair, I ask that you support this amendment.

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. I yield back the balance of my time.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will read.

The Clerk read as follows:

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 237. Amounts made available for the Department of Veterans Affairs for fiscal year 2016, under the "Board of Veterans Appeals" and the "General Operating Expenses, Veterans Benefits Administration" accounts may be transferred between such accounts: *Provided*, That before a transfer may take place, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall request from the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress the authority to make the transfer and receive approval from such Committees for such request.

(RESCISSION OF FUNDS)

SEC. 238. Of the unobligated balances available within the "DOD-VA Health Care Sharing Incentive Fund", \$15,000,000 are hereby rescinded.

SEC. 239. The Secretary of Veterans Affairs may not reprogram funds among major construction projects or programs if such instance of reprogramming will exceed \$5,000,000, unless such reprogramming is approved by the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress.

(RESCISSIONS OF FUNDS)

SEC. 240. Of the discretionary funds made available in Public Law 113-235 for the Department of Veterans Affairs for fiscal year 2016, \$197,923,000 are rescinded from "Medical Services", \$42,272,000 are rescinded from "Medical Support and Compliance", and \$15,353,000 are rescinded from "Medical Facilities".

SEC. 241. The amounts otherwise made available by this Act for the following accounts of the Department of Veterans Affairs are hereby reduced by the following amounts:

- (1) "Veterans Benefits Administration—Veterans Housing Benefit Program Fund", \$3,098,000.
- (2) "Veterans Benefits Administration—Vocational Rehabilitation Loans Program Account", \$10,000.
- (3) "Veterans Benefits Administration—Native American Veteran Housing Loan Program Account", \$25,000.
- (4) "Veterans Health Administration—Medical and Prosthetic Research", \$3,109,000.
- (5) "National Cemetery Administration", \$1,654,000.
- (6) "Departmental Administration—General Administration", \$3,877,000.
- (7) "Departmental Administration—Board of Veterans Appeals", \$786,000.
- (8) "Departmental Administration—General Operating Expenses, Veterans Benefits Administration", \$36,568,000.
- (9) "Departmental Administration—Information Technology Systems", \$7,958,000.
- (10) "Departmental Administration—Office of Inspector General", \$993,000.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. BENISHEK

Mr. BENISHEK. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk.

The CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

Page 58, after line 25, insert the following: SEC. 242. Not later than 90 days after the date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to Congress a report that describes the status, including the timeline for completion, of each Community-Based Outpatient Clinic to be established by the Department of Veterans Affairs, through construction or lease, that is not yet completed.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chair, I reserve a point of order on the gentleman's amendment.

The Acting CHAIR. A point of order is reserved.

Pursuant to House Resolution 223, the gentleman from Michigan and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Michigan.

Mr. BENISHEK. Mr. Chairman, I rise in support of my amendment to have the Secretary of the VA report to Congress on the status of VA clinics currently in the leasing or construction process.

Our rural veterans deserve access to quality care without having to drive hundreds of miles. In many areas, like in northern Michigan, VA clinics can serve an important role in providing care to veterans in their communities. However, no one is served when the VA takes many years to approve and complete these projects.

In Traverse City, Michigan, an expansion for the VA clinic was approved and funded by Congress in 2013. After I sent letters to the Secretary asking for an explanation, the program was finally approved by the VA in August of 2014. To this day, the VA has yet to make measurable progress on this facility, and they have told me that it could be as many as 6 more years before this facility is completed.

Our veterans deserve to know how many facilities are facing similar delays. As we work to enforce some accountability at the VA, we can't ignore our rural veterans that rely on VA clinics. The VA must be held accountable for these delays, and I want to know who in the agency is responsible.

My goal is for all veterans to have a choice in where they receive care. We have taken an important step towards that with the Choice Act, and I look forward to continuing to work to expand that program. However, it is critical that we do not allow the VA to hold veterans and taxpayers in limbo as critical, funded projects sit unfinished.

The money we provided in this bill is not for plush executive salaries and full retirement benefits for those that manipulate data. It is for our veterans. The VA must return to its focus, to its central mission and remove bureaucratic hurdles that keep veterans from the care they have earned.

I yield back the balance of my time.

POINT OF ORDER

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chairman, I make a point of order against the amendment because it proposes to change existing law and constitutes legislation in an appropriation bill and, therefore, violates clause 2 of rule XXI.

The rule states in pertinent part:

“An amendment to a general appropriation bill shall not be in order if changing existing law.”

The amendment gives affirmative direction in effect.

I ask for a ruling from the Chair.

The Acting CHAIR. Does any other Member wish to be heard on the point of order?

If not, the Chair is prepared to rule.

The Chair finds that this amendment imposes new duties on the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

The amendment, therefore, constitutes legislation in violation of clause 2 of rule XXI.

The point of order is sustained, and the amendment is not in order.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will read.

The Clerk read as follows:

TITLE III

RELATED AGENCIES

AMERICAN BATTLE MONUMENTS COMMISSION

SALARIES AND EXPENSES

For necessary expenses, not otherwise provided for, of the American Battle Monuments Commission, including the acquisition of land or interest in land in foreign countries; purchases and repair of uniforms for caretakers of national cemeteries and monuments outside of the United States and its territories and possessions; rent of office and garage space in foreign countries; purchase (one-for-one replacement basis only) and hire of passenger motor vehicles; not to exceed \$7,500 for official reception and representation expenses; and insurance of official motor vehicles in foreign countries, when required by law of such countries, \$75,100,000, to remain available until expended.

FOREIGN CURRENCY FLUCTUATIONS ACCOUNT

For necessary expenses, not otherwise provided for, of the American Battle Monuments Commission, such sums as may be necessary, to remain available until expended, for purposes authorized by section 2109 of title 36, United States Code.

UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS FOR VETERANS CLAIMS

SALARIES AND EXPENSES

For necessary expenses for the operation of the United States Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims as authorized by sections 7251 through 7299 of title 38, United States Code, \$32,141,000: *Provided*, That \$2,500,000 shall be available for the purpose of providing financial assistance as described, and in accordance with the process and reporting procedures set forth, under this heading in Public Law 102-229.

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE—CIVIL

CEMETERIAL EXPENSES, ARMY

SALARIES AND EXPENSES

For necessary expenses for maintenance, operation, and improvement of Arlington National Cemetery and Soldiers' and Airmen's Home National Cemetery, including the purchase or lease of passenger motor vehicles for replacement on a one-for-one basis only, and not to exceed \$1,000 for official reception and representation expenses, \$70,800,000, of which not to exceed \$5,000,000 shall remain available until September 30, 2017. In addition, such sums as may be necessary for parking maintenance, repairs and replacement, to be derived from the “Lease of Department of Defense Real Property for Defense Agencies” account.

ARMED FORCES RETIREMENT HOME

TRUST FUND

For expenses necessary for the Armed Forces Retirement Home to operate and maintain the Armed Forces Retirement Home—Washington, District of Columbia, and the Armed Forces Retirement Home—Gulfport, Mississippi, to be paid from funds available in the Armed Forces Retirement Home Trust Fund, \$64,300,000, of which \$1,000,000 shall remain available until expended for construction and renovation of

the physical plants at the Armed Forces Retirement Home—Washington, District of Columbia, and the Armed Forces Retirement Home—Gulfport, Mississippi.

ADMINISTRATIVE PROVISIONS

SEC. 301. Funds appropriated in this Act under the heading “Department of Defense—Civil, Cemeterial Expenses, Army”, may be provided to Arlington County, Virginia, for the relocation of the federally owned water main at Arlington National Cemetery, making additional land available for ground burials.

SEC. 302. Amounts deposited during the current fiscal year into the special account established under 10 U.S.C. 4727 are appropriated and shall be available until expended to support activities at the Army National Military Cemeteries.

TITLE IV

OVERSEAS CONTINGENCY OPERATIONS

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, NAVY AND MARINE CORPS

For an additional amount for “Military Construction, Navy and Marine Corps”, \$244,004,000 to remain available until September 30, 2020, for projects outside of the United States: *Provided*, That such amount is designated by the Congress for Overseas Contingency Operations/Global War on Terrorism pursuant to section 251(b)(2)(A)(ii) of the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985.

□ 1715

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. MULVANEY

Mr. MULVANEY. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

Strike title IV.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chair, I reserve a point of order on the gentleman's amendment.

The Acting CHAIR. A point of order is reserved.

Pursuant to House Resolution 223, the gentleman from South Carolina and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from South Carolina.

Mr. MULVANEY. Mr. Chairman, I want to read something at the beginning of this:

“Abuse of the overseas contingency operation global war on terror cap adjustment is a backdoor loophole that undermines the integrity of the budget process.”

It goes on to say that the Budget Committee will oppose increases above the levels the administration and our military commanders say are needed to carry out operations unless it can be clearly demonstrated that such amounts are war related.

That is from last year's House-passed budget report. Last year, this body took a position that we were not going to use the OCO budget, the global war on terror budget, in order to get around the BCA caps.

The appropriations bill, as currently offered, does exactly that. It spends about \$532 million in the OCO budget for matters that the Department of Defense admits are not war related. These

are matters that the Department of Defense included in its original base defense budget request, but for which there wasn't enough money under the BCA caps.

So what the appropriators have done is taken those requests which are admittedly not war related and buried it in this appropriations bill, using the OCO money in order to violate the caps.

By the way, the money goes to overseas bases, bases in Italy, Poland, Bahrain, Niger, Djibouti, and Oman, admitted by the Defense Department not to be war related, yet is in the war budget today.

All I ask, Mr. Chairman, is this: If we agree as a body that we cannot live within the BCA caps and we agree that the defense of the Nation takes more money than is permitted under the BCA caps, then let's break the caps. But let's do it honestly, let's do it openly, and let's tell the people here why we have to do it and where the money is going.

The OCO budget has been described by members of both the Democrat Party and the Republican Party alike as a slush fund, as a bad way to do business. The Defense Department doesn't even like using this type of money because it does not allow them to budget properly. It is a desperate act, and it is a dishonest act when it comes to following the law.

The Budget Control Act is the law of the land. It passed in the House, it passed in the Senate, and it was signed by the President. And this appropriations bill seeks to break the law and seeks to do it in such a way that isn't even honest about how it is going forward.

So with that, Mr. Chairman, I respectfully request that folks would support the Mulvaney-Van Hollen amendment and strike the OCO-GWOT money from this particular appropriations bill.

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

POINT OF ORDER

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chairman, I make a point of order against the amendment because it proposes to amend portions of the bill not yet read.

Section 17 of chapter 2 of the House Practice book states in part:

"It is not in order to strike or otherwise amend portions of a bill not yet read for amendment."

I ask for a ruling from the Chair.

The Acting CHAIR. Does any other Member wish to be heard on the point of order?

Mr. MULVANEY. Mr. Chairman, my understanding is that this amendment seeks to strike title IV on page 62, which is exactly where we are when I was called to the podium.

The Acting CHAIR. Does any other Member wish to be heard?

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. Chair, I wish to be heard.

The Acting CHAIR. The gentleman from Maryland is recognized.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. My understanding of this is it strikes the provision and, therefore, meets the requirements. After all, this is the first bill we are debating since the budget was passed. The budget opens the door wide to this accounting scam that Republicans on the Budget Committee just last year said was a gross runaround of the budget rules.

I want to read, Mr. Chairman, from the report from the Budget Committee last year that said that abuse of the OCO cap adjustment is a backdoor loophole that undermines the integrity of the budget process.

The Acting CHAIR. The gentleman must confine his remarks to the point of order.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Well, Mr. Chairman, I want to point out that the Budget Committee itself has indicated that this violates the budget process.

The Acting CHAIR. The gentleman from Maryland must confine his remarks to the point of order.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. So it is hard to understand how this could be a violation of the point of order if the Budget Committee says that what we are doing violates the budget process or undermines the budget process.

The Acting CHAIR. Does any other Member wish to be heard on the point of order?

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY

Mr. MULVANEY. Mr. Chairman, I have a parliamentary inquiry as to the point of order.

The Acting CHAIR. The gentleman may state his parliamentary inquiry.

Mr. MULVANEY. Is the point of order that we have not yet reached the appropriate time for making this particular amendment?

The Acting CHAIR. The point of order has been stated. The Chair has not yet ruled.

Mr. MULVANEY. Would the gentleman from Pennsylvania restate the point?

Mr. DENT. The point of order is that we are not at the appropriate point in the bill for this amendment to be considered.

Mr. MULVANEY. Mr. Chairman, my understanding is that we are on page 62. That is the page I think on which title IV is printed. My amendment does nothing more than strikes all of title IV. So it seems like this is wholly the appropriate time to deal with that particular amendment and, in fact, may be out of order if I don't offer it right now.

The Acting CHAIR. The Chair is prepared to rule.

The amendment strikes title IV. Only the first paragraph of title IV is pending.

It is not in order to amend portions of the bill not yet read for amendment. The point of order is sustained.

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRIES

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. Chairman, parliamentary inquiry, just so I understand the ruling.

The Acting CHAIR. The gentleman from Maryland may state his parliamentary inquiry.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. Chairman, as I understood the ruling, because the amendment strikes all of this section, as opposed to the portion of the section we are currently on, it is being ruled out of order. Is that correct?

The Acting CHAIR. Only one paragraph is currently pending, and the amendment sought to strike the entire title.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Parliamentary inquiry: Is there going to be a point in time when that entire section is pending?

The Acting CHAIR. Only the first paragraph of title IV is pending.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. Chairman, I understand that the meaning of "is" is "is." I understand that we are on the first paragraph.

Parliamentary inquiry: Is there going to be a point in time when the entire section is pending, such that this amendment would then be considered in order since the amendment is to strike the entire section?

The Acting CHAIR. The bill is being read paragraph by paragraph.

Mr. MULVANEY. Parliamentary inquiry, Mr. Chairman.

The Acting CHAIR. The gentleman may state his parliamentary inquiry.

Mr. MULVANEY. Is the ruling without prejudice as to my ability to offer the amendment at a later time?

The Acting CHAIR. The paragraph that has been read is open for amendment at this time.

Mr. MULVANEY. I respect that, Mr. Chairman. I don't believe that responds to my parliamentary inquiry.

Is the Chair's ruling with or without prejudice as to my ability to bring the same amendment at a later time?

The Acting CHAIR. The Chair cannot give an advisory opinion on a future amendment.

Mr. MULVANEY. I respect that, Mr. Chairman. I am not asking the Chair for an advisory opinion. I am asking the Chair to clarify the ruling the Chair has already made. Is it with or without prejudice?

The Acting CHAIR. The Chair has ruled and is ready for other business.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. Chairman, I move to strike the pending paragraph.

The Acting CHAIR. Does the gentleman seek to offer an amendment?

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. I ask unanimous consent to offer an amendment at this point in time to strike the pending paragraph.

Mr. DENT. I object.

The Acting CHAIR. If the gentleman would send his amendment to the desk.

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY

Mr. MULVANEY. Parliamentary inquiry, Mr. Chairman.

The Acting CHAIR. The gentleman may state his parliamentary inquiry.

Mr. MULVANEY. Again, I am new at this. I understand that we are sort of working our way through this.

Here is my question: If this was the inappropriate time for me to bring this amendment, why was I summoned to the podium?

The Acting CHAIR. The Chair was inquiring as to the purpose the gentleman was seeking recognition.

Mr. MULVANEY. Further parliamentary inquiry, Mr. Chairman.

The Acting CHAIR. The gentleman may state his parliamentary inquiry.

Mr. MULVANEY. My amendment was read.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. VAN HOLLEN

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

Strike the pending paragraph.

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 223, the gentleman from Maryland and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Maryland.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to offer this amendment with my colleague, Mr. MULVANEY. And now that we have gotten beyond the sort of procedural objections, let's go to the substance of this.

This is the first appropriations bill that we have on the floor that raises the question about the budgets that were passed in both the House and the Senate. As I think our colleagues know well by this point, both those budgets engage in an incredible accounting scam with respect to how we fund the Department of Defense and how we fund our military operations.

For years, we have distinguished between the moneys that we spend on our ongoing defense programs, called the base budget, and the moneys set aside in the war account, the so-called overseas contingency account funds.

What has happened here is that the President, on the advice of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and our military leadership, has requested the amount that is necessary to address our overseas contingency operations. But instead of abiding by that request and what was necessary, the Republican budget does this end-run and ends up using our overseas contingency account as a slush fund for funds that have been in the base defense budget.

As I was indicating earlier, Mr. Chairman, this accounting scam, the sleight of hand, was something that the Republican Budget Committee just last year strongly objected to and indicated that it violated the budget process.

I am going to read another portion of the Republican Budget Committee report from last year on this issue where it says the Budget Committee will exercise its oversight responsibilities with respect to the use of the OCO, the overseas contingency account, designation in the budget process, and it will oppose increases above the level the administration and our military commanders say are necessary to carry out operations. And then it goes on, because those are not war related.

So what this House is doing now is engaging in this incredible sleight of

hand, and it is only one big problem in the budget before us, along with many other problems.

But on this point, I would like to now yield to the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. MULVANEY) if he would like to say a word on this amendment.

Mr. MULVANEY. I thank the gentleman.

Mr. Chair, I will repeat what I said earlier on the amendment that was ruled out of order. The BCA is the law. We agreed that it is. I didn't vote for it. By the way, I didn't like it very much and was one of the few of my party who did not vote for it. But it is the law passed in the House, passed by the Senate, and signed by the President.

We can change it. We absolutely can change it if we want to. And if that is the will of this body, then let's do it. But let's do it by changing the Budget Control Act. Let's not go around the BCA. Let's not use a back door. Let's not use a slush fund, something that is off-budget.

