There was no objection.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion to instruct offered by the gentlewoman from California (Ms. SOLIS).

The question was taken; and the Speaker pro tempore announced that the noes appeared to have it.

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

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, further proceedings on this motion are postponed.

PROVIDING FOR CONSIDERATION OF H.R. 2861, DEPARTMENTS OF VETERANS AFFAIRS AND HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT, AND INDEPENDENT AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2004

Ms. PRYCE of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, by direction of the Committee on Rules, I call up House Resolution 338 and ask for its immediate consideration.

The Clerk read the resolution, as follows:

H. RES. 338

Resolved, That at any time after the adoption of this resolution the Speaker may, pursuant to clause 2(b) of rule XVIII, declare the House resolved into the Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union for consideration of the bill (H.R. 2861) making appropriations for the Departments of Veterans Affairs and Housing and Urban Development, and for sundry independent agencies, boards, commissions, corporations, and offices for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2004, and for other purposes. The first reading of the bill shall be dispensed with. All points of order against consideration of the bill are waived. General debate shall be confined to the bill and shall not exceed one hour equally divided and controlled by the chairman and ranking minority member of the Committee on Appropriations. After general debate the bill shall be considered for amendment under the five-minute rule. Points of order against provisions in the bill for failure to comply with clause 2 of rule XXI are waived except as follows: under the heading ''State and Tribal Assistance Grants'' beginning with '', except that, notwithstanding section 1452(n)'' through ''water contaminants''. Where points of order are waived against part of a paragraph, points of order against a provision in another part of such paragraph may be made only against such provision and not against the entire paragraph. During consideration of the bill for amendment, the Chairman 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 in clause 8 of rule XVIII. Amendments so printed shall be considered as read. At the conclusion of consideration of the bill for amendment the Committee shall rise and report the bill to the House with such amendments as may have been adopted. The previous question shall be considered as ordered on the bill and amendments thereto to final passage without intervening motion except one motion to recommit with or without instructions.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. PRYCE) is recognized for 1 hour.

Ms. PRYCE of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, for the purpose of debate only, I yield the customary 30 minutes to the gentlewoman from New York (Ms. SLAUGHTER), pending which I yield myself such time as I may consume. During consideration of this resolution, all time yielded is for the purpose of debate only.

Mr. Speaker, House Resolution 338 is an open rule which provides 1 hour of general debate, equally divided between the chairman and ranking minority member.

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 2861, the Fiscal Year 2004 Department of Veterans Affairs and Housing and Urban Development and Independent Agencies Appropriation Act we are hearing today. The rule waives all points of order against consideration of the bill and against provisions in the bill, except as specified in the resolution.

After general debate, any Member wishing to offer an amendment may do so as long as it complies with the regular rules of the House. The bill shall be read for amendment by paragraph and the rule authorizes the Chair to accord priority in recognition to the Members who have preprinted their amendments in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD.

Finally, the rule permits the minority to offer a motion to recommit with or without instructions.

Mr. Speaker, there is much to be said about what is good in this bill.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time at this point, and will speak about it later.

Ms. SLAUGHTER. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. PRYCE) for yielding me the customary 30 minutes and yield myself such time as I may consume.

(Ms. SLAUGHTER asked and was given permission to revise and extend her remarks).

Ms. SLAUGHTER. Mr. Speaker, part of the cost of waging war is the cost of caring for our veterans when they return home. Today, American troops are fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan and this body is considering an appropriations bill that grossly underfunds the veterans health care.

It is projected that 600,000 veterans will enroll in the veterans health care system this year. However, the veterans health care system cannot meet the medical needs of the number of veterans who are already enrolled because of inadequate funding.

□ 1030

More than 235,000 veterans are waiting 6 months or more for doctors' appointments. Embarrassingly, many veterans have reported waiting 2 years before they were able to see a Veterans Affairs doctor. The VA has reached capacity at many health care facilities and has closed enrollment for new patients at many hospitals and clinics. The VA has also placed a moratorium on all marketing and outreach to veterans.

According to the Veterans of Foreign Wars, because the veterans health care system is underfunded, 1.1 million veterans will either be pushed out or not even bother to try to access the VA health care. The funding allocated for veterans health is simply not enough and our veterans pay the price.

With this bill, we break many promises that we made to the veterans. The budget resolution for fiscal year 2004 pledged billions more for veterans medical care than has been allocated in H.R. 2861. Whenever America's men and women are sent off to war, they leave with the promise and the expectation that a thankful and grateful America will provide them with quality and accessible health care at least when they return home. We break this promise if we do not provide the funds necessary to ensure that no veteran waits months for a doctor's appointment or is denied admission to the VA health care system.

Late last night, the Committee on Rules prioritized tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans over the health care needs of America's veterans. Along party lines, the committee rejected an amendment by the gentleman from Texas (Mr. EDWARDS) that sought to increase the funding for veterans medical care by $2.2 million. A small reduction in the tax cut for people making more than $1 million would provide the needed additional health care funds with no pain to the millionaire. We should not accept the proposition that the government is able to pay for a $350 billion tax cut for the wealthiest Americans but is unable to fund $2 billion more for veterans health care needs.

The Committee on Rules also rejected an amendment by the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH) and the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS), again on party lines. This amendment would have increased funding for veterans health care by $1.8 billion, bringing the total funding level for veterans health care to the level set in the budget resolution. Meeting the budget funding levels would ensure that the VA is able to continue to treat all of the veterans currently enrolled and ensure that the VA is able to maintain nursing home care levels for the aging veterans, and indeed, it recognizes the fact that more veterans will be coming home from the present wars needing help.

Mr. Speaker, it is heartbreaking that we have American soldiers in Iraq and around the world who will find the system they count on crumbling when they return home. We need to fix the inadequacies in the underlying legislation. I urge my colleagues to oppose this rule, and I hope that I can tell the 60,000 veterans in my district that we honor our commitment to them and will provide them with the health care we promised them.

I do want to say that I think both the committee chair and the ranking member on the committee tried extraordinarily hard in a bipartisanship that is really the way our House ought to

operate, and I want to give them my thanks for their hard work. Nonetheless, I would like to call for the defeat of this rule.

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

Ms. PRYCE of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, I reserve my time.

Ms. SLAUGHTER. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS), the ranking member of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

Mr. EVANS. Mr. Speaker, I am here to speak against the rule on the VA-HUD appropriations bill.

