

Roby	Sensenbrenner	Valadao
Roe (TN)	Sessions	Wagner
Rogers (AL)	Shimkus	Walberg
Rogers (KY)	Shuster	Walden
Rogers (MI)	Simpson	Walorski
Rokita	Smith (MO)	Weber (TX)
Rooney	Smith (NE)	Webster (FL)
Ros-Lehtinen	Smith (NJ)	Wenstrup
Roskam	Smith (TX)	Westmoreland
Ross	Southerland	Whitfield
Rothfus	Stewart	Williams
Royce	Stivers	Wilson (SC)
Runyan	Stutzman	Wittman
Ryan (WI)	Terry	Wolf
Salmon	Thompson (PA)	Womack
Sanford	Thornberry	Woodall
Scalise	Tiberi	Yoder
Schock	Tipton	Yoho
Schweikert	Turner	Young (AK)
Scott, Austin	Upton	Young (IN)

NAYS—189

Barber	Grayson	Neal
Barrow (GA)	Green, Al	Negrete McLeod
Bass	Green, Gene	O'Rourke
Beatty	Grijalva	Owens
Becerra	Hahn	Pallone
Bera (CA)	Hanabusa	Pascarell
Bishop (GA)	Hastings (FL)	Pastor (AZ)
Bishop (NY)	Heck (WA)	Payne
Blumenauer	Higgins	Pelosi
Bonamici	Himes	Perlmutter
Brady (PA)	Hinojosa	Peters (CA)
Braley (IA)	Holt	Peterson
Brownley (CA)	Honda	Pingree (ME)
Bustos	Horsford	Pocan
Butterfield	Hoyer	Polis
Capps	Huffman	Price (NC)
Capuano	Israel	Quigley
Cárdenas	Jackson Lee	Rahall
Carney	Jeffries	Roybal-Allard
Carson (IN)	Johnson (GA)	Ruiz
Cartwright	Johnson, E. B.	Ruppersberger
Castor (FL)	Kaptur	Rush
Castro (TX)	Keating	Ryan (OH)
Chu	Kelly (IL)	Sánchez, Linda
Clark (MA)	Kennedy	T.
Clarke (NY)	Kildee	Sanchez, Loretta
Clay	Kilmer	Sarbanes
Cleaver	Kind	Schakowsky
Clyburn	Kirkpatrick	Schiff
Cohen	Kuster	Schneider
Connolly	Langevin	Schrader
Conyers	Larsen (WA)	Scott (VA)
Cooper	Larson (CT)	Scott, David
Costa	Lee (CA)	Serrano
Courtney	Levin	Sewell (AL)
Crowley	Lipinski	Shea-Porter
Cuellar	Loeback	Sherman
Cummings	Lofgren	Sinema
Davis (CA)	Lowenthal	Sires
Davis, Danny	Lowey	Slaughter
DeFazio	Lujan Grisham	Smith (WA)
DeGette	(NM)	Speier
Delaney	Luján, Ben Ray	Swalwell (CA)
DeLauro	(NM)	Takano
DelBene	Lynch	Thompson (CA)
Deutch	Maffei	Thompson (MS)
Dingell	Maloney,	Tierney
Doggett	Carolyn	Titus
Doyle	Maloney, Sean	Tonko
Duckworth	Matheson	Tsongas
Edwards	Matsui	Van Hollen
Ellison	McCarthy (NY)	Vargas
Engel	McCollum	Veasey
Enyart	McDermott	Vela
Eshoo	McGovern	Velázquez
Esty	McIntyre	Visclosky
Farr	McNerney	Walz
Fattah	Meng	Wasserman
Foster	Michaud	Schultz
Frankel (FL)	Miller, George	Waters
Fudge	Moore	Waxman
Gabbard	Moran	Welch
Gallego	Murphy (FL)	Wilson (FL)
Garamendi	Nadler	Yarmuth
Garcia	Napolitano	

NOT VOTING—15

Brown (FL)	Meeks	Rangel
Cicilline	Nolan	Richmond
Gutiérrez	Nunnelee	Rohrabacher
Harper	Peters (MI)	Schwartz
Lewis	Petri	Stockman

□ 1339

Messrs. MORAN, HIMES, TAKANO, and BARBER changed their vote from "yea" to "nay."

So the previous question was ordered. The result of the vote was announced as above recorded.

Stated against:

Mr. NOLAN. Mr. Speaker, had I been present and voting on rollcall vote No. 184 (Motion on Ordering the Previous Question on the Rule providing for consideration of H.R. 4486) I would have voted "no."

Mr. CICILLINE. Mr. Speaker, on rollcall No. 184 I was at a funeral in my district. Had I been present, I would have voted "no."

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the resolution.