I hope my friends in the private sector understand the severity of it at this point. We have spending here that is off-budget that doesn't count towards the budget. And if we can use it for this, what else can we use it for? We are using it now for bases in Poland, Bahrain, Niger, Djibouti, and Oman, specifically not war related; yet it is in the war budget.

If we can use it for this, what is to stop us from using it for anything? If the law is going to have any meaning, let's respect it. And if we want to change it, let's change it. But let's be forthright about it.

Bring a bill to the floor to change the Budget Control Act and make the arguments for why we should do that. Let's not be disingenuous. Let's not be deceptive. Let's not be mischievous with the budget.

If we really think it is necessary for the defense of this Nation to spend \$532 million on base improvements in these overseas countries, then have folks come to the floor and tell us why. Let's not slip a line into the MILCON-VA budget and just say, Well, everybody always votes for VA anyway. Who can vote against the vets? Who can vote against MILCON? Let's put it in there. Nobody will notice it.

That is how we get \$18 trillion in debt.

Mr. Chairman, I support the amendment. In fact, I ask unanimous consent to be added as a cosponsor of Mr. VAN HOLLEN's amendment.

The Acting CHAIR. The amendment may not have cosponsors.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. Chairman, I ask unanimous consent, since the original amendment was offered by Mr. MULVANEY, to make this the Mulvaney amendment.

The Acting CHAIR. The amendment may not have a cosponsor.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. I am asking unanimous consent to make the main sponsor Mr. MULVANEY.

The Acting CHAIR. The gentleman's request cannot be entertained.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. Chairman, I am asking unanimous consent.

The Acting CHAIR. Is the gentleman seeking to withdraw the amendment?

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. I am willing to withdraw the amendment but only on the understanding—parliamentary inquiry—if I withdraw it and substitute the same amendment in the name of Mr. MULVANEY, can I do that?

The Acting CHAIR. Any Member may offer an amendment.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. Speaker, let's just keep it. This will be known as the Van Hollen-Mulvaney amendment.

I thank the Chair.

The Acting CHAIR. The gentleman's time has expired.

□ 1730

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chairman, I rise in opposition to the Van Hollen-Mulvaney amendment.

The Acting CHAIR. The gentleman from Pennsylvania is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chairman, I just want to say that there has been precedent to use OCO money on similar projects for similar purposes in previous years. Specifically, the Bahrain portion that is going to the U.S. Navy, there is a pier replacement, ship maintenance support facility. We used OCO funds in fiscal years '11, '12, and '13 for similar purposes then.

I should also note, too, that if we were to strike the OCO funding from this bill, the missile defense in Poland, the Aegis missile defense complex, would also be affected. Again, we had used OCO money for similar purposes in fiscal year '15.

I would argue that there is precedent for using OCO funds for the purposes contained in this bill. It is appropriate. I do not agree with the characterization that it is a scam, but it is used as precedent.

I would urge rejection of this amendment, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The Acting CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. VAN HOLLEN).

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

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. Chairman, I demand a recorded vote.

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

Mr. MULVANEY. I have an amendment at the desk to strike the second paragraph of title IV.

The Acting CHAIR. The reading will first progress to that next paragraph.

The Clerk will read the next paragraph.

The Clerk read as follows:

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, AIR FORCE

For an additional amount for "Military Construction, Air Force" \$75,000,000 to remain available until September 30, 2020, for

projects outside of the United States: *Provided*, That such amount is designated by the Congress for Overseas Contingency Operations/Global War on Terrorism pursuant to section 215(b)(2)(A)(ii) of the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. MULVANEY

Mr. MULVANEY. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk. I am moving to strike the second paragraph of title IV.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

Strike pg. 62, line 15–22.

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 223, the gentleman from South Carolina and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from South Carolina.

Mr. MULVANEY. Mr. Chairman, unless Mr. VAN HOLLEN has anything to add, I believe the same arguments that we just made on his previous amendment stand for this one, and I reserve the balance of my time.

The Acting CHAIR. Does any Member seek time in opposition?

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chairman, I rise in opposition to the amendment, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. MULVANEY. Mr. Chairman, I yield to the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. VAN HOLLEN).

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. Chairman, I would just observe, in response to the distinguished gentleman from Pennsylvania on the Appropriations Committee, that our military leadership has said that the funds that are requested for this purpose under OCO are not OCO funds, that they are not war-related funds. That is coming from the Department of Defense. That is coming from the folks who put together the budgets for the Department of Defense.

So to just claim that somehow these expenditures, which have been described by Mr. MULVANEY, are now somehow part of the war effort as opposed to the ongoing defense budget is to say to the military leadership that they don't understand how their budgets work. I think they do understand how their budgets work. We are trying to make sure that we protect the integrity of the process so that people can't be using the war account as a slush fund, which is exactly what this measure does.

Mr. MULVANEY. Mr. Chair, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chairman, I oppose this amendment. This amendment essentially would strike the OCO funds that would be provided to the Air Force, specifically in Oman for the airlift apron. I want to point out that the President of the United States requested funding for this same project under OCO in fiscal year 2011 for the airlift ramp. I am looking at the map actually of the work. It is on the same site.

What I am saying is OCO has been used for this at the request of the

President in fiscal year '11. We are talking about using it on the same site for the same purpose. So, again, I would argue that the airlift apron in Oman is part of a facility that is very much part of our counterterrorism operations in that part of the world.

So again, I would urge rejection of this amendment.

I reserve the balance of my time.

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

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

The Acting CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. MULVANEY).

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

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

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to clause 6 of rule XVIII, further proceedings on the amendment offered by the gentleman from South Carolina will be postponed.

The Clerk will read.

The Clerk read as follows:

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, DEFENSE-WIDE

For an additional amount for "Military Construction, Defense-Wide", \$212,996,000 to remain available until September 30, 2020, for projects outside of the United States: *Provided*, That such amount is designated by the Congress for Overseas Contingency Operations/Global War on Terrorism pursuant to section 251(b)(2)(A)(ii) of the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. MULVANEY

Mr. MULVANEY. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

Strike p. 62 line 23 thru page 63 line 6.

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 223, the gentleman from South Carolina and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from South Carolina.

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

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

The Acting CHAIR. The gentleman from Pennsylvania is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chairman, as I understand this amendment, this would essentially eliminate OCO funding for our operation in Djibouti where we have infrastructure for fuel storage and distribution facilities.

Again, OCO funds were used for similar purposes in Djibouti in fiscal years '12 and '13 through OCO, I believe at the request of the President at the time. Again, Djibouti is a key facility for us strategically and one that is being used in our fight in the global war on terror. It is obviously very close to Somalia, a hotbed of Islamist extremism, as well as close to Yemen, where there is so much hostile action.

So, again, I would urge we reject this amendment because it will negatively impact our ability to conduct the global war on terror at a facility right in that part of the world. And again, where precedent has been set, like in these other situations, precedent has been set for using OCO funds. We are doing it again this year, and I think it is appropriate.

I urge rejection of the amendment, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. MULVANEY. Mr. Chairman, I would like to read a portion of the language we are seeking to strike. It says: "For an additional amount for 'Military Construction Defense-Wide', \$212,996,000 to remain available until September 30, 2020."

So not only are we looking to spend the money today, we are looking to have the right to spend this money whenever we want over the next 5 years. I don't know of any other part of the budget where we do that.

If this is not a slush fund, Mr. Chairman, I don't know what it is. It was set up by a previous administration—an administration, by the way, of my party—and has been decried by Members of my party as being a slush fund. In fact, I think JOHN MCCAIN called it a slush fund, for goodness' sake. I believe Senator CORKER called it the same thing. This is one of the reasons. We have no idea why we are spending this money. It is available until 2020.

This is a great opportunity, Mr. Chairman, to say no. The money in the overseas contingency operation is there to support the troops who are overseas fighting a war. It is there to fight the global war on terror. It is not there for a slush fund for whatever bases we happen to think are convenient at the time and for which we can't find enough money under the base budget for that.

I hope we support not only Mr. VAN HOLLEN's first amendment, but my two subsequent amendments.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chairman, I would just like to respond to my friend from South Carolina. I do understand how construction is done.

I do want to point out that many of these projects are not all funded in one single fiscal year, but over a period of years, both domestically and internationally, as is the case here.

So, again, I would rise in opposition to the amendment and urge its rejection.

I yield back the balance of my time.

The Acting CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. MULVANEY).

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

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

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to clause 6 of rule XVIII, further proceedings on the amendment offered by the gentleman from South Carolina will be postponed.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will read.

The Clerk read the following:

TITLE V

GENERAL PROVISIONS

SEC. 501. No part of any appropriation contained in this Act shall remain available for obligation beyond the current fiscal year unless expressly so provided herein.

SEC. 502. None of the funds made available in this Act may be used for any program, project, or activity, when it is made known to the Federal entity or official to which the funds are made available that the program, project, or activity is not in compliance with any Federal law relating to risk assessment, the protection of private property rights, or unfunded mandates.

SEC. 503. All departments and agencies funded under this Act are encouraged, within the limits of the existing statutory authorities and funding, to expand their use of "E-Commerce" technologies and procedures in the conduct of their business practices and public service activities.

SEC. 504. Unless stated otherwise, all reports and notifications required by this Act shall be submitted to the Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies of the Committee on Appropriations of the House of Representatives and the Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies of the Committee on Appropriations of the Senate.

SEC. 505. None of the funds made available in this Act may be transferred to any department, agency, or instrumentality of the United States Government except pursuant to a transfer made by, or transfer authority provided in, this or any other appropriations Act.

SEC. 506. None of the funds made available in this Act may be used for a project or program named for an individual serving as a Member, Delegate, or Resident Commissioner of the United States House of Representatives.

SEC. 507. (a) Any agency receiving funds made available in this Act, shall, subject to subsections (b) and (c), post on the public Web site of that agency any report required to be submitted by the Congress in this or any other Act, upon the determination by the head of the agency that it shall serve the national interest.

(b) Subsection (a) shall not apply to a report if—

(1) the public posting of the report compromises national security; or

(2) the report contains confidential or proprietary information.

(c) The head of the agency posting such report shall do so only after such report has been made available to the requesting Committee or Committees of Congress for no less than 45 days.

SEC. 508. (a) None of the funds made available in this Act may be used to maintain or establish a computer network unless such network blocks the viewing, downloading, and exchanging of pornography.

(b) Nothing in subsection (a) shall limit the use of funds necessary for any Federal, State, tribal, or local law enforcement agency or any other entity carrying out criminal investigations, prosecution, or adjudication activities.

SEC. 509. None of the funds made available in this Act may be used by an agency of the executive branch to pay for first-class travel by an employee of the agency in contravention of sections 301–10.122 through 301–10.124 of title 41, Code of Federal Regulations.

SEC. 510. None of the funds made available in this Act may be used to execute a contract for goods or services, including con-

struction services, where the contractor has not complied with Executive Order No. 12989.

SEC. 511. None of the funds made available by this Act may be used by the Department of Defense or the Department of Veterans Affairs to lease or purchase new light duty vehicles for any executive fleet, or for an agency's fleet inventory, except in accordance with Presidential Memorandum—Federal Fleet Performance, dated May 24, 2011.

SEC. 512. (a) IN GENERAL.—None of the funds appropriated or otherwise made available to the Department of Defense in this Act may be used to construct, renovate, or expand any facility in the United States, its territories, or possessions to house any individual detained at United States Naval Station, Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, for the purposes of detention or imprisonment in the custody or under the control of the Department of Defense.

(b) The prohibition in subsection (a) shall not apply to any modification of facilities at United States Naval Station, Guantánamo Bay, Cuba.

(c) An individual described in this subsection is any individual who, as of June 24, 2009, is located at United States Naval Station, Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, and who—

(1) is not a citizen of the United States or a member of the Armed Forces of the United States; and

(2) is—

(A) in the custody or under the effective control of the Department of Defense; or

(B) otherwise under detention at United States Naval Station, Guantánamo Bay, Cuba.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. NADLER

Mr. NADLER. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

Strike section 512.

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 223, the gentleman from New York and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New York.

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

Mr. Chairman, this amendment would strike section 512 of the bill, which prohibits the use of funds to construct or expand any facility in the United States to house any individual detained at the detention facility at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba.

□ 1745

Simply put, this section is designed to prevent the closure of Guantánamo.

Mr. Chairman, we are still holding 122 people at Guantánamo, 57 of whom have been cleared for release. These people have been found guilty of nothing, are believed to be guilty of nothing, and have been judged not to pose any danger. Nonetheless, they are not released. By what claim of right do we continue to imprison them?

As for the detainees who have not been cleared for release, this bill is designed to ensure that we will continue to hold them at Guantánamo indefinitely. We don't know whether these people are enemy soldiers or not or are guilty of anything or not. Some of them may be, and some of them probably are not. Those facts must be de-

termined in a fair proceeding of some sort, but, at Guantánamo, there are no proceedings. The military tribunal process at Guantánamo has been at a complete standstill for years, and we cannot hold civilian trials at Guantánamo, so we are holding people for no purpose with no proceedings, no hearings, no opportunity to determine their guilt or innocence, and we are holding them, essentially, forever.

I recall a briefing last year at which Representative and now-Senator COTTON said that these people had been determined to be guilty by Congress. Aside from the fact that Congress has not determined anybody to be guilty and aside from the fact, if Congress tried to determine someone to be guilty of a crime or of anything, that it would be a violation of the bill of attainder section of the Congress, it is simply not true. These people have been determined to be guilty of nothing, and they deserve, like anybody else, to have a day in court. How long will we let this shameful episode in American history continue?

To overcome this challenge to one of the founding principles of the United States, which is that no person may be deprived of liberty without due process of law and, certainly, may not be deprived of liberty indefinitely without due process of law, we must close the detention facility at Guantánamo now so that they can be properly charged and tried in a Federal court. This will afford the detainees no additional constitutional rights. The Supreme Court has already ruled that detainees at Guantánamo have the same constitutional rights as they would if they were to be brought to the United States.

The government should transfer to Federal court any detainee against whom it has evidence. The Federal courts, in contrast to the military tribunals, have an excellent record in prosecuting and convicting terrorists. Anyone not charged should either be classified as a "prisoner of war" and treated as such or should be released back to his home country or elsewhere if that prevents a problem to his life or safety. This is not a radical suggestion. It has been our tradition for the entire history of our country and has been our unbroken legal practice until now.

The President can and should without delay authorize the Secretary of Defense to use existing certification and waiver procedures to repatriate and resettle abroad all prisoners who have been cleared for release, and he should arrange trial in the United States for all prisoners who are not cleared for release.

We must close this facility. We must try and convict and sentence the people who are guilty of acts of terrorism or aggression against the United States or, in accord with our moral and constitutional principles, release those who are not guilty of offenses against the United States. Only so can we restore our national honor. This amendment is necessary to start this process

because without our bringing some of these prisoners to the United States for trial, we cannot try them. I urge all of my colleagues to support this amendment.

I reserve the balance of my time.

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

The Acting CHAIR. The gentleman from Pennsylvania is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chairman, section 512 has been included in the MILCON-VA bill for several years, and it is part of the overall policy discussion involving Guantanamo Bay. Identical language is also carried in the 2015 appropriations bill. Again, I respectfully request that the we reject this amendment.

I would also add that, at Guantanamo Bay, we have about 120 prisoners there. Among those who are at that facility are Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the mastermind of the 9/11 attacks. I believe he is the man who also confessed that he decapitated Dan Pearl, the Wall Street Journal reporter. He was gruesomely executed by Khalid Sheikh Mohammed. He is a high-value detainee, and there are other high-value detainees there. Many of the prisoners down in Guantanamo are Yemeni, but we certainly can't send them back to Yemen. It is also clear to me that many of these prisoners are very difficult to try and too dangerous to release, so I urge opposition to this amendment.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. NADLER. Mr. Chairman, I note in his opposing this amendment that the gentleman simply said it is part of a larger policy discussion about Guantanamo. He is correct. He said that there is identical language in other bills. He is correct. He said that we should remove that language from the other bills, and he points out that Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and other high-value prisoners are at Guantanamo. He is correct.

We are to bring them to the United States. We are to try them and convict them and either sentence them to death or to life in prison without parole or whatever. That is our tradition. We don't simply declare someone is a bad guy and hold him forever without a trial. Our Federal courts in the United States have an excellent record of trying and convicting people accused of terrorism. In the military tribunals at Guantanamo, they can't even run a trial. It has come to a complete standstill.

It is really missing the point to say that there are some very bad people at Guantanamo. Yes, there are. There are also some perfectly innocent people at Guantanamo. Those people ought to be released. The people who we think are guilty of something should be charged and tried. To simply say that someone is not going to be charged and tried but be held for life imprisonment without a trial is not what this country is about.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Mr. Chairman, I move to strike the last word.

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

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Mr. Chairman, I rise in support of the amendment.

I believe we need to set the conditions for the closure of the detention facility at Guantanamo. It is in the United States national security interests to do so. Guantanamo has become a rallying cry. It serves as a recruitment tool for terrorists, and it increases the will of our enemies to fight while decreasing the will of others to work with America.

Part of the rationale for establishing Guantanamo in the first place was the misplaced idea that the facility would be beyond the law—a proposition rejected by the United States Supreme Court. As a result, the continued operation of this facility creates the impression in the eyes of our allies and our enemies alike that the United States selectively observes the rule of law.

There is no reason that we should impose upon ourselves the legal and moral problems arising from the prospect of indefinite detentions at Guantanamo. Working through civil courts since 9/11, hundreds of individuals have been convicted of terrorism or of terrorism-related offenses and are now serving long sentences in Federal prison. Not one has ever escaped custody.