Our troops are beginning to return from their service in Afghanistan and Iraq. Sadly, these have not been bloodless wars. None of them are in history, and certainly many of these brave men and women will now rely upon the VA for their health care. They do not deserve delayed or rationed services.

Ultimately, this Congress did the right thing in approving a budget resolution that increased funding for veterans programs by $1.8 billion. We want to ensure that we keep the promise that we gave our veterans and add these funds to the appropriation for veterans health care. Please give us the opportunity to do so.

Mr. Speaker, Sunday is the 50th anniversary of the signing of the peace treaty for the Korean War. Veterans have gathered here in Washington and elsewhere to commemorate this event. Some of these veterans are gathered in the halls of this Congress today.

It comes down to this, Mr. Speaker, with the vote on this rule: You are either for or against veteran health services for veterans. What will you say to the veterans watching today and your veterans at home tomorrow who are showing great interest in this issue? Do you support them or not? Vote no on this rule.

Ms. SLAUGHTER. Mr. Speaker, I yield 5 minutes to the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. OBEY), the ranking member of the Committee on Appropriations.

Mr. OBEY. Mr. Speaker, everyone knows that there is a crisis in veterans health care in this country. All too often a veteran who has prostate cancer will be told that it is going to be 3 months before he can see a specialist. There are delays in seeing almost any specialist in the system. Veterans hospitals are in many ways inadequate for the demand that they face, and there is no question that if this bill passes as is, it will make that situation worse.

Now how can I say that? After all, the bill has a 6 percent increase. Here is how I can say it.

Inflation, first of all, will cost at least 3 percent more this year to serve the same population. In addition, the population which will be served, or will be eligible to be served I should say, will increase by 9 percent this year. So that means that this bill would need to be 12 percent above last year for veterans health care just to stay even.

This bill does about half of that. So if you pass this bill as is, veterans health care will get worse, not better, in this country, and I do not think that makes any sense.

Members from both sides of the aisle asked the Committee on Rules to allow amendments to be offered that could fix this situation, and they have been told, ''No, sorry, boys and girls, cannot do it.'' That, I think, means that if you want to do anything meaningful besides send out a political press release or a nice flowery letter, another one of those wonderful resolutions that passed this Congress 430 to nothing, if you want to do something to back up all those wonderful flowery words, if you want to send your veterans, as the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. KILDEE) says, if you want to send them something other than a get well card, you will vote against this rule, and give us the chance to boost veterans health care in a meaningful way.

We want to be able to offer the Edwards amendment which would raise the veterans health care budget by over $2 billion, and it would pay for it by reducing the size of the tax cut for people who make over $1 million a year from $88,000 to about $77,000. So we have a choice. What is more important to the country, an $88,000 tax cut for someone who makes 100,000 bucks a year or putting veterans where we promised we would put them, which is first in line immediately for the medical care they need?

Now, I know some people will say, ''You know, this is a bottomless pit.'' I have heard it said this is a bottomless pit. How much are we going to give the veterans? We did not ask how much the veterans were going to give us when they agreed to put everything on the line, and it just seems to me that our position ought to be that whatever it takes to provide people who wore the uniform of this country under any circumstances, whatever it takes to provide them with decent health care we are going to do.

To me, that is a whole lot more important than a number of the tax choices that have been made, and I think it is to a lot of people in this Chamber as well.

So I would strongly urge you to vote against this rule. If you are not willing to vote against this rule, do not go back home and tell your veterans, oh, man, we put you first, we really did. This committee has done a a credible job with the resources available, but the resources available are pitiful in comparison to need.

So I would hope Members would recognize that it is no criticism of the subcommittee itself to vote against this rule. It is a criticism of misplaced institutional priorities in this House, and we ask the House to take the only action you can take if you want to correct those misplaced priorities, and that is to turn down this rule.

Ms. SLAUGHTER. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. MCGOVERN) a member of the Committee on Rules.

Mr. MCGOVERN. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman for yielding me the time.

Mr. Speaker, this is a defining moment for this Congress. What we are talking about here today is a big deal. It is a huge deal. This is about veterans and the services that they receive in this country. The vote on this rule will show once and for all which Members of this body truly support veterans and which Members are merely talking a good game when it comes to funding veterans programs.

This bill woefully underfunds veterans services. It is disgraceful. We have young men and women who are bravely serving in Afghanistan and Iraq and around the world, and how do we thank them for their sacrifices? By cutting important veterans programs and services.

I know the gentleman from New York (Chairman WALSH) and the gentleman from West Virginia (Ranking Member MOLLOHAN) did the very best they could with the little money they had to work with. In fact, they should be praised for crafting this bill out of such few resources. They are both dedicated and good public servants, and I do not fault them for this problem.

But I do fault the Republican leadership and the Republicans on the Committee on Rules for not making several bipartisan amendments in order last night that would have increased veterans spending by at least $1.8 billion. The gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH) and the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS) had an amendment, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. EDWARDS) had an amendment, and they were just shut out.

The Committee on Rules provides waivers all the time, and it could have provided waivers for these amendments. Not only did the majority fail to provide waivers for these amendments, but in fact, every single Republican on the Committee on Rules voted against every amendment to increase veterans spending last night.

Mr. Speaker, the sad reality is that the Republican leadership is all talk and no action. They talk about funding important programs. They talk about their support and their admiration for our veterans. They like to pose for pictures with our veterans. They speak at every veterans conference, but they do not back up their rhetoric with the funds necessary to pay for these programs.

Frankly, this body is quick to pass authorization bills that designate the necessary funding levels, followed by lengthy press releases and big press conferences, claiming support for these programs, but the Republican leadership does not put its money where its mouth is when it comes time to genuinely provide the funds needed to run these programs.

This entire year has been nothing but a history of broken promises, to our

teachers, our schools, our children and, today, to our veterans. It is wrong, Mr. Speaker, and it is outrageous that this Congress is turning its back on the men and women who have defended this country and made it the greatest and freest country in the world.

We have veterans in our districts who have to wait months and months and months to get health care. We have veterans programs that are being slashed, but it does not have to be this way.

I truly believe that this is a defining moment for this body. A yes vote on this rule is a vote against veterans. This rule prohibits any opportunity to increase veterans spending. So if my colleagues want to live up to their rhetoric, if they actually support our veterans, then join me in voting against this rule. Send this flawed rule back to the Committee on Rules and force the majority at a minimum to give us a vote but, more importantly, to give our veterans what they deserve.