The resolution was agreed to.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

REMOVAL OF NAME OF MEMBER AS COSPONSOR OF H.R. 3344

Mr. GINGREY of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to remove my name as a cosponsor from H.R. 3344.

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

There was no objection.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION AND VETERANS AFFAIRS AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2015

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. CULBERSON. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on consideration of H.R. 4486, and that I may include tabular material on the same.

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

There was no objection.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to House Resolution 557 and rule XVIII, the Chair declares the House in the Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union for the consideration of the bill, H.R. 4486.

The Chair appoints the gentleman from Florida (Mr. WEBSTER) to preside over the Committee of the Whole.

□ 1343

IN THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Accordingly, the House resolved itself into the Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union for the consideration of the bill (H.R. 4486) making appropriations for military construction, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2015, and for other purposes, with Mr. WEBSTER of Florida in the chair.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

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

The gentleman from Texas (Mr. CULBERSON) and the gentleman from Geor-

gia (Mr. BISHOP) each will control 30 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas.

Mr. CULBERSON. Mr. Chairman, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

It is a real honor and a privilege for me to present the Veterans Affairs and Military Construction Appropriations bill to the House of Representatives with my good friend from Georgia, SANFORD BISHOP.

This is a bipartisan bill that we produced together with unanimous support of the committee and the subcommittee to ensure that our veterans and our men and women in uniform have everything that they need to do their job with complete peace of mind.

In fact, I often think of the job of this subcommittee as the peace of mind subcommittee, to be sure that our men and women in uniform have everything they need when it comes to their physical infrastructure and that, when they leave the services and go into the VA system, they have everything they need.

□ 1345

Making sure that our men and women in uniform have everything that they need and making sure that our veterans when they leave the service have the best possible medical care this country can provide is one of those fundamental functions of the government. We have an obligation as guardians of the Treasury and as good stewards of taxpayers' hard-earned dollars to ensure that this vital, core function of our Federal Government is fulfilled to our veterans and to our men and women in uniform.

In this appropriations bill, we have included \$71.5 billion in discretionary funding, which is \$1.8 billion less than last year and \$398 million less than the budget request. We have provided the full budget request number of \$6.6 billion for military construction projects, and while we have provided \$1.8 billion less in fiscal year '14, we have included \$64.7 billion in discretionary funding for the VA, which is about \$1.5 billion more than last year. We have included an additional \$20 million to get at the claims backlog and \$17 million more than was requested for electronic medical records.

In this legislation, we are ensuring that we have continued strict oversight of the VA in their reporting requirements on the claims backlog. The length of time it takes veterans to receive the disability benefits that they have earned is just unacceptable, so Mr. BISHOP and I have included language in this bill to have very strict reporting requirements over which we will continue to exercise vigorous oversight in the months ahead at the VA to ensure that the claims backlog is reduced.

We are also introducing a mechanism here that we have found to be very, very effective in the case of electronic

health records. The VA and the Department of Defense are operating two completely different medical record systems that don't talk to each other. So, when you are in uniform in the Armed Forces and leave and go into the private sector and when the VA picks you up, the VA can't read your medical records. This is unacceptable. Since 2008, the Congress has had laws on the books that require the VA and the Department of Defense to have transparent, interoperable medical records that would be easily and quickly readable when a servicemember leaves the active service and goes into the VA system. Yet they are still not there, so we have in this bill a mechanism that says you are only going to get 25 percent of your money up front on implementing electronic health records until you come back to the committee and show us that you are meeting your obligation under the law to provide an immediate, seamless, and transparent transfer of your medical records from the Department of Defense to the VA.

In particular, I want to thank Chairman ROGERS for his support in this effort. He had a constituent of whom I am confident he will talk about in a minute—a young man in his district who really struck a chord with me. It is a tragic example of how unacceptable this is, that one agency can't read the medical records of the other. He is a young man who was injured. He lost his eyesight, I believe, Mr. Chairman, in Afghanistan. He had the vision in one eye lost, but had damage in the other eye. He still had some vision in the other eye, so when he left the service to go into the VA and when the VA needed to work on his other eye immediately in order to save his vision, the VA could not read the medical records provided to them by the Department of

Defense. The doctors at the VA, understandably being cautious and concerned and being unable to read the records, didn't operate as quickly as they should have, and the young man lost his eyesight as a result of the medical records being unreadable by the VA. It is tragic, unacceptable, and utterly outrageous.

I am working closely with the chairman of the armed services Appropriations subcommittee. Chairman ROGERS has been terrifically helpful in this as has Ranking Member LOWEY and my good friend Mr. BISHOP from Georgia. We are working with the armed services subcommittee in Appropriations to put identical language in the bill so that the DOD is in the same boat.