For these reasons, I believe that the time is past due to take the actions needed to initiate the closure of the detention facility at Guantanamo.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chairman, I would also like to remind the Members that Bowe Bergdahl was exchanged for five detainees at GTMO who have been sent elsewhere outside the United States and outside of Guantanamo. It is hard to keep eyes on these folks who have been released in exchange for Bowe Bergdahl, who has actually been charged with desertion.

I also want to remind Members that, a few years ago, former Mayor Bloomberg of New York City agreed to allow certain detainees to be brought back to New York City for trial. Then, apparently, the mayor must have spoken to his police commissioner, who thought that that was a really bad idea because it would have choked off much of southern Manhattan, and it would have been extraordinarily expensive. It would have been a mistake.

Again, I urge that we reject this amendment and maintain the facility at Guantanamo Bay.

I yield back the balance of my time.

The Acting CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from New York (Mr. NADLER).

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

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

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to clause 6 of rule XVIII, further proceedings on the amendment offered by

the gentleman from New York will be postponed.

The Clerk will read.

The Clerk read as follows:

SPENDING REDUCTION ACCOUNT

SEC. 513. The amount by which the applicable allocation of new budget authority made by the Committee on Appropriations of the House of Representatives under section 302(b) of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974 exceeds the amount of proposed new budget authority is \$0.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. BOUSTANY

Mr. BOUSTANY. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

At the end of the bill (before the short title), insert the following:

SEC. _____. (1) None of the funds made available by this Act may be used to pay any bonus or monetary award under chapter 45 or 53 of title 5, United States Code, to an employee of the Chief Business Office of the Department of Veterans Affairs who is responsible for processing emergency medical care claims until the percentage of emergency medical care claims processed within 30 days reaches 90 percent.

(2) The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit quarterly data to Congress on the following:

(A) The total number of emergency medical claims and the total number of billed charges for such claims.

(B) The total number of emergency medical claims and billed charges for such claims pending for more than 30 days.

(C) The number of veterans with unpaid claims under consideration in each Veterans Integrated Service Network.

(D) The percent of clean claims processed within 30 days.

Mr. DENT (during the reading). Mr. Chairman, I ask unanimous consent to dispense with the reading of the amendment.

The Acting CHAIR. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Pennsylvania?

There was no objection.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chairman, I reserve a point of order on the gentleman's amendment.

The Acting CHAIR. A point of order is reserved.

Pursuant to House Resolution 223, the gentleman from Louisiana and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Louisiana.

Mr. BOUSTANY. Mr. Chairman, our veterans deserve better than long, drawn-out claims processes that inhibit access to high-quality care. This is just unacceptable.

Since the passage of last year's landmark VA reform legislation, the VA has demonstrated disturbingly little progress on addressing the emergency medical care claims processing backlog that is hurting our veterans.

I requested data earlier this year on the VA's progress in fiscal year 2015. I was shocked to find that, as of late March of this year, only 14 percent of the claims originating from VISN 16, including my home State of Louisiana, have been processed within 30 days.

That is abysmal. No employee at any business in Louisiana or anywhere around this country would be given a bonus with such a poor success rate.

Mr. Chairman, it is high time the VA starts demanding a higher standard from its employees. My amendment is fairly simple. It prevents this agency from granting bonuses to its emergency medical care claims processing staff until the percentage of emergency medical care claims processed within 30 days reaches 90 percent.

This is just unacceptable behavior. Time and time again, we have asked the VA and have worked and legislated to get them to clean up their act. Our veterans are suffering, and this is no way to treat them. That is why I have offered this amendment.

Mr. Chairman, I understand the gentleman has a point of order raised against the amendment because it violates the House rules of legislating on an appropriations bill. I just feel compelled to speak out because of the plight of our veterans, who are at the mercy of an incompetent agency, and it has got to change.

I hope that all Members of this House on both sides of the aisle will work so that we clean up this mess and treat our veterans the way they should be treated because they have gone out and fought for us.

Mr. Chairman, with respect to my friend, the chairman of the subcommittee, I ask unanimous consent to withdraw my amendment.

The Acting CHAIR. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Louisiana?

There was no objection.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MS. JACKSON LEE

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

At the end of the bill (before the short title), insert the following:

SEC. _____. The amounts otherwise provided by this Act are revised by reducing the amount made available for "Department of Veterans Affairs—Departmental Administration—Information Technology Services" (and the amount specified under such heading for operations and maintenance), and by increasing the amount made available for "Veterans Health Administration—Medical Services", by \$2,000,000.

Ms. JACKSON LEE (during the reading). Mr. Chairman, I ask unanimous consent that the amendment be considered as read.

The Acting CHAIR. Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from Texas?

There was no objection.

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 223, the gentlewoman from Texas and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Texas.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Chairman, my first task is to thank the ranking member, Mr. BISHOP, and the chairman of the subcommittee, Mr. DENT, both of

whom I have worked with, and I consider them champions of veterans and champions of the legislation that we have before us in terms of the needs that are there.

□ 1800

However, there are many needs that should be addressed, Mr. Chairman. I hold in my hand a list of veterans who have fallen upon hard times, one in particular who has three grown daughters who are serving in the military. She, herself, served in the Navy for 5 years, had a divorce, and really needed to have housing assistance and medical care, but her options were insufficient.

My amendment is a simple amendment to, again, remind us of the importance of these individuals who still suffer. The Jackson Lee amendment makes a modest but important improvement to the bill by increasing the amount of funding for Supportive Services for Veteran Families account by \$2 million, offset by a reduction in the same amount to the \$4 billion allocated to the VA's information technology systems.

Today in our country, there are approximately 107,000 veterans, male and female, who are homeless on any given night, and perhaps twice as many—200,000—experience homelessness at some point during the course of the year.

All you need do, Mr. Chairman, is go home to your district and be able to engage with your veterans associations and your own constituents, and you will find that they will come up to you because they are homeless.

The VA Supportive Services for Veteran Families Program helps veterans and their families who may have fallen on hard times or hit a rough patch in life and need help from the country they selflessly risked their life to defend.

The veterans don't have to remind us that we owe them an obligation of support. They don't have to say it. We know that. When they put on the uniform, they ask no questions; they are selfless.

The SSVF program ensures that eligible veteran families receive the outreach, case management, and assistance in obtaining veterans and other benefits. Many are suffering from PTSD or traumatic brain injury. They have lived, and we are grateful for it. Many Vietnam vets are just being diagnosed. This program is crucial to helping them get an extra step in life.

I would ask my colleagues to be reminded of the kinds of veterans whom we see every day who are willing to put on that uniform and sacrifice without asking one single question. I ask my colleagues to support the Jackson Lee amendment.

Mr. Chair, the Jackson Lee amendment will enable this vital program to serve more veteran families in need of help by providing a bit more funding for grants to provide nonprofit private organizations and consumer coopera-

tives the ability to provide supportive services.

The main point is that there is a need, and I would only say that we need to follow the words of a veteran who said, after getting services, "I have a home, and I enjoy being inside."

Let's give more of our veterans and veteran families that very important quote, "I have a home, and I enjoy being inside."

I ask my colleagues to support the Jackson Lee amendment.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Chair, before I begin, let me express my appreciation and thanks to my good friends, Chairman DENT and Ranking Member BISHOP, for their hard and constructive work in shepherding this legislation to the floor.

Chairman DENT and I worked together constructively for many years on the Homeland Security Committee and has always distinguished himself as one of the most bipartisan members of the House.

And Ranking Member BISHOP has for years been one of the ablest Members of this body; I thank them both for commitment to the important work of ensuring that our veterans receive the care and support they have earned from a grateful nation.

The Jackson Lee Amendment makes a modest but important improvement to the bill by increasing the amount of funding for the "Supportive Services for Veterans' Families" account by \$2 million, offset by a reduction of the same amount to the \$4 billion allocated to the VA's "Information Technology Systems" account.

Today, in our country, there are approximately 107,000 veterans (male and female) who are homeless on any given night.

And perhaps twice as many (200,000) experience homelessness at some point during the course of a year.

The VA's "Supportive Services for Veterans' Families" Program helps veterans, and their families, who may have fallen on hard times or hit a rough patch in life and need a little help from the country they selflessly risked their life to defend.

The Jackson Lee Amendment will enable this vital program to serve more veterans' families in need of help by providing a bit more funding for grants to private non-profit organizations and consumer cooperatives that provide supportive services to very low-income veteran families living in or transitioning to permanent housing.

The SSVF Program ensures that eligible veteran families receive the outreach, case management, and assistance in obtaining VA and other benefits.

These services may include health care, daily living, legal services, fiduciary and payee services, personal financial planning, child care, transportation, housing counseling.

The SSVF Program enables VA staff and local homeless service providers to work together to effectively address the unique challenges that make it difficult for some veterans and their families to remain stably housed.

Many homeless veterans, including in my own state of Texas, lack housing because they lost their job or could no longer afford rent; many suffer from an untreated mental illness that keeps them from working.

Every day the SSVF program makes a real difference in the lives of real people.

Veterans like the Air Force veteran who, hoping to utilize the skills he learned in the service, instead bounced from job to job after being discharged and found himself sleeping at night on the cold cement under a bridge in Chicago.

Through the Thresholds Veterans Project, funded through the SSVF, this hero received steady community service support and eventually was placed in his own studio apartment.

He now says, in his own words: I have a home. I enjoy bein' inside."

Veterans like the one in Texas who because he lost his job at a manufacturing plant and was unable to pay the bills, was forced to seek shelter for himself and his family at a homeless shelter.

Fortunately, the homeless shelter was a SSVF grantee and was able to assist the veteran obtain employment and his family in securing affordable low-cost housing.

There are thousands of similar success stories made possible by the SSVF Program that I could share but all of them share a common theme: they involve veterans who served their country proudly, fell down on their luck, picked themselves back up, and found affordable and sustainable housing for their families because of the assistance and support made possible by the SSVF program.

Ensuring that veterans have a place of their own to call home is the very least we can do.

I urge my colleagues to support the Jackson Lee Amendment and commit ourselves to the hard but necessary work of ending veteran homelessness in America.

I urge my colleagues to support the Jackson Lee Amendment.

The Acting CHAIR (Mr. RODNEY DAVIS of Illinois). The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON LEE).

The amendment was agreed to.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. JOLLY

Mr. JOLLY. I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

At the end of the bill (before the short title), insert the following:

SEC. _____. None of the funds made available by this Act may be used to carry out the closure or transfer of the United States Naval Station, Guantánamo Bay, Cuba.

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 223, the gentleman from Florida and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Florida.

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

This is a very simple measure. It simply prohibits the relinquishment, the closure, or the transfer of Naval Station Guantanamo Bay out of the possession of the United States.

In 1903, as a result of the Cuban-American treaty, the United States began to occupy Naval Station Guantanamo Bay for at least as long as necessary or in perpetuity for naval operations. The treaty stated that the U.S. shall exercise complete jurisdiction and control of the base, while also recognizing the sovereignty of Cuba.

Today, Naval Station Guantanamo is a front line for our regional security in

the Caribbean. It supports our Navy logistical work; drug interdiction; DHS migrant operations; and, importantly, disaster and humanitarian relief, including responding to the 1980s and 1990s mass migration, as well as the 2010 Haiti earthquake response.

Very importantly is what this measure does not do. This measure does not touch the detention facility and the politics of the detention facility. This focuses solely on the national security implications of maintaining the Navy station 90 miles off the shores of Florida. Importantly, it is an issue that has been brought right now as a result of the President's decision to begin to normalize relations with Cuba.

Also, importantly, this doesn't take a position on normalizing relations with Cuba. In fact, you could make the argument that normalizing relations with Cuba actually enhances and improves and increases our national security because it allows us additional operational units and boots on the ground at our Navy station there, engaging with the locals, improving our intelligence, improving our ability to respond.

The moment the President began to offer normalized relations, the Castro regime demanded the return of Guantanamo. This is a matter of our national security to maintain it. You need not make this political.

Simply look at the advice and opinions of the previous three commanders of U.S. Southern Command. Current General John Kelly has called GTMO indispensable to the Departments of Defense, Homeland Security, and State.

The commander before him, Admiral Stavridis, said it is of immense strategic value. Prior to him, General Douglas Fraser, contemplating the eventual closure of the detention facility said, even absent a detention facility, the strategic capability provided by U.S. Naval Station Guantanamo Bay remains essential for executing the national priorities of the United States.

Mr. Speaker, this is a matter of national security. We have a process for realigning and closing naval facilities. This legislation simply says, for purposes of national security, this amendment prohibits any transfer or closure of Naval Station Guantanamo.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. I claim the time in opposition, but I am not opposed to the gentleman's amendment.

The Acting CHAIR. Without objection, the gentleman is recognized for 5 minutes.

There was no objection.

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Mr. Chairman, I think sometimes people get confused about the role of Guantanamo Bay naval facility's mission. There is a joint task force on detainee operations, and there is the actual facility.

No one has ever floated the idea of closing the base and giving it back to Cuba, so when the detainee mission

ends, which it will, we will still need to have this facility. It is the southernmost military facility of the Department.

I don't support detainee operations, but I do support the regular mission of the Guantanamo Bay naval facility, and therefore, I will not oppose the gentleman's amendment.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. JOLLY. Mr. Chairman, I yield the time I have remaining to the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. DENT), the chairman of the subcommittee.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chairman, I just wanted to state, too, that the underlying legislation does not include any funds to close the naval station at Guantanamo Bay, a facility I have visited.

I also should point out, as the distinguished ranking member just stated, Mr. BISHOP, that the naval station is a key strategic location for SOUTHCOM, and I would support the gentleman's amendment.

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Mr. Chair, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. JOLLY. Mr. Chair, I yield back the balance of my time.

The Acting CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Florida (Mr. JOLLY).

The amendment was agreed to.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. BLUMENAUER

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Chair, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

At the end of the bill (before the short title), insert the following:

SEC. _____. None of the funds made available by this Act may be used to implement, administer, or enforce Veterans Health Administration directive 2011-004 (or directive of the same substance) with respect to the prohibition on "VA providers from completing forms seeking recommendations or opinions regarding a Veteran's participation in a State marijuana program".

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chair, I reserve a point of order on the gentleman's amendment. I haven't seen the amendment yet.

The Acting CHAIR. A point of order is reserved.

Pursuant to House Resolution 223, the gentleman from Oregon and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Oregon.

Mr. BLUMENAUER. I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Chair, 36 States and the District of Columbia have passed laws that provide legal access to medical marijuana in some form, and over 1 million patients now use medical marijuana to treat conditions ranging from seizures, anxiety, chronic pain, nausea associated with chemotherapy, and post-traumatic stress at the recommendation of their physician.

Over 213 million people reside in those jurisdictions; yet, according to Directive 2011-004, the Department of Veterans Affairs prohibits its medical

providers from completing forms brought by their patients seeking recommendations or opinions regarding a veteran's participation in a State medical marijuana program.

The amendment I am offering ensures that no funds made available to the VA can be used to implement this prohibition. The amendment will not encourage doctors or patients to recommend or use medical marijuana. It would not authorize the possession or use of marijuana at VA facilities.

It would simply free up VA providers to have an honest conversation about treatment options and recommend medical marijuana in accordance with State law if they think it is appropriate. It would not force veterans to not work with their primary care provider.

I am joined in offering this bipartisan amendment by Congressman HECK from Nevada, Congressman ROHR-ABACHER, and a series of other Members, some of whom you will hear from.

Over 20 percent of the 2.8 million American veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan suffer from PTSD and depression. They should not be forced outside the VA system to seek a simple recommendation about a treatment that might help them manage these conditions.

I will say, while nobody has ever died from a marijuana overdose, we are watching veterans have prescriptions for opiates who suffer from PTSD, for example, more than others, and their suicide rate is high. There is real danger in not being able to provide balanced treatment.

Our VA physicians should not be denied their First Amendment right to have an honest conversation about options and offer a recommendation they think could bring relief and well-being to a patient. Our veterans should not be treated as second class citizens in the States that permit medical marijuana.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chairman, I withdraw my reservation of a point of order.

The Acting CHAIR. The reservation of a point of order is withdrawn.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chair, I claim the time in opposition to the amendment.

The Acting CHAIR. The gentleman from Pennsylvania is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chairman, I do rise in opposition to my friend's amendment. We had a similar debate in the full committee just last week. The VA must comply with all Federal laws, including the Controlled Substances Act.

This act designates schedule I drugs, such as marijuana, as having no currently accepted medical use. There are criminal penalties associated with the production, distribution, and possession of these drugs.

The standing VA policy does not deny veterans who participate in State marijuana programs from also participating in VA substance abuse or clinical programs. It simply prohibits VA

clinicians from completing forms for their participation in such State programs or for providing or paying for marijuana authorized by a State program.

Veterans are able to participate in State programs. They just cannot possess marijuana at VA facilities. Changing the VA directive does not change the DEA's interpretation of Federal law on marijuana.

DEA has advised VA that its doctors cannot issue anything that could be construed as a prescription or endorsement of medical marijuana, so the amendment won't change the situation for veterans unless the VA physicians are willing to risk prosecution.

At this point, again, I would have to urge opposition.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. I move to strike the last word.

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

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Mr. Chairman, I support the amendment offered by Mr. BLUMENAUER.

Just recently, in Georgia, Governor Deal signed legislation that immediately legalized the use of medical marijuana to treat serious medical conditions. Georgia became the 36th State, plus Washington, D.C., to legalize marijuana extracts to treat diseases.

I believe that we should not limit the Veterans Health Administration in providing optimal pain care for our veterans. If medical marijuana is legal in the State, then the VA should be able to discuss that treatment option and allow the veteran to make his or her own choice.

I believe that the VA's published policy guidance related to the use of medical marijuana by veteran patients has become outdated. I believe supporting a veteran's right to use alternative methods to deal with pain is the right thing to do.

I support the amendment. I urge its adoption.

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

□ 1815

Mr. FARR. I thank the gentleman for yielding.