Ms. PRYCE of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to yield such time as he may consume to my distinguished colleague, the gentleman from New York (Mr. WALSH), the chairman of the Subcommittee on VA, HUD and Independent Agencies of the Committee on Appropriations.

Mr. WALSH. Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. PRYCE), my colleague from the Committee on Rules, who has helped us to guide this bill through the Congress the last three years. She does a great job and knows the bill very well and is very capable at this.

I would like to first of all, Mr. Speaker, talk a little bit about the rule. This rule provides for the customary protections usually afforded all appropriations bills at this stage of the process. It is an open rule but it waives points of order against unauthorized appropriations because so much of this bill is unauthorized.

The Appropriations subcommittee is appropriating funds for NASA, much of which is unauthorized; EPA, much of which is unauthorized; HUD programs, National Science Foundation, and we have heard a lot about veterans, and we will continue to hear more about veterans.

□ 1045

But there are a lot of items in this bill that are of critical importance to these Departments; and this would, in effect, provide the authorization required for this current year.

Most of the focus has been on veterans issues in this bill, and rightly so. It is the priority for the subcommittee each and every year that we provide for funding for this area. But I would like to talk a little bit about some of the other aspects of the bill, the other Departments that are funded in this bill.

HUD is the Department that provides for housing for all Americans. We have fully funded the section 8 housing voucher program, which allows individuals to live where they would like and take their housing vouchers with them to help pay for their rent. It is a very popular program. It is fully funded. Of our allocation, which was only about a $3 billion increase over last year, a billion of that goes just to fund the cost increases in the section 8 housing voucher program. No new vouchers, but it is fully funded. And I would remind my colleagues that thousands of American veterans live in section 8 housing, and they benefit substantially from that portion of the bill, as all other Americans do.

In the AmeriCorps program, which has had a lot of discussion and debate of late, the subcommittee provides them with about a $100 million increase over last year's budget. We raised the cap. We allow AmeriCorps to put on an additional 5,000 volunteers, which is something the President wants. We go from 50,000 to 55,000. Our only hope is that they will hire that many, as opposed to last year when they had a cap of 50,000 and they put on 67,000 volunteers. So there are problems over at AmeriCorps and National Corporation that they are working on trying to fix. We are going to provide them with additional funds this year; and, hopefully, we will get it right this year.

The Environmental Protection Agency. We provide for about $8 billion in funding for that agency. We maintain the level of enforcement that we maintained last year, which was an increase over the prior year. We have added back about $.5 billion in funds to the EPA to provide for clean water, wastewater improvements, and combined sewer overflow conversions so that we can help clean up our Nation's water. There is a tremendous demand out there. This will not cover the problem; but of our $3 billion increase in allocation, about $.5 billion of it went to clean water SRF and State and tribal assistance grants.

NASA is really a status quo budget because we are waiting to hear what happens with the Gehman Commission. They will be reporting back to the Congress probably in August, and we expect that that will have some major ramifications for NASA. The administration will have to weigh in on that, and possibly we could be dealing with that in a supplemental later in the year. I do not know. I do not know what the administration will want us to do. But we did not deal with those issues in this bill. As I said, it is a status quo budget for NASA.

National Science Foundation. The Congress has asked us to double National Science Foundation over a 5-year period. We could not do that with this allocation. We have provided for in the last several years almost double-digit increases in the National Science Foundation. Everybody agrees these are important investments for the country, but we provided for about a 5 percent increase in National Science Foundation.

That brings us to veterans. And I describe this bill, the VA–HUD and independent agencies bill, as a train, and the engine that pulls the train through the Congress is the veterans funding. It is the most important priority of the subcommittee. It has the largest advocacy group. It has the broadest support within the Congress.

Now, as I said, we had about a $3 billion increase in our allocation over last year's enacted level, and $1.3 billion of that goes toward the veterans medical care. There is also a $1 billion increase for veterans mandatory programs for veterans benefits, so a $2.3 billion increase just for veterans out of the about $3 billion that we got as an increase. Actually, the mandatory is separate, but an overall increase in veterans, counting discretionary and mandatory, is about a $2.5 billion increase.

Mr. Speaker, we have increased veterans spending in the last 5 years by almost 50 percent, 49 percent. I do not believe there is any other Department in the Federal Government that has experienced a 50 percent increase in the last 5 years. This subcommittee has bent over backwards to try to meet the needs of our veterans.

Now, we will hear, and it is accurate, that the number of veterans actually coming into the VA has increased beyond that number. But I would submit that most of the new veterans coming in are coming in for prescription drugs. They are what we refer to as category 7s and 8s.

The Congress has, in its wisdom, dramatically expanded eligibility for access to the veterans health agency. Many of the new veterans that are coming in are not indigent and they are not service connected, but they are eligible under the new broadened eligibility rules that the Congress put in place. That is putting an additional burden on the VA. It is creating long waiting lines.

There are a couple things that can happen that the administration can do. One of the things the Secretary is talking about relates to one of the problems we are experiencing. A category 7 and 8 looking to come in for prescription drugs cannot get them until they have a physical, even if they have had a physical by their own personal doctor. Now, that it is a double cost. It is a cost possibly in Medicare; it is also a cost in the VA if they need to get two physicals. There is some discussion about waiving that initial physical for veterans when they come to the VA if it is just for prescription drugs. So that would reduce the waiting time.

Also, there was in this bill when we first brought it to the Congress a fee requirement, a $250 premium and a $15 copay, which has been stripped from the bill. So those additional fees that were in the bill are no longer in the bill. We just do not have the allocation that some people would like us to have, the amount of funds some people would like us to provide. The budget resolution that we passed required us to raise veterans spending for health care even higher. The problem was we did not have the resources to do that.

There was an assumption in that budget resolution for $7.5 billion more than we actually had. It was supposed to come from mandatory savings, from waste, fraud, and abuse savings; but that was knocked out in the conference so we did not have those additional funds. Now, we went back and rescinded $5 billion from defense to provide the Committee on Appropriations with an additional $5 billion, which we did do, which provided some relief; but we still came up about $2.5 billion less than what was assumed available in the budget resolution. So it squeezed us.