You are going to have to earn your money. Prove to us that you are obeying the law, that you are fulfilling your obligation to our veterans and to our men and women in uniform, and then we will release the money. Follow the law and you will get your money. It works every time in the private sector. Certainly, I am confident that it is going to work here. I often think of the fact that I have been using an Apple Macintosh computer since they first came out in 1985. I never dreamed that you would be able to use a Windows operating system on a Macintosh computer, but, today, you can run Microsoft Word and other Windows programs on a Macintosh operating system. Surely, if Apple and Windows can work it out, the VA and the Department of Defense can as well. This bill ensures that that is going to happen. If they want to see the rest of their money, they are going to have to obey the law and get an interoperable, transparent medical records system in place.

Mr. Chairman, we have also limited the availability of construction funds

in this bill to 5 years for hospitals that the VA builds so that the veterans don't have to wait endlessly for the completion of a hospital. I will never forget when I first got this marvelous assignment—I was assigned by Chairman ROGERS to handle this important bill—that the Denver hospital had \$900 million, I believe, set aside, squirreled away in a hole. I don't think they had signed a contract or turned a spade of dirt, but they had \$900 million squirreled away for years—that they had not used—in order to build that sorely needed hospital in Denver. That is just unacceptable.

This money that we are privileged to be stewards of was earned by our constituents by the sweat of their brow and their hard work, and it is our responsibility to ensure that the money is wisely spent, that it is spent to ensure that the law is enforced and, above all, that we do not spend any more than is absolutely necessary to fulfill the fundamental obligations of the United States Government. At the top of that list is to ensure that our veterans receive the medical care they have earned, that they receive the disability benefits in a timely fashion that they have earned, and that our men and women in uniform have all of the physical facilities they need to do their jobs with the peace of mind and the assurance that the United States Congress and the American taxpayers are right there with them, looking over their shoulders, to take care of them.

That is why this is the "peace of mind" committee, and it is a privilege for me to serve with my good friend from Georgia (Mr. BISHOP). So that my good friend Mr. BISHOP can address the House, I reserve the balance of my time.

Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, FY 2015 (H.R. 4486)
(Amounts in thousands)

	FY 2014 Enacted	FY 2015 Request	Bill	Bill vs. Enacted	Bill vs. Request
TITLE I - DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE					
Military construction, Army.....	1,104,875	539,427	526,427	-578,448	-13,000
Military construction, Navy and Marine Corps.....	1,629,690	1,018,772	998,772	-630,918	-20,000
Military construction, Air Force.....	1,052,796	811,774	719,551	-333,245	-92,223
Military construction, Defense-Wide.....	3,445,423	2,061,890	2,021,690	-1,423,733	-40,200
Total, Active components.....	7,232,784	4,431,863	4,266,440	-2,966,344	-165,423
Military construction, Army National Guard.....	314,740	126,920	126,920	-187,820	---
Military construction, Air National Guard.....	119,800	94,663	94,663	-25,137	---
Military construction, Army Reserve.....	156,560	103,946	103,946	-52,614	---
Military construction, Navy Reserve.....	29,000	51,528	51,528	+22,528	---
Military construction, Air Force Reserve.....	45,659	49,492	49,492	+3,833	---
Total, Reserve components.....	665,759	426,549	426,549	-239,210	---
Total, Military construction.....	7,898,543	4,858,412	4,692,989	-3,205,554	-165,423
North Atlantic Treaty Organization Security Investment Program.....	199,700	199,700	199,700	---	---
Family housing construction, Army.....	27,408	78,609	78,609	+51,201	---
Family housing operation and maintenance, Army.....	512,871	350,976	350,976	-161,895	---
Family housing construction, Navy and Marine Corps....	73,407	16,412	16,412	-56,995	---
Family housing operation and maintenance, Navy and Marine Corps.....	379,444	354,029	354,029	-25,415	---
Family housing construction, Air Force.....	76,360	---	---	-76,360	---
Family housing operation and maintenance, Air Force...	388,598	327,747	327,747	-60,851	---
Family housing operation and maintenance, Defense-Wide.....	55,845	61,100	61,100	+5,255	---
Department of Defense Family Housing Improvement Fund.....	1,780	1,662	1,662	-118	---
Total, Family housing.....	1,515,713	1,190,535	1,190,535	-325,178	---
Chemical demilitarization construction, Defense-Wide..	122,536	38,715	38,715	-83,821	---
Department of Defense Base Closure Account.....	451,357	270,085	270,085	-181,272	---
Military Construction - fiscal year 2014 (Sec. 127)...	---	---	125,000	+125,000	+125,000
Military Construction - fiscal year 2015 (Sec. 128)...	---	---	245,000	+245,000	+245,000
Military Construction, Army (Sec. 129).....	-200,000	---	-79,577	+120,423	-79,577
Military Construction, Navy and Marine Corps (Sec. 131).....	-12,000	---	---	+12,000	---
Military Construction, Air Force.....	-39,700	---	---	+39,700	---
Military Construction, Defense-Wide.....	-14,000	---	---	+14,000	---
Military Construction, Air National Guard.....	-14,200	---	---	+14,200	---
42 USC 3374 (Sec. 131).....	-99,949	---	-100,000	-51	-100,000
NATO Security Investment Program (Sec. 130).....	---	---	-25,000	-25,000	-25,000
Total, title I, Department of Defense.....	9,808,000	6,557,447	6,557,447	-3,250,553	---
Appropriations.....	(10,187,849)	(6,557,447)	(6,762,024)	(-3,425,825)	(+204,577)
Rescissions.....	(-379,849)	---	(-204,577)	(+175,272)	(-204,577)
TITLE II - DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS					
Veterans Benefits Administration					
Compensation and pensions.....	71,476,104	78,687,709	78,687,709	+7,211,605	---
Readjustment benefits.....	13,135,898	14,761,862	14,761,862	+1,625,964	---
Veterans insurance and indemnities.....	77,567	63,257	63,257	-14,310	---
Veterans housing benefit program fund:					
(indefinite).....	---	---	---	---	---
(Limitation on direct loans).....	(500)	(500)	(500)	---	---
Administrative expenses.....	158,430	160,881	160,881	+2,451	---

Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, FY 2015 (H.R. 4486)
(Amounts in thousands)

	FY 2014 Enacted	FY 2015 Request	Bill	Bill vs. Enacted	Bill vs. Request
Vocational rehabilitation loans program account.....	5	10	10	+5	---
(Limitation on direct loans).....	(2,500)	(2,877)	(2,877)	(+377)	---
Administrative expenses.....	354	361	361	+7	---
Native American veteran housing loan program account..	1,109	1,130	1,130	+21	---
Total, Veterans Benefits Administration.....	84,849,467	93,675,210	93,675,210	+8,825,743	---
Veterans Health Administration					
Medical services:					
Advance from prior year.....	(43,557,000)	(45,015,527)	(45,015,527)	(+1,458,527)	---
Current year request.....	40,000	367,885	---	-40,000	-367,885
Advance appropriation, FY 2016.....	45,015,527	47,603,202	47,603,202	+2,587,675	---
Subtotal.....	45,055,527	47,971,087	47,603,202	+2,547,675	-367,885
Medical support and compliance:					
Advance from prior year.....	(6,033,000)	(5,879,700)	(5,879,700)	(-153,300)	---
Advance appropriation, FY 2016.....	5,879,700	6,144,000	6,144,000	+264,300	---
Subtotal.....	5,879,700	6,144,000	6,144,000	+264,300	---
Medical facilities:					
Advance from prior year.....	(4,872,000)	(4,739,000)	(4,739,000)	(-133,000)	---
Current year request.....	85,000	---	---	-85,000	---
Advance appropriation, FY 2016.....	4,739,000	4,915,000	4,915,000	+176,000	---
Subtotal.....	4,824,000	4,915,000	4,915,000	+91,000	---
Medical and prosthetic research.....	585,664	588,922	588,922	+3,258	---
Medical care cost recovery collections:					
Offsetting collections.....	-2,485,000	-2,456,000	-2,456,000	+29,000	---
Appropriations (indefinite).....	2,485,000	2,456,000	2,456,000	-29,000	---
Subtotal.....	---	---	---	---	---
DoD-VA Joint Medical Funds (transfers out).....	(-254,257)	(-269,366)	(-252,366)	(+1,891)	(+17,000)
DoD-VA Joint Medical Funds (by transfer).....	(254,257)	(269,366)	(252,366)	(-1,891)	(-17,000)
DoD-VA Health Care Sharing Incentive Fund (Transfer out).....	(-15,000)	(-15,000)	(-15,000)	---	---
DoD-VA Health Care Sharing Incentive Fund (by transfer).....	(15,000)	(15,000)	(15,000)	---	---
Total, Veterans Health Administration.....	56,344,891	59,619,009	59,251,124	+2,906,233	-367,885
Appropriations.....	(710,664)	(956,807)	(588,922)	(-121,742)	(-367,885)
Advance appropriations, FY 2016.....	(55,634,227)	(58,662,202)	(58,662,202)	(+3,027,975)	---
Advances from prior year appropriations.....	(54,462,000)	(55,634,227)	(55,634,227)	(+1,172,227)	---
National Cemetery Administration					
National Cemetery Administration.....	250,000	256,800	256,800	+6,800	---
Departmental Administration					
General administration.....	327,591	321,591	321,591	-6,000	---
Board of Veterans Appeals.....	88,294	94,294	94,294	+6,000	---
General operating expenses, VBA.....	2,465,490	2,494,254	2,514,254	+48,764	+20,000
Information technology systems.....	3,703,344	3,903,344	3,870,552	+167,208	-32,792
Office of Inspector General.....	121,411	121,411	121,411	---	---
Construction, major projects.....	342,130	561,800	561,800	+219,670	---
Construction, minor projects.....	714,870	495,200	495,200	-219,670	---
Grants for construction of State extended care facilities.....	85,000	80,000	80,000	-5,000	---

Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, FY 2015 (H.R. 4486)
(Amounts in thousands)

	FY 2014 Enacted	FY 2015 Request	Bill	Bill vs. Enacted	Bill vs. Request
Grants for the construction of veterans cemeteries....	46,000	45,000	45,000	-1,000	---
Total, Departmental Administration.....	7,894,130	8,116,894	8,104,102	+209,972	-12,792
Administrative Provisions					
Prior Year Rescissions (Sec. 233).....	-182,000	---	-38,000	+144,000	-38,000
Section 225					
Medical services.....	1,400,000	1,400,000	1,400,000	---	---
(Rescission).....	-1,400,000	-1,400,000	-1,400,000	---	---
Medical support and compliance.....	100,000	100,000	100,000	---	---
(Rescission).....	-150,000	-100,000	-100,000	+50,000	---
Medical facilities.....	250,000	250,000	250,000	---	---
(Rescission).....	-250,000	-250,000	-250,000	---	---
Total, Administrative Provisions.....	-232,000	---	-38,000	+194,000	-38,000
Total, title II.....	149,106,488	161,667,913	161,249,236	+12,142,748	-418,677
Appropriations.....	(95,454,261)	(104,755,711)	(104,375,034)	(+8,920,773)	(-380,677)
Rescissions.....	(-1,982,000)	(-1,750,000)	(-1,788,000)	(+194,000)	(-38,000)
Advance appropriations, FY 2016.....	(55,634,227)	(58,662,202)	(58,662,202)	(+3,027,975)	---
Advances from prior year appropriations.....	(54,462,000)	(55,634,227)	(55,634,227)	(+1,172,227)	---
(Limitation on direct loans).....	(3,000)	(3,377)	(3,377)	(+377)	---
Discretionary.....	(64,416,919)	(68,155,085)	(67,736,408)	(+3,319,489)	(-418,677)
Advances from prior year less FY 2016 advances.....	-1,172,227	-3,027,975	-3,027,975	-1,855,748	---
Net discretionary.....	(63,244,692)	(65,127,110)	(64,708,433)	(+1,463,741)	(-418,677)
Mandatory.....	(84,689,569)	(93,512,828)	(93,512,828)	(+8,823,259)	---
Total mandatory and net discretionary.....	147,934,261	158,639,938	158,221,261	+10,287,000	-418,677
TITLE III - RELATED AGENCIES					
American Battle Monuments Commission					
Salaries and expenses.....	63,200	70,100	75,000	+11,800	+4,900
Foreign currency fluctuations account.....	14,100	1,900	1,900	-12,200	---
Total, American Battle Monuments Commission.....	77,300	72,000	76,900	-400	+4,900
U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims					
Salaries and expenses.....	35,408	31,386	31,386	-4,022	---
Department of Defense - Civil					
Cemeterial Expenses, Army					
Salaries and expenses.....	65,800	45,800	61,881	-3,919	+16,081
Armed Forces Retirement Home - Trust Fund					
Operation and maintenance.....	66,800	62,400	62,400	-4,400	---
Capital program.....	1,000	1,000	1,000	---	---
Total, Armed Forces Retirement Home.....	67,800	63,400	63,400	-4,400	---
Total, title III.....	246,308	212,586	233,567	-12,741	+20,981

Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, FY 2015 (H.R. 4486)
 (Amounts in thousands)

	FY 2014 Enacted	FY 2015 Request	Bill	Bill vs. Enacted	Bill vs. Request
Grand total.....	159,160,796	168,437,946	168,040,250	+8,879,454	-397,696
Appropriations.....	(105,888,418)	(111,525,744)	(111,370,625)	(+5,482,207)	(-155,119)
Rescissions.....	(-2,361,849)	(-1,750,000)	(-1,992,577)	(+369,272)	(-242,577)
Advance appropriations, FY 2015.....	(55,634,227)	(58,662,202)	(58,662,202)	(+3,027,975)	---
Advances from prior year appropriations.....	(54,462,000)	(55,634,227)	(55,634,227)	(+1,172,227)	---
(By transfer).....	(269,257)	(284,366)	(267,366)	(-1,891)	(-17,000)
(Transfer out).....	(-269,257)	(-284,366)	(-267,366)	(+1,891)	(+17,000)
(Limitation on direct loans).....	(3,000)	(3,377)	(3,377)	(+377)	---

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. I thank the gentleman.