Mr. Chairman, I hope that you heard the amendment because it said nothing about the doctor's ability to issue a prescription for use of medical marijuana. This simply lifts a gag order.

Now, these doctors have taken an oath of office to do no harm. Their ability is to talk to patients. They can tell patients that there is medical marijuana available. They can also tell patients that you shouldn't try it, you shouldn't use it.

What you want is just an honest dialogue. You want to give doctors their professional capability to have a discussion with the veteran. That is all this bill does.

Our veterans are living in a civilian community. In 33 States, this is legal.

When they walk in with admitted problems and they want medical attention, the doctor cannot have a thorough discussion with them.

That is all this amendment adds. It says, Let's let these doctors be like the civilian doctors in the same offices in the same States, only maybe those civilian doctors can issue prescriptions where the veteran doctor can't.

Because of the reasons that the chairman talked about of how this drug is listed, this is very limiting, so let's lift the gag order. We owe it to our veterans to give them complete information when they ask for it, even if it means discussing medical marijuana.

I ask for an "aye" vote.

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Mr. Chair, I yield to the gentlewoman from California (Ms. LEE).

Ms. LEE. I thank the gentleman for yielding.

Mr. Chairman, I rise in very strong support of this bipartisan amendment, which I am very proud to cosponsor with my colleagues.

This would finally put an end to the misguided VA policy that keeps our veterans from receiving the medicine that they need. To date, 23 States, the District of Columbia, and Guam have passed legislation allowing legal access to medical marijuana.

What is more, similar amendments saying that the Federal Government should respect states' rights and the will of voters on this issue have passed the House with bipartisan support.

This amendment represents the will of more than 70 percent of voters who support patient access to medical marijuana and is supported across party lines.

Veterans should have the benefit of being able to know what the options are. So many of our veterans are suffering from PTSD and other medical problems, and possibly, this would help in terms of relieving their pain and providing for the quality of life that they so deserve.

This amendment would put an end to the policy that keeps our veterans from receiving the medicine, counseling, and care they so deserve, and I hope we have an "aye" vote on this.

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. May I inquire of the chair how much time is remaining?

The Acting CHAIR. The gentleman from Georgia has 1 minute remaining.

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. I yield to the gentlewoman from Nevada (Ms. TITUS).

Ms. TITUS. I thank the gentleman for yielding.

I want to say, very simply, that we shortchange our veterans if we don't give them the opportunity to have every possible medical treatment that is out there.

We know that certain States have legalized medical marijuana. In those States, our veterans deserve to have that as an option. To shortchange them would just be unconscionable, and I urge a "yes" vote.

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

Mr. BLUMENAUER. May I inquire as to how much time is remaining?

The Acting CHAIR. The gentleman from Oregon (Mr. BLUMENAUER) has 2½ minutes remaining, and the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. DENT) has 3½ minutes remaining.

Mr. BLUMENAUER. I yield 1½ minutes to the gentleman from California (Mr. ROHRBACHER).

Mr. ROHRBACHER. Mr. Chairman, the question we are discussing is simply whether Veterans Affairs physicians can recommend the use of marijuana or not recommend the use of marijuana to their patients.

As Republicans, we supposedly believe in the doctor-patient relationship, but apparently, some of my colleagues believe that that relationship is not relevant when it comes to VA doctors and their patients, the patients who happen to be our Nation's great heroes who went off to defend us in war.

It is criminal that we send our men and women off to war, where their minds and bodies are broken, and then deny them the ability to obtain a medical recommendation from a legitimate VA doctor upon their return home.

Why is it we have faith in the medical qualifications of Congress to determine the best medical practices rather than those people who are doctors in the Department of Veterans Affairs?

I would submit that perhaps marijuana is a better option for some patients—and maybe not—but we should stop this heavy-handed, top-down approach and allow the Department of Veterans Affairs physicians and their patients to determine for themselves the best use and the best treatment that they would be able to have.

Let's respect these people and their rights. I thought we Republicans believed in the doctor-patient relationship. Either you do or you don't. If you vote this down, you don't believe in the doctor-patient relationship for our veterans, of all people.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chairman, I understand my colleagues are very sincere in their attempt. I am sympathetic to at least listening to the arguments for medicinal marijuana, but this discussion must be driven by the science.

I would love to hear from the National Institutes of Health, Food and Drug Administration, and the medical community formally about their views on this issue prior to us legislating on this matter.

At this time, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Maryland, Dr. HARRIS.

Mr. HARRIS. Mr. Chairman, as a veteran and a physician and someone who has treated veterans, I appreciate the sacrifice our men and women in uniform have made and our duty to give them the best possible care.

That means care based on real science, not promise, not hope, not conjecture, not politics, not as part of an agenda, but real science.

The chairman says we should wait for good science and we should wait to

hear from the experts. We don't need to wait. We have heard. Dr. Nora Volkow, the head of the National Institute on Drug Abuse at the NIH, says medical marijuana, in the current state of medical knowledge, is not a good idea.

There just isn't very good science behind what it works for and what it doesn't; so I agree, when good science is in hand, let's give doctors carte blanche to discuss that. That science isn't available.

Worse than that, Mr. Chairman, this bill does nothing to advance the knowledge of science on this issue because it doesn't say we are going to sign veterans up for research so they can help other veterans answer the question of whether or not it helps.

It doesn't do anything like that. It doesn't make it easier for them to enlist in research protocols to address the scientific questions. Now, the chairman of the subcommittee asked, Well, we should hear from the FDA; we should hear from DEA.

We hear from all of them. They say medical marijuana is not scientifically based at this time. I have offered this to the Members, but the author of the amendment and I have been to the NIH. He knows my interest in getting to the bottom of what works and what doesn't.

At this point in time, we are not doing our veterans a service. We could. If we asked to engage in more scientific research, we could do them a service. If this amendment, in fact, encouraged in any way, shape, or form further research on what works and what doesn't, we could be doing them a service.

Sadly enough, Mr. Chairman, it doesn't; and that is why I oppose this effort—not helping our veterans, but this specific effort.

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

The Acting CHAIR. The gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. DENT) has 1 minute remaining. The gentleman from Oregon (Mr. BLUMENAUER) has 1 minute remaining.

Mr. DENT. At this time, I yield the balance of my time to the distinguished gentleman from Louisiana, Dr. FLEMING.

Mr. FLEMING. I thank my friend, the chairman, for yielding.

As a practicing physician and a veteran myself, the way we approach health care is not to just allow any healthcare provider to do whatever he or she wants to do at the time. That is simply not the way health care works.

Let's look specifically at the problem of PTSD, which is one of the worst problems that we are dealing with today among veterans.

What have we found just in the last year? Smoking pot increases psychotic episodes by a factor of two to four times normal. The conversion to schizophrenia, a permanent mental disorder, is enhanced by pot by a factor of two—double.

Why in the world would we give a drug that is addictive, that is prohibited under schedule I, that is not accepted for any specific mental disease or disorder and enhances psychosis and schizophrenia, why are we going to give that to our veterans, especially those with PTSD? That is just absolutely insane.

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

Mr. BLUMENAUER. First, it isn't just PTSD that medical marijuana is used for. There is a whole host of other conditions that were available.

Second, the marijuana medical train has left the station. A million Americans have a legal right to use medical marijuana, and they do so. You want to treat veterans differently.

Third, medical marijuana is nowhere near as addictive as what is happening to our veterans right now. Veterans seen by agency doctors are dying from prescription drug overdoses nearly twice the national average.

Nobody dies from an overdose of marijuana; and the VA doctors prescribe significantly more opiates, which are highly addictive, to patients with PTSD and depression than other veterans, even though those people suffering those conditions are more at risk of overdose and suicide.

Get your facts straight. I am happy to do more research; I have work coming forward, but, in the meantime, don't treat these veterans as second class citizens.

If you want to be concerned, be concerned about the explosion of addictive drugs that are being prescribed to people who we should be giving more care.

I yield back the balance of my time.

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

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

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

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

AMENDMENT NO. 1 OFFERED BY MR. BABIN

Mr. BABIN. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will designate the amendment.

The text of the amendment is as follows:

At the end of the bill (before the short title), insert the following:

SEC. ____ None of the funds made available by this Act may be used to carry out the Appraised Value Offer program of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 223, the gentleman from Texas and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas.

Mr. BABIN. Mr. Chairman, I rise to offer an amendment to terminate the

VA's abused Appraised Value Offer Program so that these funds can be used to better serve the needs of our Nation's veterans, rather than VA bureaucrats.

The VA spent nearly \$300,000 of taxpayer money to move a VA employee 140 miles, specifically from Washington, D.C., to Philadelphia. That is \$300,000 that could have been used to care for numerous deserving veterans who have served this Nation in uniform, but instead was spent to move someone 140 miles.

At the request of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, the Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General is investigating this abuse, and here is what we have learned so far.

Under the VA's Appraised Value Offer Program, the VA paid more than \$80,000 to one of its government employees and \$211,000 to a Federal contractor that was tasked with selling that employee's home.

At a time when the VA is struggling to meet the medical needs of our veterans, it is unconscionable that the VA would waste \$300,000 in taxpayer money to move someone 140 miles.

Unfortunately, this is just another disturbing example of the lack of transparency and accountability at the VA. The folks at the VA are already under scrutiny for their shocking failure to properly care for veterans, and now, to spend \$300,000 on this is absolutely abusive. Clearly, the VA cannot be trusted to exercise common sense with this program, and it is time to end it.

As a military veteran and a father of a decorated Navy SEAL, I am deeply frustrated with the abuse and mismanagement at the VA. Our veterans must be the VA's first priority, not its bureaucrats.

I would like to thank House Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman JEFF MILLER for shedding light on this important issue and holding the VA accountable for failing to put veterans first.

I urge my colleagues to support this amendment and to end this outrageous abuse within the Department of Veterans Affairs.

□ 1830

Mr. DENT. Will the gentleman yield?

Mr. BABIN. I yield to the gentleman from Pennsylvania.

Mr. DENT. I just wanted to state I do not object to the gentleman's amendment. He raised the Philadelphia issue. I am very much aware of it and certainly concerned about it, and I understand the purpose.

I also understand the purpose of the Appraised Value Offer Program, when a valued employee would otherwise stand to lose thousands in the sale of a house to move at the request of their employing agency. But sometimes the cost of the program seems a little excessive, in my view.

In conference, we may need to tweak the language to make sure that we aren't jeopardizing VA's efforts to

move talented staff to areas where they are needed. But as I said, I do not object to the amendment.

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

The Acting CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Texas (Mr. BABIN).

The amendment was agreed to.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MS. ADAMS

Ms. ADAMS. Mr. Chair, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

At the end of the bill (before the short title), insert the following:

SEC. _____. (1) Subject to paragraphs (2) and (3), amounts made available under the "General Operating Expenses, Veterans Benefits Administration" account for fiscal year 2016 may be used by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide discretionary competitive grants for State and local governments to establish or expand technology systems that develop a coordinated network of private, public and nonprofit services and resources to better serve veterans and their family members. A State or local government awarded a grant under this section shall work with an entity that has experience working with comprehensive coordinated networks, protects privacy of veterans and their families, ensures the quality of providers, and has a metrics system to effectively measure success of the network.

(2) Amounts used as described in paragraph (1) may not result in a more than 10 percent aggregate decrease in the total amount made available by this Act for the "General Operating Expenses, Veterans Benefits Administration" account.

(3) Each grant made under paragraph (1) shall be subject to the approval of the Committees on Appropriations of the House of Representatives and the Senate.

Mr. DENT (during the reading). Mr. Chair, I reserve a point of order on the gentleman's amendment.

The Acting CHAIR. A point of order is reserved.

The Clerk will read.

The Clerk continued to read.

Ms. ADAMS (during the reading). Mr. Chair, I ask unanimous consent that we dispense with the reading.

The Acting CHAIR. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from North Carolina?

There was no objection.

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 223, the gentleman from North Carolina and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from North Carolina.

Ms. ADAMS. Mr. Chairman, I want to thank Chairman DENT and Ranking Member BISHOP for allowing me to present my amendment.

Mr. Chair, I rise today to highlight the need for better access to resources and services for our veterans and military families.

The U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs and other Federal agencies are providing a vast array of services and resources that our heroes deserve, but the Federal Government alone is not able to address every challenge our servicemen and -women and their fami-

lies are facing and will face in years to come. Many community providers and local governments are starting their own initiatives to assist veterans in applying for benefits with VA and other organizations.

For those 37,000 veterans living in the 12th Congressional District of North Carolina, it is important that community-based groups work collaboratively with local, State, and Federal Government service providers so that recipients know where all of these different benefits and resources are and how to access them.

Additionally, we need to make sure we are holding service providers accountable and that performance measures are in place.

My amendment encourages the VA to assist with establishing and expanding technology systems at the local and State level to create a more unified network of veteran services. These networks would include private, public, and nonprofit partners who are qualified to serve veterans and their families.

My amendment directs funding to a grant program that has not yet been authorized by law, and will be subject to a point of order.

I look forward to working with the House Veterans' Affairs Committee and with the Appropriations Committee to make this funding a reality for our community providers in the future.

The veterans in my district, in Mecklenburg, Cabarrus, Rowan, Davidson, Forsyth, and Guilford Counties, have noted that they have difficulties finding and accessing the services that are available to them and their families.

As more servicemen and -women come home from serving overseas, Congress must support innovation and local solutions to providing services for our Nation's veterans.

I thank the chairman and the ranking member for allowing me to present my amendment.

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

The Acting CHAIR. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from North Carolina?

There was no objection.

AMENDMENT NO. 2 OFFERED BY MR. ROTHFUS

Mr. ROTHFUS. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will designate the amendment.

The text of the amendment as follows:

At the end of the bill (before the short title), insert the following:

SEC. _____. None of the funds made available by this Act may be used by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to pay a performance award under section 5384 of title 5, United States Code.

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 223, the gentleman from Pennsylvania and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Pennsylvania.

Mr. ROTHFUS. Mr. Chairman, I rise today to stand with our Nation's veterans and their families. We owe these

brave individuals and their loved ones a debt that can never be repaid. When our Nation called, they answered. Our veterans served bravely in theaters around the world, kept us safe, and helped to spread American values and the freedoms that we hold dear.

Our veterans made unimaginable sacrifices to their health, to their well-being, and to their families. They fulfilled their commitment to our great Nation, and we must now uphold the commitments we made to them. It is for that reason that I rise in strong support of the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Act under consideration today. It is also why this amendment is so important.

For the last 2 years, I have offered this amendment with the same simple message: VA senior executives need to take responsibility, fix the problems, and do their jobs. As public servants, these senior executives have a solemn obligation to ensure that veterans receive the respect, support, and care that they have earned.

But one only needs to take a quick survey of the tremendous investigative work that Chairman MILLER, Congressman MIKE COFFMAN, and the rest of my colleagues on the Veterans' Affairs Committee have been doing to see that, despite our efforts to reform and improve the agency culture at the VA, little to nothing has changed.

The VA is still failing veterans in Pennsylvania and across the country. Veterans still have difficulty accessing care, claims and appeals are still backlogged, whistleblowers are still being retaliated against, and reckless, wasteful spending has reached new levels.

For example, in my home State of Pennsylvania, the inspector general recently conducted an investigation at the Philadelphia regional office after receiving numerous complaints that there was data manipulation and that management was mistreating and retaliating against staff. The IG confirmed a number of these allegations and found tens of thousands of unanswered veteran inquiries.

Many of us are also familiar with the VA Hospital project in Aurora, Colorado. Over a decade ago, veterans in Denver were promised a new medical facility; yet, due to gross mismanagement, the project is well behind schedule and is now going to cost taxpayers more than \$1 billion over budget.

To his credit, Secretary McDonald has publicly recognized many of his Department's failings, has spoken of increased transparency and accountability, and acknowledges that a wholesale culture change will be necessary. But this transformation has not yet occurred, and accountability is certainly still lacking.

To date, only a few of the senior executives who have been found responsible for the misconduct at the VA have actually been terminated. Some have been placed on extended paid leave, some reassigned, while others have been promoted.

In fiscal year 2013, the VA shelled out some \$2.8 million in bonuses solely to its executives, an increase from the previous year, when the agency paid out \$2.3 million.

I have always maintained that taxpayer-funded bonuses to senior executives of an organization with this sort of abysmal performance record are ridiculous. These dollars would be better spent providing our veterans with the first-rate service and care they rightly deserve.

That is why I am offering this amendment again this year, to direct that none of the funds appropriated may be used to pay for senior executive bonuses. The amendment was adopted the last 2 years and was included in bills that passed out of this Chamber with wide bipartisan support.

Congress certainly has an important role to play in reforming the VA. We need to continue our oversight activities and pass the sorts of reforms that are included in bills brought to the floor by Chairman MILLER and the Veterans' Affairs Committee. However, while we do that, we also need to ensure that not a single dime is spent on paying bonuses to senior executives until the problems at the VA are fixed.

I would like to thank Chairman MILLER and Congressmen FITZPATRICK, KELLY, TIPTON, CRAWFORD, and HUELSKAMP for their support.

I urge all of my other colleagues to stand with our Nation's veterans and support increased transparency.

Mr. DENT. Will the gentleman yield?

Mr. ROTHFUS. I yield to the gentleman from Pennsylvania.

Mr. DENT. I just want to say I rise in support of the amendment.

A number of Members have offered amendments relating to the VA performance bonus awards. The gentleman's amendment is the most comprehensive, and I would encourage other Members to join with Mr. ROTHFUS rather than offer their own amendments.

We have all certainly been outraged by the behavior of some VA employees and the consequences for veterans' health and well-being resulting from incompetence, deceit, and deception. A ban on all senior executive service performance bonuses is a needed wake-up call to the VA bureaucracy which, as we have seen, needs to change its culture to ensure veterans' needs are their top priority.