Now, I do not stand back from the commitment that this bill has made to veterans. We have increased mandatory spending. We have increased discretionary spending. It is clearly the priority. We have increased veterans health care 50 percent in the last 5 years. As I said, no other Department, no other agency in the Federal Government has experienced that kind of growth.

This is a bill we can be proud of. This is a bill that maintains its commitment and maintains its promise to veterans, but it also provides the necessary resources to make the investments in our Nation's intellectual and technological future by making investments in the National Science Foundation. On NASA, we are waiting for the report and we will respond to that. Environmental protection, we think this is a strong vote of support for protecting our environment, which is a priority for our party and for all parties in this country, certainly for the President. It provides an increase for AmeriCorps, and it also fully funds our Nation's public housing program, which, to me, is as important a commitment as our commitment to the veterans.

We have an obligation, I think, in this country. This is a very competitive society. Some people do not compete as well as others. There is a need out there for public housing, and this Congress stands behind that commitment to those individuals that, until they can get on their feet and manage their own housing costs, we need to stand behind them.

So it is a very complex bill; we have limited resources, but a full desire to meet our commitments that we have. Mr. Speaker, I am proud of this bill, and I urge its support and support of the rule. It is a good rule. It is an open rule.

Ms. SLAUGHTER. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself 20 seconds to say to the gentleman, the Chair of the subcommittee, the gentleman from New York (Mr. WALSH), that we do know what a wonderful job that he does with what he has been given, but we do believe we could make the bill a little better if we were allowed the Edwards amendment.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. REYES).

Mr. REYES. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman for yielding me this time.

Mr. Speaker, I know you know about veterans issues, because I was honored to serve as your ranking member on the Subcommittee on Benefits. As I sit here and listen to my good friend and colleague trying to deal with a very difficult situation, trying to put the best face he possibly can on this, the thought occurs to me that if we are interested in doing right by our veterans, and I spoke earlier about the sacrifices that today are being made by the families of our veterans and current members of the armed services, it occurs to me that no amount of parliamentary gerrymandering that talks about unauthorized appropriations and those kinds of fancy words can make this issue go away.

Yes, there have been increases in the VA budget, but I would remind my colleagues on both sides of the aisle that not too long ago we were in a situation where we had a surplus. I spoke about putting our veterans at the head of the line. Instead, we put tax cuts before our veterans. The gentleman from New York (Mr. WALSH) is absolutely correct, we do not have the resources today. Why do we not have the resources? Because we prioritized tax cuts ahead of our veterans and ahead of so many other programs.

Those of us that continuously have an opportunity to go visit with today's heroes, heroes that we talk about on the floor of this House, heroes that we talk about in our respective committees, and I am talking about the men and women that are laying down their lives in Iraq and other parts of the Middle East and around the world in serving proudly for our country, we go to Walter Reed Hospital and to Bethesda and we see the results of those sacrifices. Why can we not increase the budget of the veterans administration that take care of today's heroes? Because we are not even taking care of yesterday's heroes.

Veterans today are not coming in just to get prescription drugs. They are coming in because they need attention after putting their lives on the line for this country. They deserve better. They deserve to have us do our job for them, if nothing else. Vote against this rule.

Ms. SLAUGHTER. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. EDWARDS).

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Speaker, as we speak from the comfort and security of this House Chamber, tomorrow's veterans are putting their lives on the line in Iraq today. That is why this rule is shameful.

With this rule, the House Republican leadership has guaranteed inadequate funding for veterans health care during a time of war. And to add insult to injury, the House Republican leadership has broken its recent promises with this rule to veterans. How? By ensuring that we cut VA health care funding by $1.8 billion less than they promised our veterans just a few weeks ago.

Do not listen to just my voice; more importantly, listen to the voices of America's veterans' leaders. Let us go to Ron Conley, the national commander of the American Legion. He said this: ''I have visited over 60 VA medical facilities across the country only to find that budgetary shortfalls are preventing hundreds of thousands of Americans from receiving timely access to quality health care.'' He goes on to say that to fund VA medical care short of that recommendation in the House budget resolution ''sends a chilling message to those who served in the liberation of Iraq.''

Shameful, Mr. Speaker.

□ 1100

Let us talk about broken promises. It would be wrong to break promises to veterans in any year, but to do so in a time of war is absolutely inexcusable. The VFW in its national press release just a week ago calls this bill without the amendment that has been prohibited with this rule to increase veterans funding by $2.2 billion ''a clear betrayal of the assurances made to America's veterans by the House Republican leadership.'' VFW Commander in Chief Ray Sisk said on July 17, ''The House leadership has deceived us.''

The national legislative directors of AMVETS, Paralyzed Veterans, and Veterans of Foreign Wars said this:

''This represents a flagrant disregard to promises made to veterans by this Congress.''

I think I know what is happening. The Republican leadership is carrying out the will of its majority leader, TOM DELAY, who said not long ago that in time of war nothing is more important than tax cuts. I would hope, Mr. Speaker, that Mr. DELAY would tell that into the eyes and into the faces of the 20,000 soldiers from my district that are presently putting their lives on the line in Iraq. This rule that prohibits a $2.2 billion increase in veterans health care guarantees broken promises to our veterans in time of war, and it guarantees inadequate funding for veterans health care. That is shameful.

Vote ''no'' on this rule and in doing so let us support America's veterans.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SIMPSON). The Chair would remind all persons in the gallery that they are here as guests of the House and that any manifestation of approval or disapproval of proceedings or other audible conversation is in violation of the rules of the House.

Ms. PRYCE of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from California (Mr. DREIER), the very distinguished chairman of the Committee on Rules.

(Mr. DREIER asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. DREIER. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of this rule. There is nothing extraordinary about it at all.

This is a standard rule for consideration of an appropriation measure. It is an open amendment process. For my colleagues, I would like to explain exactly what it is that we have done. The subcommittee, very ably chaired by our friend from New York (Mr. WALSH), worked its will, went through its subcommittee process, worked through the full committee, and it had a number of very important items focused obviously at its number one priority, dealing with the veterans of this Nation. Do I wish that more could be done for veterans? Absolutely.

I was just having a conversation with my friend from Connecticut (Mr. SIMMONS), subcommittee chairman on the authorization committee. Obviously, we would like to be able to do more. We live within the constraints of the 302(b) allocations, and I believe that the gentleman from New York did a phenomenal job with those limitations that have been imposed on him.

