

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds of those present have voted in the affirmative.

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

The yeas and nays were ordered.

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

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. BUYER. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous materials on H.R. 3200.

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

There was no objection.

REMOVAL OF NAME OF MEMBER AS COSPONSOR OF H.R. 515

Mr. EVANS. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to have the name of the gentleman from Florida (Mr. BOYD) removed as a cosponsor of H.R. 515, as it was inadvertently added.

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

There was no objection.

APPOINTMENT OF CONFEREES ON H.R. 2361, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2006

Mr. TAYLOR of North Carolina. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to take from the Speaker's table the bill (H.R. 2361) making appropriations for the Department of the Interior, environment, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2006, and for other purposes, with a Senate amendment thereto, disagree to the Senate amendment, and agree to the conference asked by the Senate.

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

There was no objection.

MOTION TO INSTRUCT CONFEREES ON H.R. 2361, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2006

Mr. OBEY. Mr. Speaker, I offer a motion to instruct.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Clerk will report the motion.

The Clerk read as follows:

Mr. Obey moves that the managers on the part of the House at the conference on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses on the Senate amendment to the bill H.R. 2361 be instructed to agree to section 439 of the Senate amendment, providing \$1,500,000,000 for fiscal year 2005 for the Department of Veterans Affairs for medical services provided

by the Veterans Health Administration and designating that amount as an emergency requirement pursuant to section 402 of H. Con. Res. 95 (109th Congress).

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 7 of rule XXII, the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. OBEY) and the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. TAYLOR) each will control 30 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. OBEY).

Mr. OBEY. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself 5 minutes.

Mr. Speaker, for the past 3 years, a number of us on this side of the aisle, including the gentleman from Texas (Mr. EDWARDS), myself and several others, have tried to bring the administration to the realization that we needed many more dollars in the veterans health care funds than, in fact, they requested each year. And each year we have been able to drag them a little bit towards that goal, but we have not been able to drag them far enough.

As a result, we have heard many, many horror stories. We have heard that thousands of patients have had to wait more than 3 months for appointments in California. We have heard that in States like Arkansas and Oklahoma and Mississippi and Louisiana, the VA has stopped scheduling appointments for many veterans who are eligible for care. We have heard of 6-month delays in emergency surgery in Oregon. We have heard that facilities have had to erect scaffolding to protect patients and staff from falling bricks in Maine. We have heard that a medical center in Vermont has major shortfalls in their prosthetics budget. We have been told that doctors have had to pilfer supplies from neighboring hospitals to carry out routine procedures in Illinois. And we have been told that life safety improvements like replacing fire alarm systems have been postponed as the funds are used to cover operating expenses in States like California.

Yet, in the face of stories like that, in April VA Secretary Nicholson told the Congress that no additional funds would be needed for fiscal year 2005. But by the end of June he had to admit that there was a big problem, and he then testified that an additional \$975 million was needed. Two weeks later, the problem in their eyes got even bigger. OMB asked for yet another \$300 million for fiscal year 2005, so they are admitting a \$1.3 billion shortfall right now; and the numbers look worse for the coming fiscal year.

The VA has already amended their \$20 billion medical care budget request for an additional \$1.7 billion, and that does not count the additional \$500 million they are going to need, because I doubt that many Members want to go along with the administration's proposal to raise the veterans health care fees and co-op pays as has been suggested by the administration.

I would hope that by now every Member realizes that we have a VA health care crisis and we have to deal with it

right now. The other body did the right thing in the interior bill. They provided \$1.5 billion of emergency money for the VA. That would cover the immediate \$975 million shortfall and provide an additional \$525 million that could be distributed among the VA regions to take care of the source of problems that each of us has been hearing about.

I would point out also that in my view some Members of this House have paid a very high price for speaking out on behalf of our veterans. We saw earlier this year news stories which reported the fact that the majority caucus not only removed from his chairmanship but removed from the committee itself the Member on the other side of the aisle who chaired the committee in charge of veterans funding because he had been too insistent in agreeing with those of us on this side of the aisle who kept insisting that we needed more funding for veterans health care.

I would hope that it would be recognized that he was right, that we were right, not just about yesterday's problems but about today's and tomorrow's with respect to this account.

So I would simply urge each and every Member of this House to vote for this motion. This money is going to be provided. It is just a question of how many times we have to hit the House along side the head before, like a stubborn donkey, they finally recognize that something needs to be done.

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Reality is here. It would be nice if we faced up to it. I would hope this would receive the unanimous support of the Members of the House.

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

Mr. TAYLOR of North Carolina. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, we will soon, I think, hear from our chairman of the Subcommittee on Military Quality of Life and Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies, who will be speaking on this. I know that the error that was made is being taken care of in this legislation, in 2005 with \$1.5 billion, and in 2006 with another \$1.5 billion to make the entire \$3 billion.

Every year, Mr. Speaker, we have raised benefits for American veterans, and rightly so. Some 68 percent of our veterans are from World War II and Korea, and we know when we go out on the plaza and see the monument to the World War II veterans the sacrifices paid. We all have relatives who served in World War II, and we know they saved this world with their dedication. We know also how much our other veterans give to this country, those who fought in subsequent wars right up through the current time with our own children fighting in Iraq.

So all of us want to provide the materials and the health care benefits for our veterans, and this amendment will be one of the steps in providing that.