I support the amendment.

Mr. ROTHFUS. I thank the chairman.

I yield my remaining time to the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. CRAWFORD).

Mr. CRAWFORD. I will make it quick, Mr. Chairman.

I rise in support of this amendment. Just last year, the House voted unanimously to strip out funding for bonuses to Senior Executive Service employees at the VA because we were appalled by the heinous treatment of our veterans. And even though I opposed the legisla-

tion, later, both Chambers voted to reinstate many of these bonuses. Some of these executives are the very people who contributed to the plight of our VA hospitals.

We can't allow this negligent behavior to continue to impact the care of those who sacrificed so much on behalf of our Nation's security. In fact, no award should be reinstated until significant improvements are made toward transparency.

I want to make this point. In my home State of Arkansas, \$8 million of Federal funds were used to build solar panels in a VA parking lot. But those panels have sat unplugged and inoperable for years, and now some of the panels are being torn down in order to make room for a parking garage that they knew in advance was coming, and yet they spent that money recklessly on another project. This is exactly the type of poor planning and behavior that shouldn't be rewarded, even though it has been.

This amendment makes sure that no Federal funds in the MILCON-VA Appropriations Act are used to pay performance awards to VA senior officials. I encourage its passage.

The Acting CHAIR. The time of the gentleman has expired.

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Mr. Chairman, I claim the time in opposition.

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

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Mr. Chairman, we are all outraged with regard to the claims backlog and the incidences of poor quality health services and safety. The current claims backlog is unacceptable.

There is no question that the VA has struggled to successfully deliver one of its key missions: to provide timely ratings of disabilities. However, the VA has reduced the backlog by 44 percent.

Should we ignore that?

It is also clear that some VA health facilities have had serious issues that put the health, safety, and well-being of our veterans at risk. This, too, is unacceptable. Where these failures have occurred, it is hard to imagine how VA leaders of these facilities could have received high performance ratings and substantial bonuses.

However, this amendment will not provide any solution in the short-term and, in fact, may have long-term consequences and compound the very problems that it attempts to address. This amendment would make the VA a less attractive option than other agencies when it comes to recruiting and retaining quality executive leaders, and it will not have the very talent that it needs to solve the problems that it faces today, like the claims backlog and the healthcare deficiencies.

Furthermore, SES pay and bonuses are governed by title 5 of the United States Code and administered by the Office of Personnel Management. Any change to title 5 to address VA would then also apply to all other Federal agencies.

Attempting to do an across-the-board, one-size-fits-all fix will penalize those dedicated VA executives who are working hard and well to find solutions to the VA's problems. This is nonsense. I urge all Members to vote "no."

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

The Acting CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. ROTHFUS).

The amendment was agreed to.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MS. JACKSON LEE

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

At the end of the bill (before the short title), insert the following:

SEC. ____ None of the funds made available by this Act for benefits for homeless veterans and training and outreach programs may be used by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs in contravention of subchapter III of chapter 20 of title 38, United States Code.

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 223, the gentlewoman from Texas and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Texas.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Chairman, I thank the chairman and ranking member of the subcommittee again for the work, and I raise again a picture of three ladies who look attractive in this picture.

Mr. Chairman, and colleagues, these are homeless vets. These are vets who bonded with each other in a homeless shelter.

The good news is that we have made progress on providing services for homeless vets. But I want to emphasize, through this amendment, that we will continue to raise and focus on the needs of homeless vets.

I offer the Jackson Lee amendment because I believe reducing and eliminating homelessness among veterans, those who risked their lives to protect our freedom, should also be one of the Nation's highest priorities. I would like this bill to have it as its highest priority.

□ 1845

Homelessness among the American veteran population is on the rise in the United States. We must be proactive in giving back to those who have given us so much.

Even though the administration has done an enormous job, has made great strides in bringing down the numbers of homeless vets, for those that they bring down, then, for some reason—whether it is the loss of a job or medical issues—vets are becoming homeless every day.

My amendment will help remind us of our obligation to provide our veterans the assistance needed to avoid homelessness, which includes adequately funding the program for Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing and,

as well, to be able to ensure those centers are there for our veterans.

Today in our country, we have mentioned the numbers of veterans that exist: 100,000 veterans, male and female, are homeless; 200,000 experience homelessness. In my hometown of Houston, for example, between the years of 2010 and 2012, the number of homeless vets increased from 771 to 1,162.

I want to acknowledge the city of Houston that has worked on their Homeless Veterans Project; the George Hotel that has worked on the Homeless Veterans Project; many other veteran organizations; U.S.VETS, who has worked on the Homeless Veterans Project; and a grant that came some years ago to the Houston Housing Authority to work on the Homeless Veterans Project.

But this amendment is to, again, establish in this important legislation the idea that we must fight for our veterans, and we must ensure that every year, we take the temperature of the Nation's homeless vets, the temperature that says, if it is high, the numbers have been going up; if it is low, we are doing our job because the numbers of homeless vets are going down.

Let me thank the many shelters that deal with our vets, and particularly in my district, St. John's United Methodist Church for the work they have done, along with many other entities that believe that cutting the numbers of homeless vets should be the end.

I yield to the gentleman from Pennsylvania.

Mr. DENT. I just wanted to let the gentlelady know that we support the amendment, which was accepted last year. I know the gentlelady is offering it to reaffirm the congressional obligation to provide veterans the assistance they need to avoid homelessness.

I accept the amendment.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Reclaiming my time, let me thank the chairman. With that, I thank my colleagues and ask my colleagues to support the Jackson Lee amendment to end homelessness for our veterans here in America.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Chair, none of the funds made available by this Act for the Department of Veteran Affairs—Benefits for Homeless Veterans and Training and Outreach Programs may be used in contravention of the title 38, Part II, Chapter 20, Subchapter II and III of the U.S. Code.

This amendment will help ensure that the rate of homelessness among veterans in the United States does not increase.

I thank Subcommittee Chairman DENT and Ranking Member BISHOP for their hard work in shepherding this important legislation to the floor.

I offer the Jackson Lee Amendment because I believe reducing and eliminating homelessness among veterans, those who risked their lives to protect our freedom, should also be one of the nation's highest priorities.

Homelessness among the American veteran population is on the rise in the United States

and we must be proactive in giving back to those who have given so much to us.

My amendment will help remind us of our obligation to provide our veterans the assistance needed to avoid homelessness, which includes adequately funding for programs Veterans Administration Supportive Housing (VASH) that provide case-management services, adequate housing facilities, mental health support, and address other areas that contribute to veteran homelessness.

VASH is a jointly-administered permanent supportive housing program for disabled Veterans experiencing homelessness in which VA medical Centers provide referrals and case management while Public Housing Agencies (PHAs) administer the Section 8 housing vouchers.

Mr. Chair, our veterans deserve the best services available, and I believe that we could be doing much more for them.

Today, in our country, there are approximately 107,000 veterans (male and female) who are homeless on any given night. And perhaps twice as many (200,000) experience homelessness at some point during the course of a year.

Many other veterans are considered near homeless or at risk because of their poverty, lack of support from family and friends, and dismal living conditions in cheap hotels or in overcrowded or substandard housing.

While significant progress has been made, ending homelessness among veterans remains a big challenge.

In my hometown of Houston for example, between the years 2010 and 2012, the number of homeless veterans increased from 771 to 1,162.

We must remain vigilant and continue to fight for those who put on the uniform and fought for us.

Providing a home for veterans to come home to every night is the very least we can do.

Mr. Chair, programs like VASH have succeeded in changing lives. In 2012 alone, 35,905 veterans lived in the public housing provided by VASH.

I have seen the impact of such grants in my home state of Texas, and within my congressional district in Houston, and I am sure that this funding has positively impacted many communities across this country.

In Texas, there are committed groups in Houston, working to eradicate the issue of homelessness.

For example, the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center has been involved in changing veterans' lives in a mighty way by providing Veterans and their families with access to affordable housing and medical services that will help them get back on their feet.

Mr. Chair, we cannot let this issue of homelessness continue.

I urge my colleagues to support the Jackson Lee Amendment and commit ourselves to the hard but necessary work of ending veteran homelessness in America.

The Acting CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON LEE).

The amendment was agreed to.

AMENDMENT NO. 6 OFFERED BY MR. ROE OF TENNESSEE

Mr. ROE of Tennessee. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will designate the amendment.

The text of the amendment is as follows:

At the end of the bill (before the short title), insert the following:

SEC. _____. Not more than \$4,400,000 of the funds provided by this Act under the heading "Department of Veterans Affairs—Departmental Administration—General Administration" may be used for the Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs, and the amount otherwise provided under such heading is hereby reduced by \$1,500,000.

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 223, the gentleman from Tennessee and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Tennessee.

Mr. ROE of Tennessee. Mr. Chairman, I am offering this amendment that would cut \$1.5 million from the budget of the VA's Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs, or OCLA. The OCLA is tasked with being the liaison between Congress and the VA. It is their job to provide information to Congress to help with casework and basic information.

What is unfortunate is that, even after the Committee on Veterans' Affairs' investigation into the largest scandal in VA history continues, it is still the perception that the VA will do everything in its power to withhold information to prevent negative news from being made public. Unfortunately, as many veterans can tell you, timeliness is not a word the VA understands or cares to learn.

In VA's budget submission, they assert: "The mission of OCLA is to improve the lives of veterans and their families by advancing pro-veteran legislation and maintaining responsive and effective communications with Congress."

As of April 24, the Committee on Veterans' Affairs had 78 outstanding requests for information with OCLA, and over half of these have been pending for over 60 days. On average, it is now taking the OCLA 69 days to respond to the committee's requests. There is one that dates back all the way to 2012. These numbers do not reflect responsive or effective communications. What is even more disappointing is that the requests have gone unanswered despite the fact that the OCLA's budget has gone up by 36 percent since fiscal year 2009.

I understand that other parts of the Federal Government, such as the Office of General Counsel, the Office of Management and Budget, and in some cases, the President's own staff may be delaying Congress' requests for months. However, OCLA is chartered with being Congress' connection to the rest of the VA, and, as such, they bear the burden of these untimely responses.

The current delays in getting information to Congress is not a new phenomenon, as the VA Committee has now held three separate hearings that have exposed VA's lack of transparency

to Congress and showed that even when we do receive information we have requested, it is so old or so heavily redacted that it is basically useless.

These requests are critically important to Congress' role in providing meaningful oversight over the second-largest agency in the Federal Government. It is our duty to be a strong check on the executive branch. While Secretary McDonald is trying everything he can to change the culture at the VA, Congress must send a message that providing answers to our questions 69 days after we have requested it is simply unacceptable to us, unacceptable to the taxpayers, and, most importantly, it is unacceptable to the veterans. Passage of this amendment would send that message.

I thank Chairman DENT for his hard work on this bill.

Mr. DENT. Will the gentleman yield?

Mr. ROE of Tennessee. I yield to the gentleman from Pennsylvania.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chair, I rise in support of the gentleman's amendment.

I certainly share Dr. ROE's frustration with the VA Congressional and Legislative Affairs Office stalling the delivery of important information Congress has requested to fulfill its oversight responsibilities.

Frankly, the only time I have seen that office act with lightning speed was in its delivery to all Members of the House last week in an inaccurate and critical portrayal of this appropriations bill.

So, again, I support your amendment.

Mr. ROE of Tennessee. Mr. Chairman, I yield 1 minute to the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. COSTELLO) to speak on the amendment.

Mr. COSTELLO of Pennsylvania. Mr. Chairman, I rise today in support of Dr. ROE's amendment to address the lack of accountability and transparency at the Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs.

As the gentleman from Tennessee mentioned, OCLA is meant to serve as a bridge between Congress and the VA to help facilitate access to information that we, as a legislative body, request in our oversight role.

Since I have been in Congress and a member of the Veterans' Affairs Committee all of 4 months, it is clear that more transparency is needed.

Let me give you a clear example of a pending request, an unusually long unfulfilled request that is still outstanding. Back in December, as part of the committee's continued investigation into malfeasance at the Philadelphia RO, the committee requested copies of all EEO complaints and MSBP files that have been filed at this location since 2008.

Late last year, we were told that the files were in boxes and ready to be shipped to Washington, D.C., for our review. It is now 5 months later, and after numerous requests, we have only received a few of the files we requested.

The inability of the VA to provide these documents is mind-boggling. I don't know how else to describe it.

The bottom line is: ignoring reasonable, relevant requests is unacceptable. There has to be accountability. This amendment does that. It does not impact or diminish in any way the treatment and care of our veterans. I urge adoption of Dr. ROE's amendment to demand accountability.

Mr. ROE of Tennessee. Mr. Chairman, I urge my colleagues to adopt this amendment.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. I claim the time in opposition.

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

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Mr. Chair, I think that the concerns raised by the gentleman in offering the amendment are perhaps well taken from time to time. But I think this amendment is punitive. I think it is counterproductive. And I think it is going to make it much more difficult to get the results that the gentleman is seeking.

Because of that, I think that the amendment should be defeated. It is a bad amendment. And I think it would be bad for morale for the Department. And I think it would be bad generally for the public. I urge opposition and a "no" vote on this amendment.

I yield back the balance of my time.

The Acting CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. ROE).

The amendment was agreed to.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. POCAN

Mr. POCAN. Mr. Chair, I have an amendment at the desk.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chair, I reserve a point of order on the gentleman's amendment.

The Acting CHAIR. A point of order is reserved.

The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

At the end of the bill (before the short title), insert the following:

SEC. _____. None of the funds made available in this Act may be used to withhold any report of an Inspector General from any member of Congress in any case where the member of Congress has requested that such report be provided.

Mr. POCAN (during the reading). Mr. Chair, I ask unanimous consent that the amendment be considered as read.

The Acting CHAIR. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Wisconsin?

Mr. DENT. I object to the unanimous consent. I don't know which amendment we are talking about here.

The Acting CHAIR. Objection is heard.

The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk continued to read.

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 223, the gentleman from Wisconsin and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Wisconsin.

Mr. POCAN. Mr. Chair, I thank Subcommittee Chairman DENT and Ranking Member BISHOP for all of their work on this bill.

This amendment is a simple amendment to make sure that Members of Congress have access to inspector general reports, should they request one.

We recently came across this issue when there was a bipartisan field hearing in Tomah, Wisconsin, regarding the Tomah VA facility.

The Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General had a report regarding the overprescription of opiates resulting in multiple deaths in the area. And in this case, the VA Office of Inspector General completed a report that uncovered these practices, and they gave the recommendations to the local and regional manager. However, the report and these recommendations were never reported to the Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Bob McDonald, any congressional committees of jurisdiction, or the public, as the report was administratively closed. What is more, the initial report was requested by a Member of the House of Representatives, and the VA Office of Inspector General failed to even provide the completed report to the Member of Congress.

Ultimately, that Member of Congress had to do a Freedom of Information request, a very unusual request, in order to get a copy of that report. Instead, it was left largely to local facilities to implement the recommended changes without any oversight from the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs or from the Members of Congress who had specifically requested that report. It is all about sunlight. I think we function better if we could have that information. And we should make sure that those reports are available to every Member of Congress. This amendment would simply make sure that no funds can be expended in withholding a report, as this report was in the State of Wisconsin.

I yield back the balance of my time.

POINT OF ORDER

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chairman, I make a point of order against the amendment because it proposes to change existing law and constitutes legislation in an appropriations bill and, therefore, violates clause 2 of rule XXI.

The rule states in pertinent part:

“An amendment to a general appropriation bill shall not be in order if changing existing law.”

The amendment imposes additional duties.

Therefore, I would request a ruling from the Chair.

The Acting CHAIR. Does any other Member wish to be heard on the point of order?

If not, the Chair will rule.

As the Chair ruled on an analogous amendment on June 13, 2011, this amendment includes language requiring a new determination by the relevant executive branch official of the current membership of a body in the

legislative branch. The amendment, therefore, constitutes legislation in violation of clause 2 of rule XXI.

The point of order is sustained, and the amendment is not in order.

□ 1900

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MRS. NOEM

Mrs. NOEM. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

At the end of the bill (before the short title), insert the following:

SEC. _____. None of the funds made available by this Act may be used to end, suspend, or relocate hospital-based services with respect to a health care facility of the Department of Veterans Affairs that is—

(1) the subject of an environmental impact statement in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.);

(2) designated as a National Historic Landmark by the National Park Service; and

(3) located in a highly rural area.

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 223, the gentlewoman from South Dakota and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from South Dakota.

Mrs. NOEM. Mr. Chairman, the Department of Veterans Affairs is entrusted with the protection of a multitude of historic facilities. As I noted last year during debate on the VA's budget, the National Trust for Historic Preservation has found serious deficiencies in the manner in which the VA operates these facilities.

These VA facilities, especially the medical facilities, are more important than ever. We are seeing thousands of veterans returning home after fighting in conflicts abroad, many suffering from chronic service-related injuries. The last thing we want to do is to force these veterans to travel hundreds of miles to receive treatment, as is often the case in rural States like South Dakota.

The health of these historic medical facilities is directly connected to our veterans' health, and this amendment would prohibit the VA from curtailing healthcare services at the historic facilities located in rural areas.

I thank the chairman and his staff for all of their assistance on this amendment, and I urge everyone's support for this amendment as well.

Mr. DENT. Will the gentlewoman yield?

Mrs. NOEM. I yield to the gentleman from Pennsylvania.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chairman, I am aware the South Dakota delegation has been struggling with the VA's determination to move services out of historic facilities into a new geographic area. We had language in last year's bill forcing the VA to do a full analysis of the consequences of the facility moving.

I have no objection to including the amendment Representative NOEM is offering this year.