There are a lot of other issues that are included in this measure, Mr. Speaker, some that are important to me. I happen to be privileged to represent the Jet Propulsion Laboratory just above Pasadena, California, in La Canada-Flintridge. They are phenomenal projects that they have been pursuing, the Prometheus Project, the Jupiter program. They have been involved on the cutting edge of exploration, which is improving the quality of life for all of us. Important funding for that is included in this measure.

As the full Committee on Appropriations worked out its package, they came to the Committee on Rules and asked for, as is usually the case, a waiver to simply protect the work product of the subcommittee and the full committee. Chairman YOUNG, who does such a great job, was supportive of that request that came forward to provide the protection for the bill itself. And then, Mr. Speaker, what we did is we made in order what is called an open rule. An open rule means that any Member can offer a germane amendment that relates to this appropriations bill. That means they can offer striking amendments, cutting amendments. Those are in order. Those amendments are in order.

That is why, while I am very sympathetic, very sympathetic, with the concerns that have been raised by my colleagues as it relates to veterans, we need to recognize everything that has been done for veterans. The dedication that the United States Congress and our government has made to those who have sacrificed for our country is very strong. I was just telling the gentleman from Connecticut that my father was a drill instructor, Mr. Speaker, in the United States Marine Corps. He passed away 6 years ago this past March 3. I miss him greatly, but he inspired me. The service that he provided to our country inspired me. I cannot in any way turn my back on that kind of dedication, that kind of commitment to our country. I believe that this measure does effectively address the challenges that we have, and I hope very much that we will at some point be able to do more. I appreciate the work of so many of our colleagues on this.

But I think that we need to move ahead and get this bill done. Chairman YOUNG has done a phenomenal job with the appropriations process, but we have a lot of work ahead of us so I hope we are able to move quickly. I thank my friend from Ohio for yielding me this time.

Ms. SLAUGHTER. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentlewoman from Indiana (Ms. CARSON).

Ms. CARSON of Indiana. Mr. Speaker, I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the honorable gentlewoman from New York for yielding me this time. I do not believe that there is any Member of all of us who does not love veterans. I really believe that you genuinely love veterans and that you probably have some of them in your district. So I believe that you love them. I am here simply to say, help my disbelief.

We have hospitals closing that were inspired and created specifically to accommodate health care for veterans. We have veterans in my district, if you would care to talk to some in yours, who have endured long waits just to have an opportunity to see a doctor in a VA hospital. If you really love your veterans, give up your seat in Congress to a veteran so that they can go down to the attending physician's office and go out to Walter Reed or Bethesda whenever they have a toe ache or a headache and then that would be showing your love for a veteran.

In 1789, General and President George Washington, whose picture hangs on the wall here in the Chamber, said: ''The willingness with which our young people are likely to serve in any war, no matter how justified, shall be directly proportional as to how they perceive the veterans of earlier wars were treated and appreciated by their country.''

We pass feel-good legislation not to desecrate the flag. We pass resolutions to support our troops. If we truly, genuinely, without hypocrisy want to support our troops, vote against the rule. If any of you care to notice, many of our young women and men who are in war right now will come back hopefully in this country, but many will be maimed, many will be without limbs, many will suffer post-traumatic stress disorder, in need of dire medical care. We are closing down veterans hospitals around this country. That is just devastating that we are shutting out the people who fought for the freedom of the United States of America. We come in here and pledge allegiance to the Flag on a daily basis, pretending to support those who preserve the freedom for this country.

The President's budget requested a $1.4 billion increase when it really needed at least $2.5 billion, even to meet its own definition of current services, which includes serving fewer veterans and further rationing services like nursing home care. It meets the shortfall by proposing poorly defined management efficiencies, including outsourcing a significant part of the workforce. The President's budget also contained a number of legislative initiatives designed to limit veterans' use of health care services by increasing copayments for medication and outpatient visits and levying a new enrollment fee. Give me a break.

This rule is atrocious. It reeks with hypocrisy. It reeks with inhumaneness. I would encourage anybody in the name of the veteran to vote against the rule.

In 1789, General and President George Washington spoke these words:

> The willingness with which our young people are likely to serve in any war, no matter how justified, shall be directly proportional as to how they perceive the Veterans of earlier wars were treated and appreciated by this country.

This bill shortchanges veterans.

I do not believe we should be balancing the budget on the back of veterans. By not allowing priority 8 veterans to claim the benefits they deserve for serving this nation only because they were lucky enough to escape combat without injury is wrong.

The President's budget requested a $1.4 billion increase when it really needed at least $2.5 billion even to meet its own definition of current services, which includes serving fewer veterans and further rationing services like nursing home care.

It meets the shortfall by proposing poorly defined management efficiencies, including outsourcing a significant part of its workforce.

The President's budget also contained a number of legislative initiatives designed to limit veterans' use of health care services by increasing copayments for medication and outpatient visits and levying a new enrollment fee.

Congress has not had the stomach for the Bush legislative initiatives, but hasn't replaced the funds they were designed to create.

Ultimately this body agreed to accept the Senate budget numbers that increased VA discretionary funds, including medical care by $1.8 billion in fiscal year 04.

This level of funding would allow VA to fill the funding deficiencies left from our rejection of Bush's legislative initiatives, restore a vital nursing home program and fund much-needed construction.

We must not break our promises to veterans. The VA–HUD appropriations bill will not meets veterans' needs. Its increase from last year is $1.4 billion, which does not keep pace with hospital inflation or the growth in the numbers of veterans enrolled.

Even the President's own Task Force to Improve Health Care Delivery for Our Nation's Veterans acknowledged the problem, stating that ''There is persistent concern about the inability of VA to provide care to enrolled veterans . . .''.

The President's Task Force also noted that ''the Federal Government has been more ambitious in authorizing veteran access to health care than it has been in providing the funding necessary to match declared intentions.''

Ms. SLAUGHTER. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. HOLT).

(Mr. HOLT asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. HOLT. ''To bind up the Nation's wounds, to care for those who have borne the battle.'' Those are the words of our greatest Republican President. It was the beginning of a national promise, a promise, an obligation, a sacred obligation to look after those who bore the battle. The result is today we have in the VA excellent doctors and nurses, excellent facilities as far as they go, but it is not far enough.

