

Mr. MILLER of Florida. I want to thank Mr. MICHAUD for his fine work on this legislation and others that our committee has been involved in.

Mr. Speaker, one of the most important subcommittees within VA is Oversight and Investigations. That's why I asked the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. JOHNSON) to chair that subcommittee.

With that, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Ohio on this bill.

Mr. JOHNSON of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, I am proud to sponsor the Veterans Fiduciary Reform and Noble Service Act. This important legislation will transform the VA's fiduciary program to better serve the needs of our most vulnerable veterans and their hardworking fiduciaries; but most importantly, it will protect veterans in the program from falling victim to deceitful and criminal fiduciaries.

Since our February hearing, hardly a week has gone by where the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee has not been contacted about a fiduciary issue. Many of these issues have involved honest and hardworking fiduciaries who are caught in the rigid bureaucratic trap that is the VA's fiduciary program. This bill will go a long way toward making that unyielding bureaucracy more responsive to the needs of the veterans that it is supposed to serve.

We have heard many complaints about the requirement for fiduciaries to obtain a bond. While proper in some settings, it is inappropriate when it causes unnecessary hardship, such as a mother caring for her veteran son. This bill will require the VA to consider whether a bond is necessary and if it will adversely affect the fiduciary and the veterans he or she serves.

The Veterans Fiduciary Program and Noble Service Act will also direct VA's Under Secretaries for Health and Benefits to coordinate their efforts to ensure that fiduciaries caring for their loved ones are not overly burdened by redundant requirements.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, this bill aims to simplify annual reporting requirements. Currently, the VA does not have to review a fiduciary's annual accounting, and when it does, it places an onerous burden on those fiduciaries who are serving out of love, not for monetary gain. This bill will implement a straightforward annual accounting requirement and gives the VA the opportunity to audit fiduciaries whose accounting is suspect.

I'd like to thank my colleagues on the committee on both sides of the aisle for their work in this bipartisan effort.

Mr. MICHAUD. I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from the great State of New Jersey (Mr. RUNYAN), also somebody who has been very involved in helping us put this piece of legislation together.

Mr. RUNYAN. I thank Chairman MILLER.

I rise today in support of H.R. 5948, the Veterans Fiduciary Reform and Honoring Noble Service Act of 2012.

In addition to several important provisions that address many needed improvements to VA's fiduciary program, as chairman of the Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs, I would like to draw attention to several other important provisions of this bill.

First, section 9 of the bill provides for improved access to case-tracking information for certain government employees, including county veterans service officers.

□ 1550

It is my hope that allowing these local service officers to assist with the veterans claims process that more claims will be completed in a more timely manner.

There are also several other provisions in this bill that further honor the final resting places of our Nation's fallen heroes by providing improvements to the VA's national cemetery program and burial process, as well as at Arlington National Cemetery.

I believe we have a solemn obligation to cherish the memory and the heroic actions of our fallen heroes by holding ourselves and our organizations to the highest standards, which this legislation aims to do.

Therefore, I urge all Members to support H.R. 5948.

Mr. MICHAUD. I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I now yield 1 minute to the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. STIVERS).

Mr. STIVERS. I'd like to thank the gentleman for yielding.

As a Member of Congress and a serviceman, I was as shocked as everyone else by the stories coming out late last year about Dover Air Force Base mortuary sending cremated unidentified remains to the Prince George's landfill. It's a terrible injustice to our service members, and it can't be allowed to happen again.

While unidentified partial remains are now cremated and buried at sea, I believe we should not leave those heroes behind. My bill that became section 3 of H.R. 5948 creates a place of remembrance at Arlington National Cemetery for each conflict moving forward and ensures the remains of those who served and gave their lives have a final resting place that's deserving and worthy of their dedication and devotion.

I'd like to thank the chairman, and I'd like to thank the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. WALZ), and the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. RUNYAN) for their help and assistance on the bill.

I would ask my colleagues to support H.R. 5948 and help ensure that there's a place of remembrance for those who've given their final measure of devotion, especially if their remains are unidentified, and make sure we send their re-

mains to a place worthy of their dedication and commitment and devotion.

Mr. MICHAUD. Mr. Speaker, it's my understanding Chairman MILLER has no further speakers.

Mr. MILLER of Florida. That's correct, no further speakers.

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

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members would have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks on H.R. 5948, as amended.

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

There was no objection.

Mr. MILLER of Florida. I thank you once again and encourage all Members to support this legislation.

I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MILLER) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 5948, as amended.

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

The title was amended so as to read: "A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to improve the supervision of fiduciaries of veterans under the laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, to establish a Place of Remembrance at Arlington National Cemetery, and for other purposes."