Mr. Chairman, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

As you all know, this bill has a strong reputation for finding bipartisan common ground as members work together to fund the construction of military facilities and strive to improve the quality of life and the care afforded to our veterans and our military families. Once again, Chairman CULBERSON has continued this tradition. The bill before us provides funding levels that, I think, most Members on both sides of the aisle agree are appropriate while avoiding the contentious legislative riders that complicate passage.

I am pleased to join Chairman CULBERSON as the House takes up the fiscal year 2015 appropriations bill for Military Construction, Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies. The MilCon-VA bill is critically important to the strength and well-being of our military, our veterans, and the families who sacrifice so much to defend our country.

In working with Chairman CULBERSON and the members of the subcommittee, we have crafted a bill that will address the funding needs for military construction and family housing for our troops and their families as well as other quality-of-life construction projects. In addition, it will provide funding for many important VA programs as well as for agencies like the Veterans Court of Appeals and the American Battle Monuments Commission. The bill before us today touches every soldier, sailor, marine, and airman. In addition, this bill will also impact military spouses, their children, and every veteran who participates in VA programs.

I want to commend the chairman for his work. Together, we sat through hearings and gained valuable insight to the workings of all agencies under the subcommittee's jurisdiction. I also want to thank all of our subcommittee members and recognize them for their hard work in crafting this bill. I believe that the minority was treated fairly during this process, and I want to thank Chairman CULBERSON for ensuring this bipartisan result.

Chairman CULBERSON has already provided the funding highlights in the bill, so I won't repeat them all, but I will say this: In my opinion, the FY '15 bill adequately provides for the Department's priorities in military construction for each of the services. If the Department needed something, it is in the bill, and if it didn't need it, it is not in the bill. The Department of Veterans Affairs is funded at \$64.7 billion, which is \$1.8 billion above the '14 enacted level. Overall, the bill meets the discretionary budget request in all areas of administrative expenses, research, and facilities. In addition, the bill includes \$58.7 billion in advances, which is the same as the budget request.

While I am pleased with the healthy funding increase for the VA, many con-

stituents from my district are still extremely frustrated with the claims backlog. Frankly, I would have to agree. Now, while the VA has made some progress on lessening the backlog, there are still over 300,000 claims considered as backlogged, so I was pleased that an additional \$20 million was included in the bill to assist the VA in making even more progress on the backlog. In addition, Mr. Chairman, it is my hope that coupling the Veterans Claims Intake Program with continued rigorous reporting requirements, while fully funding the Veterans Benefit Management System, will help the VA reach its goal to end this backlog in 2015.

On the issue of electronic medical records, you all know my frustration, and I could spend all of the time yielded to me just on this one topic, but I will say this: We have finally gotten the two Departments' attention, and I expect to see some real progress on this soon. The bill continues the practice of fencing money for this endeavor to make sure that when it is completed we have a system that works, and works well.

Mr. Chairman, I believe that we have a strong bipartisan bill that supports our military, their families, and our veterans, and I would hate to see the hard work of our committee upended by contentious, partisan riders intended to serve in scoring political points instead of those that serve our Nation. I also believe the most important things of this bill are the resources and accountability provided to assist the VA in tackling the claims backlog. So I say to my colleagues that our committee strongly shares the deep commitment of this body in fixing the claims backlog issue. We have looked at numerous approaches and firmly believe our bill has found the optimal approach in dealing with this pressing concern for our veterans.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. CULBERSON. Mr. Chairman, at this time, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from Kentucky, Chairman ROGERS, the distinguished chairman of the full committee.

Mr. ROGERS of Kentucky. I thank the gentleman for yielding.

Mr. Chairman, I rise today in support of the 2015 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations bill.

I am very happy to be on the floor with this bill today, Mr. Chairman, because it kicks off the 2015 appropriations cycle at a very early date. In fact, we know that this is the earliest in the year that our committee has presented a bill to the floor, at least since 1974, the date of the present Budget Act, and perhaps even more so beyond that. We just don't have the records for it. Nevertheless, it is a very early date. It also does the important work of providing funding for our military, infrastructure and for the care of our veterans.

This bill provides \$71.5 billion in discretionary funding to meet those

needs. Within that total, this bill provides \$6.6 billion for military construction projects, family housing, medical units, education-training facilities. This will help make sure that the men and women of our Armed Forces have the quality of life that they deserve during their service and that they have the support that they need for our Nation's military missions.

The bill also provides a total of \$64.7 billion in discretionary funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs. That goes a long way toward fulfilling our commitments to our veterans, making sure that, in exchange for their service and their sacrifice, we will take care of their health and well-being. Of that money, \$45 billion goes toward VA medical services, including funding for mental health care, suicide prevention, rural health initiatives, homeless veteran treatment, and job training. The bill also ensures that our benefit programs and health systems operate smoothly and efficiently.