Mrs. NOEM. I thank the gentleman. I appreciate those words of support. It

certainly is important to the veterans in our State and in many States across the country that often find it very difficult to travel to local VA facilities, but now, with the closure of some of these facilities, they would have to travel hundreds of miles.

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

The Acting CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentlewoman from South Dakota (Mrs. NOEM).

The amendment was agreed to.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. POCAN

Mr. POCAN. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

At the end of the bill (before the short title), insert the following new section:

SEC. 5 _____. None of the funds made available in this Act may be used to enter into a contract with any person whose disclosures of a proceeding with a disposition listed in section 2313(c)(1) of title 41, United States Code, in the Federal Awardee Performance and Integrity Information System include the term “Fair Labor Standards Act”.

Mr. POCAN (during the reading). Mr. Chair, I ask unanimous consent that the amendment be considered read.

The Acting CHAIR. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Wisconsin?

There was no objection.

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 223, the gentleman from Wisconsin and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Wisconsin.

Mr. POCAN. Mr. Chairman, hopefully, the second time is the charm. This is an amendment on behalf of myself, Representative ELLISON, and the Congressional Progressive Caucus.

This amendment would bar taxpayer dollars from going to companies that have recent wage theft convictions or civil penalties reported in the government's contracting database.

No hard-working American should ever have to worry that their employer will refuse to pay his or her work, overtime, or take money out of their paycheck, especially if they work for a Federal contractor.

As a small-business owner who has had previous contracts, it is not a right, but an earned responsibility and privilege to have these contracts, and any employer that would do wage theft—which is considered to pay less than the minimum wage, to be shorting someone their hours, being forced to work off the clock, not being paid overtime, or not being paid at all—should not be able to get these Federal contracts.

A recent National Employment Law Project survey found that 21 percent of Federal contract workers were not paid overtime, and 11 percent have been forced to work off the clock. Eighteen Federal contractors were recipients of one of the largest 100 penalties issued

by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration of the Department of Labor between 2007 and 2012, and almost half of the total initial penalty dollars assessed for OSHA violations were against companies holding Federal contracts in 2012.

Overall, 49 Federal contractors responsible for large violations of Federal labor laws were cited for 1,776 separate violations of these laws and paid \$196 million in penalties and assessments; yet, just in fiscal year 2012, these same companies were awarded \$81 billion in taxpayer dollars.

The Federal Government cannot look the other way when Federal contractors take advantage of their employees. Those who violate the Fair Labor Standards Act deserve more than a slap on the wrist; they don't deserve to do business with the government anymore. Those contractors who engage in wage theft should not be rewarded with contracts to do business with the Federal Government.

This was included in last year's appropriation. We would appreciate consideration again in this year's appropriation, to make sure that we are protecting the workers for these Federal contractors.

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

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

The Acting CHAIR. The gentleman from Pennsylvania is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chairman, I do have some concerns with this amendment. As I read it, it appears to be a "one strike and you are out" type amendment.

Mr. WALBERG. Will the gentleman yield?

Mr. DENT. I yield to the gentleman from Michigan.

Mr. WALBERG. I thank the chairman. I appreciate the concern that my colleague has on this issue. I know it is sincere. I think there is every one in this Chamber that has concerns that our laborers, our employees, and individual citizens be treated fairly and treated with respect, safety, and all of the rest by their employers.

Mr. Chairman, we all agree that bad actors who deny workers basic protections, including wage and overtime pay, shouldn't be rewarded with government contracts funded by taxpayer dollars. That is a given.

There is a suspension and disbarment process already in place under current law. If an employer has a history of bad behavior, Federal agencies know about it and have the authority to deny that employer Federal contracts. My question is: Has anyone suggested the current process isn't working? I don't believe so, Mr. Chairman.

Earlier this year, we held a joint subcommittee hearing, in fact, on this issue in relation to the President's executive order that functions to blacklist Federal contractors for alleged Federal and State labor law violations, including the FLSA.

The committee received a substantial load of evidence regarding the inherent flaws of the President's executive order, which, like this amendment, supersedes agencies' current authority to exclude problematic contractors, causing significant delays and disruption to the Federal procurement system.

There is agreement on both sides of the aisle that the FLSA is the cornerstone of workers' wage and hour protections, but in many ways, the regulations implementing the law are flawed and outdated.

For that reason, we have asked for consideration with the President, with the administration, the Department of Labor, both sides of the aisle, to look at reforming and fixing the Fair Labor Standards Act that has been in place an awful long time before present practices and doesn't fit with the 21st century workplace.

A report by the Government Accountability Office found that litigation stemming from FLSA claims continues to be a significant problem. These aren't all from bad actors, but in many cases, it comes—if not most cases—from an employer trying to keep up with present law, present functions, and present regulations that don't even fit with FLSA.

Mr. Chairman, I would ask my colleagues to reject this amendment. We have in place opportunities now that can and should be used. We even have instances where the Labor Department has violated, and, under this amendment that is being offered, they would be held at risk as well.

It is not an amendment that is needed; it is an amendment that will disrupt the process, and it is an amendment that will not move us forward and really make changes with FLSA that can and should be made.

I urge rejection.

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

Mr. POCAN. Mr. Chairman, I would just like to say I agree with the gentleman. I was at the hearing, and I heard the conversation that was there. The difference we had is that the hearing—I understand there was a disagreement with the executive order, but I would hate for us to confuse the disagreement with the executive order with the action that we can do here in Congress.

We had concluded this last year in the appropriations bill, the exact same language, to the best of my understanding; and I know that, since then, there has been an executive order that we are trying to have a conversation with the executive branch about.

However, it is not fair to the contractors who abide by the law that, when you bid against someone who doesn't abide by the law because they are shortchanging their employees, that makes it an unfair practice.

We think the bottom line is we should be protecting those good contractors; we should be protecting the

employees who don't get their fair pay; and, despite any disagreement we might have with the executive branch, I think we should, at minimum, as a Congress, stand up for those workers and for those good contractors.

Mr. Chairman, I have been in business for 28 years as a small-business owner. I know that, when I bid on something, I want to know I am at a fair and even playing field.

We are not making a fair playing field when you have this number of people who are getting violations who already get Federal contracts and are really getting a slap on the hand, \$196 million in penalties versus 81 billion in taxpayer dollars in contracts awarded.

Clearly, there is an imbalance, and that becomes a cost to business for a bad company, but you are punishing the good companies and the good workers by doing that.

I would certainly hope that we would support this amendment, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chairman, I will try to keep it brief.

I do have concerns about the amendment. There is an agreement on both sides of the aisle that the FLSA is the cornerstone of workers' wage and hour protections, but in many ways, the regulations implementing the law are flawed and outdated. A report by the GAO found that litigation stemming from the FLSA claims continue to be a significant problem.

These aren't all bad actors. Often, they are employers trying to do the right thing, but are simply tripped up by an overly complex regulatory structure.

I would urge opposition, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The Acting CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. POCAN).

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

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

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

AMENDMENT NO. 5 OFFERED BY MR. RATCLIFFE

Mr. RATCLIFFE. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will designate the amendment.

The text of the amendment is as follows:

At the end of the bill (before the short title), add the following new section:

SEC. 5 _____. None of the funds made available by this Act may be used to propose, plan for, or execute a new or additional Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) round.

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 223, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. RATCLIFFE) and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas.

Mr. RATCLIFFE. Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank Chairman DENT and Ranking Member BISHOP for their hard work on behalf of the 57,000 veterans in my district and on behalf of veterans and servicemembers across the country.

I am also grateful for the support of Congressmen MACARTHUR, HURD, and NORCROSS in offering this bipartisan amendment, one which would simply prohibit any funds made available in this act from being used to propose or execute a new or additional round of BRAC.

Mr. Chairman, I am honored to represent the Fourth Congressional District of Texas, home to the Red River Army Depot. The depot has supported the warfighters since 1941. Although the depot community has weathered many changes over the years, their commitment to mission remains the same. It is reflected on the placard placed in each of the vehicles there which reads, "We build it as if our lives depend on it. Theirs do."

The Red River Army Depot is a vital job creator in northeast Texas, and it is a critical component of our national defense.

Mr. Chairman, in this fiscal environment, we need to be careful stewards of taxpayer dollars and focus our limited resources on addressing critical national security objectives and military readiness. Having another round of BRAC won't help us achieve this goal.

In fact, the Government Accountability Office reports that the last round of BRAC in 2005 cost the American taxpayers \$35.1 billion, which was 67 percent more than the original cost estimate.

At the same time, the expected savings from the last round of BRAC were 73 percent less than was advertised. Starting another round of BRAC would weaken our capabilities and increase our vulnerability in the face of the critical threats facing our Nation.

I would like to thank my colleagues who have supported this amendment.

Mr. DENT. Will the gentleman yield?

Mr. RATCLIFFE. I yield to the gentleman from Pennsylvania.

Mr. DENT. I want to let the gentleman know I support the amendment.

Mr. RATCLIFFE. I thank the gentleman. I would like to yield the remainder of my time to the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. MACARTHUR).

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Mr. MACARTHUR. Mr. Chairman, I thank the gentleman from Texas.

I have been fighting against BRAC since January, when I led a bipartisan letter urging then-Defense Secretary Hagel to not call for another round of base closures. But a BRAC was included in the President's budget, and here we are today.

Along with the gentleman from Texas, I am bringing this amendment and fighting against BRAC for two reasons:

First, BRAC is not cost effective. As was mentioned, the 2005 BRAC was sup-

posed to cost \$21 billion. Just a few years later, it has now skyrocketed to \$35 billion. On top of that, the savings were reduced by 73 percent. So it cost the taxpayers more and saved them less. Once more, the Department of Defense won't even recoup its upfront costs until 2018, 13 years after it started.

And second, I oppose BRAC because it destroys local economies. I know this all too well as Fort Monmouth in my home State was shuttered in 2005. That area is still recovering from the loss.

My district is home to Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, which is responsible for 105,000 local jobs in southern New Jersey. It is a \$7 billion impact on just one local community. Like so many other military bases around the country, it is the backbone of our community. If it is closed, the area would be devastated.

Spending more, saving less, ruining local economies, and reducing our military capability should not be done based on what we know today. In closing, I urge passage of this amendment.

Mr. RATCLIFFE. I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. HURD).

Mr. HURD of Texas. Mr. Chairman, I am proud to cosponsor this amendment alongside my colleague from Texas, the honorable JOHN RATCLIFFE, and my colleague from New Jersey, the Honorable TOM MACARTHUR.

Government action that both wastes the taxpayer dollars and hurts local economies just doesn't make sense, especially when the same action negatively impacts national security. But that is precisely what another round of base realignment and closures would do.

Laughlin Air Force Base, located near Del Rio, Texas, in the 23rd Congressional District of Texas, is responsible for training more Air Force pilots than any other base in the world. It is an integral component of our Nation's military readiness, and they are a vital part of Del Rio's economy and community. Yet every year they wait to see if the powers that be up here have decided in their infinite wisdom to put Laughlin Air Force Base back on the chopping block, devastating Del Rio and endangering our Nation's air superiority.

I encourage my colleagues to support this amendment, which will prohibit funds from being used to propose, plan, or execute another round of BRAC closures. Protecting our military readiness in communities such as Del Rio is vital.

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

The Acting CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Texas (Mr. RATCLIFFE).

The amendment was agreed to.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. GRAYSON

Mr. GRAYSON. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

At the end of the bill (before the short title), insert the following:

SEC. _____. None of the funds made available by this Act may be used to enter into a contract with any offeror or any of its principals if the offeror certifies, as required by Federal Acquisition Regulation, that the offeror or any of its principals:

(A) within a three-year period preceding this offer has been convicted of or had a civil judgment rendered against it for: commission of fraud or a criminal offense in connection with obtaining, attempting to obtain, or performing a public (Federal, State, or local) contract or subcontract; violation of Federal or State antitrust statutes relating to the submission of offers; or commission of embezzlement, theft, forgery, bribery, falsification or destruction of records, making false statements, tax evasion, violating Federal criminal tax laws, or receiving stolen property; or

(B) are presently indicted for, or otherwise criminally or civilly charged by a governmental entity with, commission of any of the offenses enumerated above in subsection (A); or

(C) within a three-year period preceding this offer, has been notified of any delinquent Federal taxes in an amount that exceeds \$3,000 for which the liability remains unsatisfied.

Mr. GRAYSON (during the reading). Mr. Chairman, I ask unanimous consent to waive the reading of the amendment.

The Acting CHAIR. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Florida?

There was no objection.

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 223, the gentleman from Florida and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Florida.

Mr. GRAYSON. Mr. Chairman, this amendment is identical to other amendments that were inserted by voice vote into every appropriations bill that was considered under an open rule during the 113th Congress. My amendment expands the list of parties with whom the Federal Government is prohibited from contracting due to serious misconduct on the part of the contractors.

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

The Acting CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Florida (Mr. GRAYSON).

The amendment was agreed to.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. HURD OF TEXAS

Mr. HURD of Texas. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

At the end of the bill (before the short title), insert the following:

SEC. _____. None of the funds made available by this Act may be used in contravention of subtitle D of title VIII of the Carl Levin and Howard P. "Buck" McKeon National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2015.

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 223, the gentleman from Texas and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas.

Mr. HURD of Texas. Mr. Chairman, one thing we can all agree on is our veterans deserve better. For far too long, our Nation's veterans have failed to receive the health care they have earned and the health care they have needed.

One of the reasons is due to the VA's inability to join the 21st century when it comes to information technology. Something as simple as allowing a veteran's medical records to be available digitally to their health care providers shouldn't be something beyond the capabilities of the greatest Nation in the world.

My amendment ensures the Department of Veterans Affairs and their chief information officer will take the appropriate steps and get the VA moving in the right direction. It will create accountability with their acquisition and use of information technology.

Let's do what is right and make sure the VA is using the right technology to ensure that our veterans are getting timely, quality care.

I yield back the balance of my time.

The Acting CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Texas (Mr. HURD).

The amendment was agreed to.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. ROE OF
TENNESSEE

Mr. ROE of Tennessee. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

At the end of the bill (before the short title), insert the following:

SEC. ____ None of the funds made available by this Act may be used to pay an award or bonus under chapter 45 or 53 of title 5, United States Code, to any employee of the Office of Construction and Facilities Management of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 223, the gentleman from Tennessee and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Tennessee.

Mr. ROE of Tennessee. Mr. Chairman, I am offering an amendment that would prevent bonuses from being awarded to the Office of Construction & Facilities Management, the branch of the Department of Veterans Affairs in charge of all construction projects costing more than \$10 million and which is perhaps the least deserving of performance bonuses in the entire agency.

In January, the House Veterans' Affairs Committee held a hearing to examine the enormous shortcomings of this office. We found that construction of a VA hospital in Denver—Aurora, to be specific—is projected to outpace the budget by \$1 billion. This project that started supposedly in 2010 was supposed to be completed in 2013. The original budget was \$600 million, with a \$10 million change order. Now they estimate the completion date is 2017.

Mr. Chairman, the Romans built the Colosseum in 8 years, and I don't think they were \$1 billion over budget. That is \$1,700 a square foot to build this hospital. Can you imagine how many veterans the VA could have treated with \$1 billion. That is 1,000 million dollars.

How many doctors and nurses could have been hired with \$1 billion that the VA's Office of Construction & Facilities Management has set fire to? The answer is: a lot.

The Denver project, if that was just it, that would be fine, but it is not an isolated incident.

In Orlando, a hospital project initially estimated to cost \$254 million is almost 5 years behind schedule and projected to be \$372 million over budget. That is 143 percent overrun.

In New Orleans, a major hospital being built to replace a VA facility lost to Hurricane Katrina was initially estimated to cost \$625 million and is just over halfway completed, running 66 percent over budget at a cost of a whopping \$1.035 billion.

And in Las Vegas, a hospital initially projected to cost \$325 million is almost complete after being delayed for more than 7 years, coming in \$260 million over budget.

These four projects alone have wasted billions of dollars of taxpayer money and delayed the delivery of health care to veterans for almost 14 years.

If this is the performance we should expect, the VA really has no business being in the construction industry. My friend, Congressman COFFMAN, who chairs the House Veterans' Affairs Committee Oversight and Investigation Subcommittee and represents the Denver area, has introduced legislation that would allow construction to continue at Denver while placing the responsibility of any further future VA construction projects over \$10 million in the hands of the Army Corps of Engineers, who have a great track record. I might add.

I hope that we are able to consider an approach like Mr. COFFMAN's and clean up this mess once and for all. But in the interim, it is critical that we send a message to this office that business as usual can't be tolerated.

The VA branch responsible for these cost overruns and delays should not have jobs in the construction realm, much less receive performance bonuses. This amendment would see that the taxpayer does not pay for performance bonuses to an office that has caused more harm than good.

I urge adoption of this amendment, Mr. Chairman, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Mr. Chairman, I claim the time in opposition, although I do not oppose the gentleman's amendment.

The Acting CHAIR. Without objection, the gentleman is recognized for 5 minutes.

There was no objection.

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Mr. Chairman, I think we are all very, very dis-

turbed by what has happened with Denver, and we are also disturbed about the practices of the construction office. But I just wanted to take this opportunity to maybe kind of clarify what has happened in response to try to mitigate the situation.

In January, Deputy Secretary Sloan Gibson announced the restructuring of the Office of Construction & Facilities Management, having them report directly to the Deputy Secretary through the Office of Management.

The VA also initiated an administrative investigative board in January to find the truth and to document the misconduct on the project. Secretary Gibson has included the VA Office of General Counsel in the review, and the administrative investigative board is expected to complete its review and make recommendations to the Deputy Secretary this month.

Additionally, the U.S. Corps of Engineers is conducting a separate review of the VA's Construction office to evaluate the structure and the processes so that changes can be made in the future.