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

#### VA MAJOR CONSTRUCTION AUTHORIZATION AND EXPIRING AUTHORITIES EXTENSION ACT OF 2012

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 6375) to authorize certain Department of Veterans Affairs major medical facility projects and leases, to amend title 38, United States Code, to extend certain authorities of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 6375

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

#### SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE; TABLE OF CONTENTS.

(a) SHORT TITLE.—This Act may be cited as the "VA Major Construction Authorization and Expiring Authorities Extension Act of 2012".

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

- Sec. 1. Short title; table of contents.
- Sec. 2. References to title 38, United States Code.
- Sec. 3. Scoring of budgetary effects.

#### TITLE I—CONSTRUCTION AUTHORIZATIONS

- Sec. 101. Authorization of fiscal year 2013 major medical facility projects.

- Sec. 102. Authorization of major medical facility project in Miami, Florida.
- Sec. 103. Authorization of appropriations.
- TITLE II—EXTENSIONS OF CERTAIN EXPIRING AUTHORITIES**
- Sec. 201. Extension of authority to calculate the net value of real property securing a defaulted loan for purposes of liquidation.
- Sec. 202. Extension of authority for operation of the Department of Veterans Affairs regional office in Manila, the Republic of the Philippines.
- Sec. 203. Extension of authority to provide treatment, rehabilitation, and certain other services for seriously mentally ill and homeless veterans.
- Sec. 204. Extension of authority to provide expanded services to homeless veterans.
- Sec. 205. Extension of authority to provide housing assistance for homeless veterans.
- Sec. 206. Extension of authority for the Advisory Committee on Homeless Veterans.
- Sec. 207. Extension of authority for the performance of medical disability examinations by contract physicians.

**SEC. 2. REFERENCES TO TITLE 38, UNITED STATES CODE.**

Except as otherwise expressly provided, whenever in this Act an amendment or repeal is expressed in terms of an amendment to, or repeal of, a section or other provision, the reference shall be considered to be made to a section or other provision of title 38, United States Code.

**SEC. 3. SCORING OF BUDGETARY EFFECTS.**

The budgetary effects of this Act, for the purpose of complying with the Statutory Pay-As-You-Go Act of 2010, shall be determined by reference to the latest statement titled "Budgetary Effects of PAYGO Legislation" for this Act, submitted for printing in the Congressional Record by the Chairman of the House Budget Committee, provided that such statement has been submitted prior to the vote on passage.

**TITLE I—CONSTRUCTION AUTHORIZATIONS**

**SEC. 101. AUTHORIZATION OF FISCAL YEAR 2013 MAJOR MEDICAL FACILITY PROJECTS.**

The Secretary of Veterans Affairs may carry out the following major medical facility projects in fiscal year 2013 in the amount specified for each project:

- (1) Construction of a mental health building at the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Seattle, Washington, in an amount not to exceed \$222,000,000.
- (2) Construction of a spinal cord injury center at the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Dallas, Texas, in an amount not to exceed \$155,200,000.

**SEC. 102. AUTHORIZATION OF MAJOR MEDICAL FACILITY PROJECT IN MIAMI, FLORIDA.**

(a) **IN GENERAL.**—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs may carry out the major medical facility project described in subsection (b) in an amount not to exceed a total of \$41,000,000.

(b) **PROJECT DESCRIBED.**—The major medical facility project described in this subsection is the renovation of the surgical suite and operating rooms at the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Miami, Florida.

**SEC. 103. AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.**

(a) **AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS FOR CONSTRUCTION.**—There is authorized to be ap-

propriated to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs for fiscal year 2013 or the year in which funds are appropriated for the Construction, Major Projects, account \$377,200,000 for the projects authorized in section 101.

(b) **LIMITATION.**—In addition to any limitations under section 8104 of title 38, United States Code, or other provision of law that apply to the projects authorized in section 101 and 102, such projects may only be carried out using—

- (1) funds appropriated for fiscal year 2013 pursuant to the authorization of appropriations in subsection (a) of this section;
- (2) funds available for Construction, Major Projects, for a fiscal year before fiscal year 2013 that remain available for obligation;
- (3) funds available for Construction, Major Projects, for a fiscal year after fiscal year 2013 that remain available for obligation;
- (4) funds appropriated for Construction, Major Projects, for fiscal year 2013 for a category of activity not specific to a project;
- (5) funds appropriated for Construction, Major Projects, for a fiscal year before 2013 for a category of activity not specific to a project; and
- (6) funds appropriated for Construction, Major Projects, for a fiscal year after 2013 for a category of activity not specific to a project.