Patients have unacceptable waits. And when it comes to medical care, to delay is to deny. Those who served in uniform did not wait to serve. This bill effectively cuts veterans health care. Do not just take my word for it. The DAV, the VFW, Paralyzed Vets say this cuts health care. The rule denies waivers to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. EDWARDS), the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH), and the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS) to try to address this. That is reason enough to justify defeating this rule. The gentleman from New York (Mr. WALSH) and the gentleman from West Virginia (Mr. MOLLOHAN) have done their best; but we must not forget, these cuts were not an accident. They did not happen in the Committee on Appropriations just yesterday. They are the deliberate result of a partisan budget that was rammed through Congress a few months ago. It was passed with some empty promises to some of our colleagues that veterans would be taken care of later.

But this budget, despite the words of the chairman, who a moment ago said, ''We would like to do more,'' this budget that was rammed through Congress months ago cut veterans benefits.

Here is what they said: You know, we found several trillion dollars of money that we don't need. It's your money, Americans. We'll give it back to you. You know how to spend it better than we do.

I ask you, Mr. Speaker, whether these young and old millionaires who get 80, $90,000 will spend it better than the government to take care of those veterans, to see that they do not have to wait at their local clinic at Fort Monmouth; or Brick, New Jersey; or Lyons Hospital in New Jersey. Do they know how to spend it better?

Defeat this rule. We owe it to those who served in the Second World War, in Korea, in Vietnam, in the Gulf War and in a number of other actions; and we owe it to the new veterans who are coming home every day. Defeat this rule.

Ms. SLAUGHTER. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentlewoman from Connecticut (Ms. DELAURO).

Ms. DELAURO. Mr. Speaker, I oppose this rule. This bill critically underfunds veterans health care, affecting the lives of more than 26 million veterans in our country and 75,000 veterans in my State of Connecticut. For over 200 years our veterans have made sacrifices for our country. Some of them continue their sacrifices after they come home. They may require continued care, rehabilitation, help with job training, college, promises that were made to them when they volunteered to serve. Shamefully, we are going back on those promises now.

This bill breaks the promise by the House Republican leadership to veterans by providing $2 billion less than the budget resolution. The administration recognized the shortfall in their budget request, but claimed that they made up much of the difference implementing so-called, quote, management efficiencies by outsourcing a large portion of the medical care workforce. Outsourcing medical care will in all likelihood mean inadequate care for many of the 2.3 million veterans currently receiving benefits for service-related disabilities. It could mean longer lines for the more than 134,000 sick and disabled veterans who have already been waiting more than 6 months to simply get an appointment at veterans hospitals.

In my State, almost 2,000 veterans will be frozen out of VA enrollment entirely. I am troubled that the President has made no attempt to request emergency funding to restore enrollment for new priority 8 veterans. If this is not an emergency, then what is?

The respect and the fair treatment of veterans is an issue that hits close to home to me, Mr. Speaker, because my dad, an immigrant to this country from his native Italy, was a veteran. He proudly served in the United States military. He would find it unconscionable that this Republican Congress would renege on a commitment they made to our soldiers at the very moment our men and women are securing the peace overseas.

Mr. Speaker, you cannot support our troops and not support our veterans. Mr. President, you cannot support our troops and not support our veterans. You cannot pay for today's military services by cutting the funds for those who served in the past. It is wrong. We should honor the legacy of sacrifice made by American soldiers by supporting our veterans and the services that they rely on. We owe our veterans better.

Ms. SLAUGHTER. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. STRICKLAND).

Mr. STRICKLAND. Mr. Speaker, despite the Republicans' promise to veterans during the budget process, we find ourselves with a VA-HUD appropriations bill that is shamefully inadequate. We have cut the $3.4 billion increase that we promised veterans in half. Even though the Committee on Appropriations took out the President's recommendations to impose new enrollment fees and copayments on veterans, they did this by simply shifting funds and adding no new money.

□ 1115

Therefore, we have a new $264 million hole in the VA budget. Chairman SMITH and Ranking Member EVANS had an amendment to restore $1.8 billion. But it was denied a waiver by the Committee on Rules. Mr. EDWARDS had an amendment that would have added $2.2 billion to VA health care for all veterans including priority 8 veterans, they were recently shut out of VA health care altogether, but it was also denied.

A few weeks ago some of my Republican colleagues held a press conference in order to calm the fears of the veterans across America who were concerned that their health care system would not be adequately funded. They assured the veterans that funding veterans service was a priority of the Republican Party. A priority of the Republican Party. We now know that their words were empty. Their promises were nothing, nothing but empty rhetoric.

We can find money for a massive tax cut. We can find money for Pakistan. We can find money for Turkey. We are spending $4 billion a month in Iraq. We can find money for veterans health care. You just do not want to. Shame on you. I feel sorry for you when you go home in August and explain to your veterans why you turned your back on them, why you gave them an inadequate health care budget when you promised to do better.

Ms. SLAUGHTER. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1 minute to the gentleman from Connecticut (Mr. SIMMONS).

(Mr. SIMMONS asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. SIMMONS. Mr. Speaker, I rise in opposition to this rule. I rise in opposition to this rule because without an amendment that we presented to the Committee on Rules last night, we cannot fix the VA/HUD appropriations bill, and that bill needs to be fixed. That bill needs an additional $1.8 billion that was carried in the budget resolution that we passed in this body just a few months ago.

Over 30 years ago, I went to infantry OCS at Fort Benning, Georgia and I learned there that an officer's word is his bond and I have carried that with me through 3½ in Vietnam, 37 years in the U.S. Army, 10 years in the Central Intelligence Agency, and 3 years in this body. An officer's word is his bond. And we pledged in April that we would fund veterans health care adequately. This bill does not fund veterans health care adequately. It does not help us keep the promise. It does not allow me to keep my word, which is my bond. Vote against the rule.

Ms. SLAUGHTER. Mr. Speaker, I yield for the purpose of making a unanimous consent request to the gentleman from California (Mr. GEORGE MILLER).

(Mr. GEORGE MILLER of California asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. GEORGE MILLER of California. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman for yielding.

I rise in strong support of defeating this rule and keeping our promises to our veterans.

Ms. SLAUGHTER. Mr. Speaker, I yield my remaining time to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. EDWARDS).