I just thought that the RECORD ought to be set straight that everyone is disgusted with the way that these projects have been handled and that we are taking steps, and the Department is taking steps, to make sure that this bad situation is corrected.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. ROE of Tennessee. Mr. Chairman, I would say—and I agree with that; I am on the Veterans' Affairs Committee—I have been involved personally in four hospitals being built in my hometown. All came in on time, under budget.

When you have a bank, a lender, lending you money, they will stop you from going this much over budget. That is exactly what we didn't have here. I cannot imagine spending \$1 billion more to build a facility and then maybe offering someone a bonus.

There are some measures being put in right now, but right now I think—and I appreciate the gentleman not objecting to this amendment—we need to make sure this never happens again to waste the taxpayers' money.

I yield back the balance of my time.

The Acting CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. ROE).

The amendment was agreed to.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. STIVERS

Mr. STIVERS. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

At the end of the bill (before the short title), insert the following:

SEC. ____ None of the funds made available by this Act may be used to pay the salary of any employee of the Department of Veterans Affairs who is a member of an Amputee Clinic Team (as described in VHA Handbook 1173.3, "Amputee Clinic Teams and Artificial Limbs", dated June 4, 2004) and who is not credentialed in accordance with VHA Directive 2012-030, "Credentialing of Health Care Professionals", issued on October 11, 2012.

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 223, the gentleman from Ohio and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Ohio.

□ 1930

Mr. STIVERS. Mr. Chairman, I rise today in support of my amendment, which would help ensure that VA orthotists and prosthetists, who are responsible for caring for our veterans, are fully qualified and are able to perform the duties entrusted to them.

This February, the CBS affiliate in Columbus, Ohio, ran a story exposing flaws at the Chalmers P. Wylie VA Ambulatory Care Center, which serves constituents from my district. The story revealed that dozens of veterans—and possibly many more—who have not come forward had received ineffective care by uncertified prosthetists. One veteran was even told that his fitting was supposed to be painful. After several unsuccessful visits, he turned to a non-VA provider, Willow Wood, which is near Columbus, Ohio, where he was immediately provided with a successful, pain-free fitting.

The VA does claim to be following a credentialing directive, which is VA directive 2012-030. Mr. Chairman, I will soon be introducing comprehensive legislation to address this issue, but in the meantime, this amendment would force the VA to honor its word by ensuring that no salaries are paid to uncertified prosthetists and orthotists. Our veterans have made tremendous sacrifices for our country, and they deserve the best.

Mr. DENT. Will the gentleman yield?

Mr. STIVERS. I yield to the gentleman.

Mr. DENT. I support the amendment.

Mr. STIVERS. That was easy.

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

The Acting CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. STIVERS).

The amendment was agreed to.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. BYRNE

Mr. BYRNE. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

At the end of the bill (before the short title), insert the following:

SEC. _____. None of the funds made available by this Act may be used to transfer any funds from the Veterans Choice Fund established by section 802 of the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014 (Public Law 113-146; 128 Stat. 1802).

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 223, the gentleman from Alabama and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Alabama.

Mr. BYRNE. Mr. Chairman, I rise today to offer an important clarifying amendment that will help ensure our

Nation's veterans have the choices they deserve when seeking medical care.

Last year, Congress passed the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act. In addition to many important reforms, this bill created a VA Choice Card program. Under the law, veterans who are experiencing wait times of more than 30 days or who live more than 40 miles from a VA facility can seek private care. This was great news for veterans all across the Nation who had been stuck in a backlog or who lived a significant distance from a VA clinic. Like many of my colleagues, I praised this legislation as a major step forward. Unfortunately, due to a self-serving interpretation, the VA has put up barriers that restrict veterans' access to private care.

First, the VA calculated the 40-mile requirement in a straight line, or as the crow flies, instead of calculating based on driving distance. After much pushback from veterans' organizations and from Members of Congress, the VA recently changed the interpretation to driving distance. I applaud the VA for making that change. However, the VA is still misinterpreting the law. The VA says, if a veteran lives 40 miles from a VA facility of any kind regardless of what services are offered, then he is not eligible for private care. My district paints a good picture of why this is problematic.

We have a VA outpatient clinic in Mobile that only provides minimal services, but the VA claims that, since that clinic is there, our veterans cannot seek private care even if the services they need are not provided by the local clinic. That is especially frustrating because Mobile is home to a number of large, first class hospitals which could provide adequate care to our veterans. For example, if a veteran needed orthopedic surgery, he would be forced to travel to Pensacola or to Biloxi to seek that care even though he could get that surgery done right in his hometown. That is not how the legislation was intended to work.

Recently, VA Secretary Bob McDonald asked Congress for the ability to shift money away from the VA Choice Card program into other accounts. I am disappointed that the Secretary would already be giving up on this program while it is still in its infancy. It is even more frustrating considering that one of the biggest obstacles to the program's success is the VA's own self-serving interpretation. My simple amendment would clarify that the VA cannot move money out of the Choice Program account. We need to give this program time to work and allow veterans access to private care instead of forcing them to travel hundreds of miles out of the way to receive care.

Additionally, I have introduced stand-alone legislation, which is supported by Republicans and Democrats from 15 different States, that would correct the VA's interpretation and make clear that veterans are eligible

for private care when they live more than 40 miles from a VA facility that provides the care the veterans need.

I am optimistic that the House will act on this commonsense bill. Today, I urge my colleagues to support my amendment. Let's prevent the VA from transferring funds away from the Choice Card program, and let's work together to give our veterans the choices they need and deserve when seeking medical treatment.

I yield back the balance of my time.

The Acting CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Alabama (Mr. BYRNE).

The amendment was agreed to.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. GOSAR

Mr. GOSAR. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

At the end of the bill (before the short title), insert the following:

SEC. _____. None of the funds made available by this Act may be used to—

(1) carry out the memorandum from the Veterans Benefit Administration known as Fast Letter 13-10, issued on May 20, 2013; or

(2) create or maintain any patient record-keeping system other than those currently approved by the Department of Veterans Affairs Central Office in Washington, D.C.

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 223, the gentleman from Arizona and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Arizona.

Mr. GOSAR. Mr. Chairman, last year, in the midst of the explosive allegations about the Phoenix VA's keeping secondary unofficial records of claims and appointment requests, I offered a similar amendment that passed this body which prohibited funds from being used to create or to maintain unofficial recordkeeping systems at the Department of Veterans Affairs. This year, I am proud, once again, to offer this commonsense policy with the support of my friend and colleague from Georgia.

As many of you know, several whistleblowers came forward with allegations that the Phoenix Veterans Affairs Healthcare System had been using secondary unofficial records of veterans claims and appointment requests to misrepresent the actual wait times that veterans faced as they sought health care. Some employees within the VA even received bonuses as a result of these manipulations. It is unfortunate that, over the past year, many of these once unthinkable allegations have become substantiated.

Recently, an inspector general's investigation uncovered actual memos from VA leadership that encouraged this type of behavior. This is outrageous. The memo I speak of is known as the "Fast Letter 13-10," and it was handed down directly from the Office of the Director of Veterans Benefits Administration to the Philadelphia VA Regional Office.

I am appalled but not totally surprised to learn of this memo. I have

said this before, but it is sad that we have to pass amendments to prevent this type of behavior. When government bureaucrats don't use good judgment or common sense, Congress must address these issues. No matter what the investigation shows and no matter who was involved, this practice must be prevented in the future.

This amendment would prohibit the practice of altering or falsifying veterans wait-time data pursuant to the Fast Letter or any other purpose. We should have only one, uniform patient recordkeeping system within the VA in order to provide accountability as well as uniformity and to prevent employee manipulation.

I urge my colleagues to support this amendment, and I thank the distinguished Chair and ranking member.

Mr. DENT. Will the gentleman yield?

Mr. GOSAR. I yield to the gentleman from Pennsylvania.

Mr. DENT. I do not think any of us wants to allow the VA funds to be used in any way that would falsify records on the claims backlog. I have no objection to the amendment.

Mr. GOSAR. I thank the distinguished chairman.

Mr. Chairman, I yield the balance of my time to the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. CARTER).

Mr. CARTER of Georgia. Mr. Chairman, veterans continue to be one of the most neglected groups in our country. These men and women have sacrificed their lives to ensure that our values and principles remain true; yet we still have people within the VA system who neglect these sacrifices and who disregard these men and women.

As my colleague from Arizona mentioned, this flawed guidance from the VA headquarters is wrong and completely disrespectful to our country's veterans. The memo that was issued by the VA, commonly known as "Fast Letter 13-10," was a deliberate attempt to make VA bureaucrats appear as if they were delivering services and benefits to veterans faster than they really were. Through these internal actions, some VA offices were "eliminating" the backlog of benefit claims with a stroke of a pen.

Just because you lie about the details does not make the problem disappear. With one memo, the VA managers disregarded every performance measure that had been put in place to protect our veterans and their benefits. Mr. Chairman, I believe this brings up a large point—the problems within the Federal civil service and, as an employee within the VA stated, the dysfunctional culture of management corruption.

For the time being, we must address this issue. I join my friend from Arizona in offering this amendment. We must ensure that VA managers care for our veterans in a timely and effective manner. I urge my colleagues to support this amendment.

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

The Acting CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. GOSAR).

The amendment was agreed to.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. HILL

Mr. HILL. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

At the end of the bill (before the short title) add the following new section:

SEC. 5 _____. None of the funds made available by this Act may be used by the Department of Veterans Affairs to carry out any new Key Renewable VA Energy Project under the Department's Green Management Programs.

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 223, the gentleman from Arkansas and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Arkansas.

Mr. HILL. Mr. Chairman, in 2012, an award of \$8 million was provided to design and build a 1.8-megawatt solar system at the John L. McClellan VA Medical Center in Little Rock, Arkansas. It has been almost 2 years since that planned activation was to begin operating. However, reports in our local media have indicated that there is additional engineering and that it is not functioning and not operational. Further, sections of the solar panels for this system are now being torn down in order to be relocated to make way for a parking deck that was planned before the installation had begun of the solar panels. Many questions remain unanswered about this project and when the VA plans to fully implement this supposed cost-saving system to provide energy for the facility.

Further, I found from the VA's own Web site a list of 40 key energy projects that are designated as "works in progress" by the VA under its key renewable energy program. Some of these date back to 2010; yet they have not been completed and have not been made operational. There are over 90 solar projects that have been funded under this program and 198 projects that have been funded under the VA's Green Management Program. Some of these projects individually have cost the taxpayers up to \$20 million. The Little Rock project is only projected to save \$150,000 annually in energy costs, which would make the payback on that \$8 million investment some 50 years.

On April 8, I sent a letter to Secretary McDonald, asking for answers about these solar systems, in Little Rock particularly, about the relocation of the panels at the facility, and about the activation date. Senator JOHN BOOZMAN and I have called for an IG investigation into this project and into other aspects of the key renewable energy program to ensure that the taxpayers' hard-earned dollars are safeguarded.

This amendment would simply prevent any new funding for these projects

this fiscal year, allowing Congress the additional time to conduct oversight and allowing the VA to ensure that this program is effective.

□ 1945

It is essential that we demand accountability and transparency when utilizing taxpayer dollars for these kinds of government projects. I urge the passage of this amendment.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chair, I claim the time in opposition.

The Acting CHAIR. The gentleman from Pennsylvania is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chair, I rise reluctantly in opposition to the amendment. I feel the gentleman's amendment is a bit too broad. It is overly broad, in my view. I understand the gentleman's frustration with the VA's delay in getting the Little Rock solar panel project up and running. I certainly support the inspector general investigation into the problems.

I am concerned that blocking all renewable energy projects, currently budgeted at \$86 million for fiscal year 2016, would have the unintended impact of blocking some worthwhile projects that would save money, reduce energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions.

I would respectfully suggest maybe the gentleman would consider withdrawing the amendment, and we will try to work with him to get this amendment in a better form, one that we might be able to support. I just want to put that out there for his consideration at this time.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. HILL. I thank the chairman for his comments. I appreciate his consideration. I would be happy to work with the gentleman to revise my amendment.

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

The Acting CHAIR. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Arkansas?

There was no objection.

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Mr. Chair, I move to strike the last word.

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

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Mr. Chairman, I just want to speak to this amendment. The VA Green Management Program is a sustainability program that integrates energy and water conservation, environmental compliance, vehicle fleet management, sustainable building design and operation, greenhouse gas management, and climate change adaptation.

Since its inception in 2007, the VA Green Management Program has reduced VA's energy costs from \$504 million in 2010 to \$459 million in 2014, despite significant growth in mission. Additionally, the Green Management Program has put in place energy performance contracts requiring no appropriated funds that will save VA over \$9

million annually. Other significant achievements include it reduced VA energy use per square foot by 21 percent since 2003, reduced VA water consumption per square foot by 28 percent since 2007, increased VA's vehicle fleet to 55 percent alternatively fueled vehicles, and reduced VA-generated greenhouse gases 12 percent since the 2008 baseline.

In the absence of the Green Management Program funding, a number of programs, processes, and projects will not be carried out. These activities save taxpayers significant amounts of money; improve indoor and outdoor environments at VA facilities for the benefit of veterans, for visitors, employees, and surrounding communities; and help assure the VA compliance with Federal laws, with regulations, with executive orders, Presidential memoranda.

I would urge Members to oppose it. I am happy that the gentleman has withdrawn the amendment. I think his concerns are well placed, and I join the chairman in agreeing to work with him to see if we can't address those specific concerns in his location.

I yield back the balance of my time.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. FARENTHOLD

Mr. FARENTHOLD. I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

At the end of the bill (before the short title), insert the following:

Sec. _____. None of the funds made available by this Act may be used to pay the salary of any employee of the Department of Veterans Affairs who received an unsatisfactory work performance review in fiscal year 2015.

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 223, the gentleman from Texas and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. Mr. Chairman, my amendment is very straightforward. If an employee of the Department of Veterans Affairs has received a work performance review rated as unsatisfactory in the last fiscal year, he will not be able to receive a salary for this fiscal year 2016.

Mr. Chairman, there have been all sorts of media reports about how Secretary McDonald has been trying to reform the VA but has been having trouble getting rid of the bad apples. This is one way we could help him do that. For instance, the VA employees in the 27th Congressional District of Texas that I represent and across the Nation continue to provide vital care to our veterans. In the 27th District, our local medical center is well below the national standards for both customer service and phone standards.

Mr. Chairman, an official report from the VA inspector general found that about 1,700 veterans were in need of care and were at risk of being lost or forgotten after being kept off official waiting lists. Schedulers for the Vet-

erans Affairs were instructed to change the dates for which veterans had requested an appointment in order to hide delays. At the Phoenix VA, official data showed that veterans waited an average of 24 days for an appointment when in reality the average wait was 115 days. That is absolutely unacceptable.

The VA OIG reported in May of 2014 that 17 veterans deaths had occurred while waiting for VA treatment in the Phoenix VA, and on June 5 of that same year, the VA reported they had identified an additional 18 deaths. People are dying because of unsatisfactory performance at the VA.

Earlier this month it was reported that out of 280,000 employees working for the VA, only eight had been "punished" for any of the offenses. In fact, the only person who has actually been fired is Sharon Helman. She wasn't fired immediately for unsatisfactory work performance. Instead, she was on paid administrative leave for over 7 months before they finally got around to firing her. She was that former VA person in Phoenix and was only fired after it was discovered she was accepting gifts from a lobbyist. We have no way of dealing with the problems, and we are looking for a solution to this.

Mr. Chairman, the VA OIG found that, under Ms. Helman's leadership, 35 veterans had died, and it took us 7 months to fire her for an unrelated offense. The VA still is struggling with this.

Clearly, Congress needs to find a better approach to help root out the bad apples in the VA. My amendment is one way we can do this. If you are receiving the worst possible performance review, you ought not to be getting paid with taxpayer money for your unsatisfactory work.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chairman, I claim the time in opposition to the amendment, though I am not necessarily opposed.

The Acting CHAIR. Without objection, the gentleman from Pennsylvania is recognized for 5 minutes.

There was no objection.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chair, I appreciate the gentleman for raising this important issue. I certainly share his concern about the service our veterans are receiving from VA employees. However, I do have some concerns with the breadth of this amendment. It seems, again, a little bit overly broad.

If the gentleman would withdraw his amendment, I will continue to work with him to ensure greater accountability for poor-performing employees. Again, I thank the gentleman for highlighting this important issue, but I just think the amendment is a little overly broad. The breadth is a bit more than I think is necessary at this moment, but we might be able to work this out.

Would the gentleman consider withdrawing the amendment?

Mr. FARENTHOLD. Mr. Chair, I understand the concerns that the chairman of the subcommittee has. The

breadth was necessary in order to get by the requirement to not be legislating within an appropriations bill. If the chairman is willing to work with me on finding a scalpel rather than an ax to prune these bad apples out of the tree, I am willing to withdraw the amendment.

Mr. DENT. I will do that.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. Mr. Chairman, I ask unanimous consent to withdraw the amendment.

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

There was no objection.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. LAMALFA

Mr. LAMALFA. I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

At the end of the bill (before the short title), insert the following:

Sec. _____. For an additional amount for "Department of Veterans Affairs—Departmental Administration—General Operating Expenses, Veterans Benefits Administration", there is hereby appropriated, and the amount otherwise provided by this Act for "Department of Veterans Affairs—Departmental Administration—General Administration" is hereby reduced by, \$5,000,000.

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 223, the gentleman from California and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California.

Mr. LAMALFA. Mr. Chairman, first of all, let me thank those who have helped with this legislation here, my colleagues from California, Mr. COSTA, Mr. RUIZ, and my colleague from Massachusetts, Mr. MOULTON, on helping bring this forward. I also thank the chairman and the members of the committee as well as the desk staff here tonight in helping to make this happen.