**TITLE II—EXTENSIONS OF CERTAIN EXPIRING AUTHORITIES**

**SEC. 201. EXTENSION OF AUTHORITY TO CALCULATE THE NET VALUE OF REAL PROPERTY SECURING A DEFAULTED LOAN FOR PURPOSES OF LIQUIDATION.**

Section 3732(c)(11) is amended by striking "October 1, 2012" and inserting "October 1, 2013".

**SEC. 202. EXTENSION OF AUTHORITY FOR OPERATION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS REGIONAL OFFICE IN MANILA, THE REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES.**

Section 315(b) is amended by striking "December 31, 2012" and inserting "December 31, 2013". Such section 315 shall be carried out as amended by this section notwithstanding the date described in section 151 of the Continuing Appropriations Resolution, 2013.

**SEC. 203. EXTENSION OF AUTHORITY TO PROVIDE TREATMENT, REHABILITATION, AND CERTAIN OTHER SERVICES FOR SERIOUSLY MENTALLY ILL AND HOMELESS VETERANS.**

Section 2031(b) is amended by striking "December 31, 2012" and inserting "December 31, 2013".

**SEC. 204. EXTENSION OF AUTHORITY TO PROVIDE EXPANDED SERVICES TO HOMELESS VETERANS.**

Section 2033(d) is amended by striking "December 31, 2012" and inserting "December 31, 2013".

**SEC. 205. EXTENSION OF AUTHORITY TO PROVIDE HOUSING ASSISTANCE FOR HOMELESS VETERANS.**

Section 2041(c) is amended by striking "December 31, 2012" and inserting "December 31, 2013".

**SEC. 206. EXTENSION OF AUTHORITY FOR THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON HOMELESS VETERANS.**

Section 2066(d) is amended by striking "December 31, 2012" and inserting "December 31, 2013".

**SEC. 207. EXTENSION OF AUTHORITY FOR THE PERFORMANCE OF MEDICAL DISABILITY EXAMINATIONS BY CONTRACT PHYSICIANS.**

Section 704(c) of the Veterans Benefits Act of 2003 (38 U.S.C. 5101 note) is amended by striking "December 31, 2012" and inserting "December 31, 2013".

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from

Florida (Mr. MILLER) and the gentleman from Maine (Mr. MICHAUD) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Florida.

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I might consume.

This bill, as amended, would authorize certain Department of Veterans Affairs major medical facility projects, and it would also extend certain expiring authorities.

It encompasses VA's fiscal year for 2013, for major medical facility projects, and already tracks with the resources we have already provided to the Department for health care matters in the appropriations bill that was passed by the House with bipartisan support. It would aid in the delivery of health care to services and to service members, veterans, and their families in communities all across this country.

It authorizes two major medical facility projects, the construction of a mental health building at the VA Medical Center in Seattle, Washington, in an amount not to exceed \$222 million, and the construction of a spinal cord injury center at the VA Medical Center in Dallas, Texas, in an amount not to exceed \$155.2 million.

Section 102 of the bill would authorize the renovation of the surgical suite and operating rooms at the Medical Center in Miami, in an amount not to exceed \$41 million. I would note that this project was originally undertaken by the Department in 2007 as two separate minor construction projects.

However, in 2008, the two separate projects were combined into a single initiative without the knowledge of VA's central office, or the approval, in direct violation of established procedures. The VA officials first became aware of this issue in February of this year, and in April of this year they determined that the combined project constituted a major construction project that had moved forward without congressional authorization as required by law.

Work on the project is currently suspended, at a cost of approximately \$6,000 a day. As soon as our committee became aware of the issue, we requested an in-depth briefing from VA officials to get to the bottom of the issue and to ensure that the leaders of the VA responsible for this egregious oversight were, in fact, held accountable.

It's really nothing short of unacceptable to this committee and, I would hope, to this Congress that this facility had been openly flouting VA policy and, more importantly, breaking Federal law for 4 years without consequence before somebody at VA took notice.

How many other VA projects have moved forward without regard for proper procedure, legal requirements, or congressional authorization; and how long has the central office not been paying attention?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I reserve the balance of my time.

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

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

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

□ 1600

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

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

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

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

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

I reserve the balance of my time.

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

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

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

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

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

GENERAL LEAVE

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

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

There was no objection.

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

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

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

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

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

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

#### CONFIRMING FULL OWNERSHIP RIGHTS TO ARTIFACTS FROM ASTRONAUTS' SPACE MISSIONS

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

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

There was no objection.

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