□ 1400

This bill continues our committee's hard work to reduce the disability claims backlog, and demands that an interoperable Department of Defense-VA, the electronic health record system is up and running as soon as possible so that when a veteran goes to a VA hospital and the hospital medical people need access to Army records or DOD records when the soldier was injured, those records are available and compatible so that VA then can use those records to further the treatment of the soldier.

By providing increased funding for claims processing, continuing performance benchmarks to reduce the backlog, and placing conditions on funding for modernization of the VA health record system, we are sending a very strong message, Mr. Chairman, to that agency that we want these problems fixed, and we want them fixed now.

In total, the bill provides \$1.8 billion less than last year, hard-and-fast proof that we can streamline this government and root out unnecessary spending without adversely affecting our troops and veterans. For example, less funding is provided to Military Construction accounts due to current price stability and a favorable bid climate, which saves taxpayer dollars but has no effect on quality of life or services for our troops.

Mr. Chairman, this bill is a model of bipartisanship that represents the good we can do by way of the appropriations process. That is, in most part, thanks to the subcommittee lead by my good chairman, JOHN CULBERSON, and his ranking member, Mr. BISHOP. They worked on a collaborative basis to produce a bill that truly fulfills the needs of our military and our veterans.

I want to take a moment too to thank the staff who all put in a great deal of hard work to get this bill before the House this early and at all.

As you know, Mr. Chairman, this is the first of 12 appropriations bills that

we must bring to the floor before the August recess. With an agreed-upon budget and early start, the cooperation of our colleagues on both sides of the aisle and ample floor time, I believe we can complete our work, our congressional duty, on time, on budget, and under regular order. I look forward to working with our colleagues to make this goal a reality.

I couldn't be prouder to kick off our 2015 appropriations bill season with this legislation. I urge my colleagues to support it fully.

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Mr. Chairman, I yield 4 minutes to the gentlewoman from New York (Mrs. LOWEY), the ranking member of the full Appropriations Committee, a very, very, very eloquent and hardworking lady, and who is committed to the support of our veterans and their families.

Mrs. LOWEY. Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank our distinguished chairman, Mr. CULBERSON, and the distinguished subcommittee ranking member, SANFORD BISHOP, who really have done an extraordinary job on this bill.

Since it is the first bill coming to the floor, I share the pride expressed by the big chairman, Chairman ROGERS. This is regular order, this is an outstanding bill, and we can be very proud of the work. So thank you again, Chairman CULBERSON, Ranking Member BISHOP, for this very, very important bill.

This is the first of the 12 spending bills that the House will consider for fiscal year 2015. As I mentioned, I am so pleased that we are beginning the process with a bill, as reported out of committee, that includes reasonable spending levels and is devoid of controversial riders. I hope this is a sign of what is to follow.

Despite fiscal constraints, the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs bill would meet the needs of servicemen and servicewomen and continue to support our veterans. I am particularly pleased with the emphasis on the increased need for prosthetics for our female servicemembers.

Congress must continue to track and provide vigorous oversight, as you heard from Chairman ROGERS and Chairman CULBERSON and Ranking Member BISHOP, on the VistA Evolution Electronic Health Record to ensure its capability and interoperability with whatever health records system the Department of Defense eventually selects. As we have discussed many times, this discussion has gone on much too long. It is time for closure, and it is time for coordination. I do hope that happens sooner, rather than later. The overall increase above the fiscal year 2014-enacted level to the IT account should help the VA move forward.

This bill also takes several steps to reduce the disgraceful veterans claims backlog. The committee has previously provided the VA with additional resources. This bill would provide \$173.3 million to the Veterans Benefit Management System and an additional \$20

million to the Veterans Benefit Administration for digital scanning of old paper files, the centralized mail initiative, and staff overtime.

It withholds 75 percent of the VistA Evolution funds until VA provides information on the system, particularly regarding planned interoperability with the DOD.

It will continue to require the VA to provide monthly records on claims processing and remediation efforts for underperforming regional offices.

The VA has made progress in the last year, and this bill provides the resources to end the claims backlog, and that is what we expect of the Secretary in 2015.

This is a good bill. I hope it is preserved as the House considers amendments. Mr. Chairman, I urge your support.

Mr. CULBERSON. Mr. Chairman, if I could ask how much time do we have remaining in this part of the debate?

The CHAIR. The gentleman from Texas has 17 minutes remaining.

Mr. CULBERSON. Mr. Chairman, I have the pleasure to yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. FRELINGHUYSEN), the chairman of the Defense Subcommittee.

Mr. FRELINGHUYSEN. Mr. Chairman, as you have so well articulated, the Nation owes an almost unrepayable debt to our men and women in uniform, past and present. As a result of their selfless service, we are absolutely obliged to deliver a full range of benefits that they were promised. That includes quality medical care for members of the military and our veterans at all times.