Again, this bill simply reduces the amount budgeted for the general administration of Veterans Affairs to instead be posted toward the Veterans Benefits Administration; therefore, helping to take a bite out of the huge backlog that we have of veterans waiting to have their claims processed after having served with us. This \$5 million shift, I think, will be helpful in that backlog, as we already know that the VA is at least 171,000 claims behind in their process. These 171,000 claims are behind by more than 125 days, which is unacceptable.

Of course, the VA's top priority should be making sure that veterans have their claims processed and are receiving the benefit they should be getting. Our veterans should not have had to return from fighting a war and have to instead fight a bureaucracy at home.

Mr. DENT. Will the gentleman yield?

Mr. LAMALFA. I yield to the gentleman from Pennsylvania.

Mr. DENT. I do not oppose this amendment. I am prepared to accept it.

Mr. LAMALFA. I thank the chairman.

Mr. Chairman, again, this will be an important step towards helping reduce

that backlog and getting our veterans claims processed and the service they deserve. I ask for an "aye" vote.

I yield back the balance of my time.

The Acting CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. LAMALFA).

The amendment was agreed to.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. JODY B. HICE OF GEORGIA

Mr. JODY B. HICE of Georgia. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

At the end of the bill (before the short title), insert the following:

SEC. ____ None of the funds made available by this Act may be used to pay a Federal employee for any period of time during which such employee is using official time under section 7131 of title 5, United States Code.

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 223, the gentleman from Georgia and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Georgia.

Mr. JODY B. HICE of Georgia. Mr. Chairman, I rise today to offer an amendment that will help our Nation's veterans increase efficiency in the Federal workforce and uphold the integrity of tax dollars. Title 5 of the U.S. Code allows for a practice in which Federal employees are permitted to engage in union-related activities while at work while not doing the job for which they were hired. This practice is known as official time, and it costs the taxpayers literally millions of man-hours every year and hundreds of millions of dollars every year.

The Department of Veterans Affairs is one of the agencies with the most egregious use of official time. This agency is singlehandedly responsible for almost one-third of all the reported official time usage in the entire Federal Government.

Mr. Chairman, this one agency has more than 250 individuals who do nothing but operate on official time. That is to say, 100 percent of their time at work is used doing union activity rather than what they were hired to do, which is to help our veterans. That is unacceptable. It costs the taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars.

On the other hand, Mr. Chairman, as of April 1, there were some 431,000 veterans who have been waiting for over 30 days to get an appointment at a VA medical facility. In my home State alone, more than 20,000 veterans have waited more than 30 days for appointments, be it in Atlanta, Augusta, or Dublin. We have veterans literally begging for access to health care, and yet they are being told while waiting in line that people appreciate their service to our country, appreciate the fact that they have been willing to lay their lives down for our country, but when it comes to their medical conditions, they will have to wait because of lack of resources.

□ 2000

Mr. Chairman, to allow hundreds of VA employees to give 100 percent of their work hours to union activity while telling veterans that we do not have the resources to provide for their medical needs is inexcusable.

We need to stop this practice that allows VA employees to prioritize their union over our veterans. The day that veterans are put in second place to union activities is the day that Congress must get involved, and that has day come.

According to the most recent OPM report, the VA spends over \$45 million taxpayer dollars every year on this practice. That is \$45 million that could go to serve the medical needs of our veterans.

Mr. Chairman, what we have before us is a tremendous opportunity to help our veterans while, at the same time, saving taxpayer dollars and increasing the overall efficiency of our Federal workforce. This amendment cuts through all the bureaucratic red tape and the sweetheart deals for unions and helps our Nation's deserving veterans.

Mr. Chairman, this amendment is an opportunity to put our veterans first, above special interests, and I ask my colleagues to support this amendment.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Mr. Chairman, I rise in opposition to the amendment.

The Acting CHAIR (Mr. COLLINS of Georgia). The gentleman is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. I believe that this amendment really serves no purpose but to erode collective bargaining rights for civil service Federal employees, and it may violate collective bargaining agreements that have been negotiated between workers and these agencies.

The VA employs some 342,000 people, and to complain because 200 of them spend their time representing and making sure that the conditions of employment within the scope of employment of their coworkers under collective bargaining agreements are maintained, I believe, is just punitive.

Federal unions are legally required to provide representation to all members of a bargaining unit, whether or not the workers elect to pay voluntary unions dues. Representation for employees working their way through administrative procedures is a cost-effective process for administering and adjudicating agency policies.

The alternative to official time is for government agencies to pay for costly third-party attorney and arbitrator fees. Eliminating official time would increase cost, time, and effort for the agencies, the workers, and the taxpayers.

Official time is essential to maintaining workplace safety. Union representatives use official time to set procedures to protect employees from on-the-job hazards. Official time is also

used to allow employees to participate in work groups with the management team to improve the processes.

Under current law, official time may not be used to solicit membership, to conduct internal union meetings, elect union officers, or to engage in any partisan political activities. The notion that official time is used for these purposes is just false.

I would urge a "no" vote on this amendment. I think that it is punitive, and it has no purpose but to erode collective bargaining rights for civil service Federal employees.

I think that is not consistent with the laws of the United States of America.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. JODY B. HICE of Georgia. Mr. Chairman, how much time is remaining?

The Acting CHAIR. The gentleman has 1½ minutes remaining.

Mr. JODY B. HICE of Georgia. Mr. Chairman, I understand my colleague's concerns, but to say it is unnecessary is a bit beyond my understanding.

Yes, there are some 259 individuals at the VA that dedicate 100 percent of their time to union activity when they were hired to do veterans work, but there are hundreds of others who don't give 100 percent of their time, but hundreds of additional hours on a regular basis.

We have reached out. After I introduced H.R. 1658, the Federal Employee Accountability Act, we literally heard from veterans all across the country. Many of these fine men and women, being veterans now, also were and are employees at the VA. With one unified voice, they expressed that they had deep frustration and disappointment with how they have seen veterans treated.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to quote just one of those individuals who served in our Air Force and is a current employee at the VA. He said, "The union is the number one obstacle to providing care to vets."

I just see, ultimately, Mr. Chairman, that the choice before us is clear. Members of this body can stand with union bosses, or they can stand with the people who have stood on the front line to defend our liberties and our freedom, the Nation's veterans.

I choose to stand with our brave veterans, and I urge my colleagues to do the same.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Mr. Chairman, I would like to point out that many of the employees—as a matter of fact, I think the number is 34 percent—at the Department of Veterans Affairs are, indeed, veterans.

They are people who, in fact, put their lives on the line and have given and served and sacrificed for this country. Of course, they are now continuing to work for their colleagues and their coworkers on the job in their capacity as bargaining representatives in the VA.

I would point out that, under the law, they have the right to do this. The law supports them in doing this. We should not interfere with that because too many of them—34 percent—are, in fact, veterans.

I yield back the balance of my time. The Acting CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. JODY B. HICE).

The question was taken; and the Acting Chair announced that the ayes appeared to have it.

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

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

AMENDMENT NO. 3 OFFERED BY MR. KING OF IOWA

Mr. KING of Iowa. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will designate the amendment.

The text of the amendment is as follows:

At the end of the bill, before the short title, add the following new section:

SEC. 514. None of the funds made available by this Act may be used to implement, administer, or enforce the prevailing wage requirements in subchapter IV of chapter 31 of title 40, United States Code (commonly referred to as the Davis-Bacon Act).

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 223, the gentleman from Iowa and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Iowa.

Mr. KING of Iowa. Mr. Chairman, my amendment is an amendment that I brought up in previous appropriation cycles.

What it does is defunds and eliminates the Davis-Bacon federally mandated wage scale components in the construction of MILCON on this underlying bill. It recognizes a whole series of history that has been built since the early thirties on the Davis-Bacon Act.

I have spent my life in the construction business, Mr. Chairman. I started a construction business in 1975. We are celebrating our 40th year in business, and, almost every one of those 40 years, we have dealt with Davis-Bacon wage scales. I have made out, personally, that payroll over and over again.

I have also seen the inefficiencies that are created. The net effect is a de facto union scale. It is not a prevailing wage, but a de facto union scale. The net effect is it creates inefficiencies, and it increases and inflates the cost of our construction projects.

Our records, over the years that I have been in business, show that Davis-Bacon wage scales—the federally mandated wage scales—range between an additional 8 percent up to 38 percent; so I just bring that back to a bit of a moderate, careful average, and we have a 20 percent increase.

The bottom line on this is that, if you want to build 5 miles of road, re-

peal Davis-Bacon. If you are willing to accept 4 miles of road, accept a federally mandated union scale. That is true with whatever else we might be doing in all of our military construction and everything else.

This is a substantial savings on this bill, and I would point out that this is the last Jim Crow law that I recall that is still on the books. It was designed to lock Black construction workers out of the construction work in New York back in the thirties during the Great Depression.

When there was a Federal building contract that was let and the contractor went to Alabama and brought in African Americans to do that work, undercutting the essentially White labor union forces within New York, two New Yorkers—both of them Republicans, Davis and Bacon—got together and brought this Jim Crow law. Now, we are dealing with union scale mandates.

I would point out I used to have this debate with the gentleman from Massachusetts, Mr. Frank. He would make the argument that two consenting adults should be able to agree to whatever it is those two can do.

I would say I agree, and there is no reason for the Federal Government to be involved in a relationship between an employer and employee that agree to a wage scale.

We pay prevailing wages. They are not union scale wages, as a rule; but they are prevailing wages. We do that because we want to hire the best people. We do the best work that we can do under the plans and specifications offered to us—government work and private sector work altogether—for 40 years.

We are about to hear that the quality of the work isn't that, that the government knows best, and government should intervene between a relationship between two consenting adults. We are about to hear some kind of response on why we shouldn't get rid of the last Jim Crow law on the books.

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

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Mr. Chairman, I rise in opposition to the amendment.

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

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Mr. Chairman, Davis-Bacon is a pretty simple concept and a fair one. What the Davis-Bacon Act does is protect the government, as well as the workers, in carrying out the policy of paying decent wages on government contracts.

The Davis-Bacon Act requires that workers on federally funded construction projects be paid no less than the wages paid in the community for similar work. It requires that every contract for construction to which the Federal Government is a party in excess of \$2,000 contain a provision defining the "minimum wages" paid to various classes of laborers and mechanics.

Mr. Chairman, the House has taken numerous votes on this issue, and on

every vote, this body has voted to maintain Davis-Bacon requirements because it makes good sense, it saves the taxpayers money, and it is useful.

Last year, we avoided including divisive language like this, and it is my hope that we stop attacking the working class and defeat the amendment before us today and move on to more important matters.

I urge all Members to vote "no" on this, as we have repeatedly year after year.

At this point, I yield to the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. KILDEE).

Mr. KILDEE. I thank my friend for yielding.

Mr. Chairman, we have been through this fight before. Thankfully, we have been able to prevail with help on both sides of the aisle.

The gentleman referred to the 1930s. Anybody who is a student of history and a student of the U.S. economy knows that it was the period following the 1930s that we finally saw a steady progress toward greater wage equality in this country and we saw the middle class emerge and the strongest period of economic growth and income equality in our history, a period which is at risk right now.

I would urge the gentleman to take a look at the period that followed the enactment of Davis-Bacon, how the middle class was born, and I would also urge us to consider that, if not the Federal Government, who can we expect to set the example that a decent wage should be paid for a decent day's work. That is all this law does, and I support it wholeheartedly and urge my colleagues to reject this amendment.

Mr. KING of Iowa. I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Again, let's avoid including divisive language like this. This is a policy rider that is unnecessary. We have defeated it over and over again.

Davis-Bacon saves the government money. It requires quality work and quality labor be done on Federal contracts, and it pays a fair day's wages for a fair day's work.

I urge all Members to vote "no" and reject this amendment, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. KING of Iowa. Mr. Chairman, may I inquire as to how much time I have remaining?

The Acting CHAIR. The gentleman has 2 minutes remaining.

Mr. KING of Iowa. Mr. Chairman, first, in response to the gentleman's argument of a fair wage for a fair day's pay, that is determined by supply and demand in the marketplace. This is the United States of America, and on the flashcard the USCIS puts out, they say: What is the American system of America? It is free enterprise capitalism.

You have to pay the going rate to get the people to do the job. That has been the case for a long time. I have done that for 40 years, and the quality of the work is there, and we are proud of the work that we do.

I don't know how anyone argues that the Federal Government has got to intervene in setting the marketplace for wages on construction projects \$2,000 or more, but not intervene in the price of gas or the price of electricity or the price of some of the commodities that we are dealing with on a regular basis.

If we are going to have a robust economy, we have got to get a value received for the work that is done, and that value received is determined by supply and demand in the marketplace, not by a de facto mandated union scale. I know how these scales are reached. I know how these conferences go.

Mr. Chairman, we want to save the taxpayers money. We want to build 5 miles of road, not 4. We want to build five bases, not four. We want to put five different components out there, instead of four, and get a return on the taxpayers' dollar so that we maximize the utilization of the hard-earned tax dollars that come from some of the people that are working on these projects.

□ 2015

They want a return on their investment, too. You can't argue that there is fiscal responsibility in this country if we are going to impose an additional 20 percent on every dollar that is spent to produce construction projects on MILCON in America.

So, Mr. Chairman, I urge the adoption of my amendment, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The Acting CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. KING).

The question was taken; and the Acting Chair announced that the yeas appeared to have it.

Mr. KING of Iowa. Mr. Chairman, I demand a recorded vote.

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

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

The Acting CHAIR. The gentleman from Pennsylvania is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Chairman I yield to my colleague from New Jersey (Mr. PAYNE) for a colloquy.

Mr. PAYNE. Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank Chairman DENT and Ranking Member BISHOP for your work on this bill. And congratulations to Congressman DENT on the work he has done on H.R. 2029, his first bill as chairman of the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Subcommittee.

I admire Chairman DENT's and Ranking Member BISHOP's commitment to our veterans of America. They have demonstrated day-to-day that they are here for our people in the armed services.

I would like to especially acknowledge this bill's provisions relating to

the importance of early detection and treatment of colorectal cancer. As the bill notes, the VA has made screening patients for colorectal cancer a priority, and I am encouraged by the steps that this bill would take to ensure that the VA continues to dedicate the resources and attention to this important issue which it deserves.

Almost every family in America, including our veterans, including Members of Congress, including people all over this Nation, have been touched by cancer. My father, former Congressman Donald Payne, who served New Jersey's 10th Congressional District for 23 years, prior to me coming here and taking his place, succumbed to this preventable and treatable disease.

Chairman DENT, thank you for your partnership on this issue. I am looking forward to continuing to work together to advance the fight against colorectal cancer and lessen the needless loss of life.

The committee report encourages the VA to support additional research and development in the field, including investigating a less costly blood test for colorectal cancer. I applaud this language, and I also understand that both the FDA and CMS have approved a new DNA, noninvasive, stool-based colorectal cancer screening test that is pending review with the Federal supply services for availability in the VA health system.

For clarity, does this committee also encourage the VA to consider and review such stool-based test screening?

Mr. DENT. Thank you, Congressman PAYNE, for your shared interest in this very important topic.

Mr. Chairman, I commend my colleague for his steadfast support of colorectal cancer awareness research, prevention, and treatment efforts. As the second leading cause of death in men and women in the United States, we have both seen the personal toll that colorectal cancer can have on family members and loved ones. Congressman PAYNE obviously lost his father; I lost my brother-in-law. It was very painful for all of us. We lost them all too soon.

It has been a privilege to work together with you on an issue that has raised awareness and increased preventive screenings. This is an issue that affects far too many of our veterans and, as you mentioned, this bill takes steps to support the VA's prevention and treatment efforts.

The report's language should not be misconstrued as only focusing on blood tests, and I certainly encourage the VA to expedite its review of alternative colorectal cancer screening tests, including DNA stool-based noninvasive tests. We certainly want to encourage the VA in that regard.

I look forward to continuing to work with you on these important matters. Again, I want to really commend Congressman PAYNE for his determination and steadfast interest in advancing therapies and treatments for colorectal cancer.

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

Mr. DENT. 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. NEWHOUSE) having assumed the chair, Mr. COLLINS of Georgia, Acting Chair 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. 2029) making appropriations for military construction, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2016, and for other purposes, had come to no resolution thereon.

REPORT ON RESOLUTION PROVIDING FOR CONSIDERATION OF H.R. 1732, REGULATORY INTEGRITY PROTECTION ACT OF 2015; PROVIDING FOR CONSIDERATION OF CONFERENCE REPORT ON S. CON. RES. 11, CONCURRENT RESOLUTION ON THE BUDGET, FISCAL YEAR 2016; AND PROVIDING FOR CONSIDERATION OF H.J. RES. 43, DISAPPROVAL OF DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH NON-DISCRIMINATION AMENDMENT ACT OF 2014

Mr. WOODALL, from the Committee on Rules, submitted a privileged report (Rept. No. 114-98) on the resolution (H. Res. 231) providing for consideration of the bill (H.R. 1732) to preserve existing rights and responsibilities with respect to waters of the United States, and for other purposes; providing for consideration of the conference report to accompany the concurrent resolution (S. Con. Res. 11) setting forth the congressional budget for the United States Government for fiscal year 2016 and setting forth the appropriate budgetary levels for fiscal years 2017 through 2025; and providing for consideration of the joint resolution (H.J. Res. 43) disapproving the action of the District of Columbia Council in approving the Reproductive Health Non-Discrimination Amendment Act of 2014, which was referred to the House Calendar and ordered to be printed.

ENERGY AND WATER DEVELOPMENT AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2016

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. SIMPSON. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 2028, and that I may include tabular material on the same.

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

There was no objection.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to House Resolution 223 and rule