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Speaker, the most powerful statement made in this debate this morning is the deafening silence of House Republicans. I hope veterans all across America have noticed that only one Republican out of over 200 in this House had the courage to say that we should have just the right to be able to vote for an amendment to increase veterans health care spending this year by $2 billion. Deafening silence. Broken promises to veterans in time of war, inadequate funding for veterans health care. That is what Republicans are saying when they vote yes on this rule.

Ms. PRYCE of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

In closing, when Members of Congress met in the subcommittee to write this appropriations package, planning the most effective and efficient way to fund many of these programs, they did not pick random funding level. Quite the contrary. The gentleman from New York (Chairman Walsh) and the gentleman from Florida (Chairman Young) had a good solid record of success to guide them upon which to build. They were able to look at all of the significant battles that Congress has fought and won for our veterans in the past, the measurable steps we have taken to provide better and better and better benefits and care for our veterans.

In the fight to enhance veterans access to high-quality health care, we have won many battles. Through the Veterans Benefits and Health Care Improvement Act, we ensured quality medical staff through competitive compensation for VA nurses. Through the Veterans Millennium Health Care and Benefits Act, the House has increased access to geriatric evaluation, nursing home care and adult day care.

In our fight to improve job training, education and employment placement for veterans, we have won many battles as well. Through the Jobs for Veterans Act, Republicans have provided a new system of incentives and accountability measures aimed at enhancing economic security. Through the Veterans Entrepreneurship and Benefits Improvement Act, the House has provided veterans with assistance in starting and growing small businesses.

In our fight to enhance veterans survivor benefits, we have won many battles. Through the Survivor Benefits Improvement Act, Republicans have provided $100 million in new health care benefits for surviving spouses and extension in life insurance coverage to families in their time of need. In our fight to improve the overall quality of life for veterans and their loved ones, we have won many battles. Through the homeless veterans law, we have provided $1 billion to help homeless veterans receive housing vouchers and assistance for those veterans undergoing treatment for mental illness and substance abuse.

Today we are here to add to that long list of successes. Today we are claiming victory. Today we have an opportunity to make greater gains for our veterans and their communities by approving this significant funding plan. This bill provides $27.2 billion in total budgetary resources for the Veterans Health Administration, a $1.4 billion increase over last year. A $1.4 billion increase over last year, that is not a cut, Mr. Speaker.

This package includes nearly $16 billion for medical services, $4 billion for medical facilities, $408 million for veterans medical and prosthetic research. In addition, this plan makes significant investments in America's communities. There is more in this bill than what we have just discussed today. Over $2 billion to assist low-income families in making down payments as they purchase a home, invest in their communities, and achieve the American dream; $850 million for safe drinking water, nearly $16 million for NASA further space exploration.

In nearly every way, this funding package builds on our past successes for our veterans and for our own communities.

Is it everything on our Christmas list? No, it is not. Is it everything that we had ever hoped to provide our veterans, their families and America's communities? Not even close. But is this progress? Yes, sir, this is progress. It is one more achievement that will encourage us to return and fight harder tomorrow, next month, and next year for more for our veterans and for our communities.

Mr. Speaker, America's veterans have served our Nation in invaluable ways. Repaying them for upholding our values of liberty and freedom seems nearly impossible, but we will continue to try. Each year we will work harder and harder to reward their sacrifices. Each year we make progress, and each year we fall short because, very honestly, freedom has no price tag. We can never repay what we owe them. But step by step, bit by bit, we can continue to make gains in honoring their service with better health care, enhance access to housing and job opportunities and more generous benefits for their loved ones, and that is what this plan does. It places us one step further in the ongoing and never-ending quest to reward those who have upheld the liberty we all enjoy. Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to pass the rule and approve the underlying bill.

Mr. RODRIGUEZ. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in opposition to the rule provided for consideration of the VA/HUD appropriation bill with great sadness.

Sadness knowing that our veterans will not receive the health care they have earned.

Early this morning I joined my esteemed (bipartisan) colleagues on the House Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman CHRIS SMITH and Ranking Member LANE EVANS before the Rules Committee in support of their Amendment that would have added $1.8 billion dollars in funding for veterans health care for the 2004 budget.

This amendment was ruled out of order.

Mr. Chairman is ensuring that the VA is able to continue offering health care for all veterans currently enrolled—is that out of order?

Our veterans deserve better than this.

Many are old and frail and unable to afford any other form of health care.

Have no doubt if we pass this budget without this amendment we are handing the Department of Veterans Affairs serious challenges.

These challenges will include deciding which veterans will and will not be served.

Mr. Speaker it is time for us to put our money where our mouth is and support our veterans.

I urge a ''no'' vote on this rule.

Mr. LARSON of Connecticut. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in opposition to H. Res. 338, the rule providing for consideration of the Department of Veterans Affairs and Housing and Urban Development appropriations bill. I am again disappointed by the lip service being paid to veterans by the Republican leadership. This bill falls far short of giving the VA adequate resources to meet the health care needs of America's veterans. The Independent Budget authored by AMVETS, Disabled American Veterans, Paralyzed Veterans of American, and Veterans of Foreign Wars recommended $27 billion for veterans' health care, a $3.3 billion increase over the current level. That was the nonpartisan recommendation of America's veterans, the men and women who fought and served for our Nation.

But our veterans came under attack when the President's budget only recommended a $1.4 billion increase to $25.7 billion and dared to ask certain veterans to pay a fee to enroll in VA health care and pay increased copayments. The House took a step forward when it passed a budget resolution in April that provided $27 billion in funding for VA health care, but the resolution still funded this increase by charging veterans enrollment fees and raising copayments. While, I am pleased to learn that the Appropriations Committee did not include the President's proposal to impose new fees and increase copayments, I am sorely disappointed that the Committee shortchanged veterans what was promised in the budget resolution by only providing $25.2 billion for veterans' health care.

I am equally disappointed that the Rules Committee did not make in order an amendment offered by Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman SMITH and Ranking Member EVANS that would have increased funding for veteran's health care by an additional $1.8 billion to match the $27 billion in the budget resolution we passed in April. Additionally, the Rules Committee did not make in order an amendment by the gentleman from Texas (Mr. EDWARDS) to increase funding above the Appropriations Committee figure by an additional $2.2 billion to $27.4 billion. Veterans need these increases to insure that they are no longer turned away from their own health care system.

This debate is yet another reason for this House to consider legislation to make veterans health care funding mandatory. Our veterans deserve better than bickering over discretionary funding. They deserve a Congress

that will live up to its pledge by providing health care to all veterans, by ensuring that it is accessible, and by fully funding the VA health care system.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to join me in voting against this rule that will again deny veterans the health care funding that they deserve. I have said many times before that veterans were promised by the Federal Government that for their service to the country they would be provided a lifetime of health care services, as well as their own health care service network. It is time for us to no longer say we will support our veterans, but to actually act to support our veterans.

Mr. PRYCE of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, I move the previous question on the resolution.

The previous question was ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SIMPSON). The question is on the resolution.

The question was taken; and the Speaker pro tempore announced that the ayes appeared to have it.

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

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, further proceedings on this resolution are postponed.

PROVIDING FOR CONSIDERATION OF H.R. 2859, EMERGENCY SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATIONS FOR DISASTER RELIEF ACT, 2003

Mr. HASTINGS of Washington. Mr. Speaker, by direction of the Committee on Rules, I call up House Resolution 339 and ask for its immediate consideration.

The Clerk read the resolution, as follows:

H. RES. 339

Resolved, That upon the adoption of this resolution it shall be in order without intervention of any point of order to consider in the House the bill (H.R. 2859) making emergency supplemental appropriations for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2003. The bill shall be considered as read for amendment. The previous question shall be considered as ordered on the bill and on any amendment thereto to final passage without intervening motion except: (1) one hour of debate on the bill equally divided and controlled by the chairman and ranking minority member of the Committee on Appropriations; (2) an amendment printed in the Congressional Record pursuant to clause 8 of rule XVIII, if offered by Representative Toomey of Pennsylvania or his designee, which shall be in order without intervention of any point of order or demand for division of the question, shall be considered as read, and shall be separately debatable for 20 minutes equally divided and controlled by the proponent and an opponent; and (3) one motion to recommit with or without instructions.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman from Washington (Mr. HASTINGS) is recognized for 1 hour.

Mr. HASTINGS of Washington. Mr. Speaker, for the purpose of debate only, I yield the customary 30 minutes to the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. MCGOVERN), pending which I yield myself such time as I may consume. During consideration of this resolution, all time yielded is for the purposes of debate only.

(Mr. HASTINGS of Washington asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. HASTINGS of Washington. Mr. Speaker, House Resolution 339 is a modified closed rule waiving all points of order against the consideration of H.R. 2859, the Emergency Supplemental Appropriations for Disaster Relief Act, 2003. The rule provides for 1 hour of general debate to be equally divided between the chairman and ranking minority member of the Committee on Appropriations. The rule also provides for a consideration of an amendment offered by the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. TOOMEY), or his designee, which shall be considered as read, shall be separately debatable for 20 minutes equally divided and controlled by the proponent and an opponent. The rule waives all points of order against the amendment. Finally, Mr. Speaker, the rule provides for one motion to recommit with or without instructions.

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 2859 was introduced by the chairman of the Committee on Appropriations and provides $983.6 million in emergency supplemental funds for the Federal Emergency Management Agency for fiscal year 2003. This emergency appropriation is necessary to replenish the Disaster Relief Fund to make certain Federal resources available for the current fiscal year to meet the needs of Americans affected by tornadoes, floods, forest fires or other national disasters. The administration has informed Congress that without supplemental funds it is estimated that the Disaster Relief Fund would soon be exhausted. Additional funds are needed to respond to emergencies created by extreme weather and deadly wildfires.

Our Nation was struck by a record 562 tornadoes, Mr. Speaker, in May alone. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration forecasters predict an above average season for tropical storms and for flooding, with Hurricane Claudette already striking the Gulf Coast of Texas.

The summer fire season is also fully upon the Western United States. The National Interagency Fire Center in Boise, Idaho reported yesterday that there are currently 45 large fires burning in 12 western States. Three of these fires are burning in my State of Washington. The largest of the fires in Washington State is the Farewell Creek fire burning in the arid north central portion of the State. This fire has grown so large that it could burn, Mr. Speaker, for 3 months and not be fully extinguished until the first heavy rainfall or snowfall this winter.

The emergency appropriation included in H.R. 2859 will make certain that FEMA and the Department of Homeland Security have the funding and resources needed to meet the needs of Americans affected by these tornadoes, floods, wildfires and other national disasters. H.R. 2859 was introduced by the chairman of the Committee on Appropriations to allow for prompt consideration by the House of Representatives and by the Congress. Accordingly, I encourage my colleagues to support both the rule, H. Res. 339, and the underlying bill.

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

□ 1130

Mr. MCGOVERN. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself 4 minutes.

Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend from Washington for yielding me the customary 30 minutes.

Mr. Speaker, the Republicans have put us in quite a situation here. We all remember the great job that President Clinton and James Lee Witt did in the 1990s by remaking FEMA into the world-class disaster response agency it is today. But earlier this year, the Republicans in the House decided to play games with FEMA's funding levels. They deliberately provided inadequate resources for FEMA in order to meet their arbitrary budget cap. They knew full well that they would have to come back for more FEMA funding; and surprise, surprise, here we are.

We are here to consider a new supplemental appropriations bill that will partially fund FEMA through August and through part of the hurricane season. I am sure almost all of us will vote for this bill, because this funding is so important for FEMA and the families that they help.

But it is important that we discuss the other emergency that is looming, and that is that of AmeriCorp. As many of my colleagues probably know, AmeriCorp is woefully underfunded. Without immediate action, 20,000 AmeriCorp positions will be lost; 20,000 AmeriCorp positions will be lost.

The other body did the right thing, and they added $100 million to AmeriCorp to their version of the supplemental. But on a near party-line vote in the House Committee on Appropriations, the Republican majority killed this funding. This must be another part of the Republican employment plan.

Mr. Speaker, the Republican majority is playing games with the lives of 20,000 AmeriCorp employees. These people are proudly serving their communities and have committed themselves to this important public service program. But without our help, they will be cast aside, at no fault of their own.

After September 11, President Bush issued a challenge to Americans to give back to their communities, right here in this Chamber. He specifically singled out AmeriCorp as one way to give back. Unfortunately, the administration's actions have not matched their rhetoric. While they have talked a good game about the importance of this program, they have done absolutely nothing, absolutely nothing, to ensure its long-term stability.