My colleagues, I want to commend the gentleman from Georgia, and their staff for their commitment to ensuring that there will be a seamless transition from the Defense medical system into the VA health care system through an integrated electronic medical record.

For nearly a decade, your subcommittee and our Defense Subcommittee have listened to a parade of administration officials tell us, first of all, they recognized the need for interoperability when it comes to electronic health records and, secondly, that we are on it. Mr. Chairman, they were not on it, and as a result, we have lost years as the VA and the Department of Defense struggled to develop either a single unified record or different but interoperable systems.

My colleagues, the Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008 mandated the Department of Defense and Veterans Affairs were required to collaborate to create an electronic health record that would achieve interoperability and streamline the transition process from servicemember to veteran. Now, 7 years later, there is no interoperable record, and the original plan for the two Departments to use the same system has now been scrapped. The Department of Defense plans to acquire a new record system

while the VA continues to upgrade its current one. Alternatively, the acquisition program for the Department of Defense has an estimated contract award date of the third quarter of fiscal year 2015 with initial operating capability by the first quarter of fiscal year 2017, nearly a full decade after the initial mandate.

My colleagues, this program has been plagued by inefficiency, poor planning, and apparently even less oversight by responsible members of the Department. The failure to make the significant progress on this issue is a national disgrace.

The CHAIR. The time of the gentleman has expired.

Mr. CULBERSON. I yield the gentleman such time as he may consume.

Mr. FRELINGHUYSEN. Thank you for yielding the time.

The failure to make significant progress on this issue is a national disgrace. Not only are the Departments squandering precious taxpayer dollars, but above all, our troops and veterans are suffering as they seek help.

Mr. Chairman, I look forward to working with you on this situation to end this debacle. It is inexcusable. We need interoperable records. We need the VA and the Department of Defense to work together successfully to serve our veterans.

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Mr. Chairman, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from California (Mr. FARR), who has offered invaluable help on the committee in crafting the bill and who has a particular interest in the Defense Language School in Monterey and on maintaining our commitment to previous BRAC rounds in the State of California that they not be forgotten.

Mr. FARR. Mr. Chair, thank you very much, Ranking Member BISHOP and Chairman CULBERSON.

I rise as the longest serving member on this subcommittee, and I want to commend you both, the chairman and the ranking member, for your hard work in ensuring that this bill is another significant step in fulfilling our promise to our country that has made these commitments to our veterans that we will leave none of them behind.

This committee has a strong history of working in a bipartisan way to produce a bill that supports our Active Duty servicemembers, our veterans, and their families, and I think this bill is no exception to that.

For example, the VA has taken steps to rectify the deplorable backlog of benefit claims as everyone has mentioned so far. We owe it to our veterans to exercise our constitutional oversight responsibilities to ensure that the VA is actually fixing that backlog.

I am pleased the bill before us today includes language I requested with many of my colleagues that continues additional oversight requirements for the Veterans Benefits Administration and requires regular updates from the VA to Congress on the status of the backlog. Through regular updates from

the VA, we will be able to ensure accountability that will ultimately end the backlog.

Additionally, I am pleased to see the bill recognize that the VA must be able to employ enough mental health providers. For example, as it currently stands, 95 percent of the marriage and family therapists in California, licensed in California, are barred from VA employment under current VA standards, which require a degree from only one specified national accreditation program.

I authored language in the report of the bill, accompanying the bill, to ensure that the VA explore expanding the accreditation requirements by looking at those that are recognized by the Department of Education so that more marriage and family therapists can get to work helping our veterans.

As a final note, I would like to point out that this bill is \$1.8 billion below last year's enacted level, but it is only \$0.4 billion less than what the President requested.

The CHAIR. The time of the gentleman has expired.

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. I yield the gentleman 10 seconds.

Mr. FARR. Thank you.

I am glad to see this bill has been protected from senseless budget cuts. I strongly encourage this Congress to honor the balanced approach that this bill shows in the bipartisan Budget Control Act that we adopted last year.

□ 1415

Mr. CULBERSON. Mr. Chairman, at this time it is my privilege to yield 1 minute to the gentlewoman from Alabama (Mrs. ROBY), a member of our subcommittee who does a superb job representing her constituents.

Mrs. ROBY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, there is no greater duty that we have as a Nation than to care for our veterans. I am so proud to stand in support of this bill funding critical VA needs like medical care, medical health services, suicide prevention, traumatic brain injury treatment, homeless services, and job training.

One way I believe that we can greatly improve VA services is to further develop the Patient-Centered Community Care program. Some services veterans need aren't always offered at their local VA hospital, or, if they are, the waiting list may be really long. In these cases, it only makes sense for the VA to contract out services through local providers and get the veteran patients the care that they need. And offering better care to veterans while saving taxpayer money is a win-win situation.

Our committee report for this bill asks the Department of Veterans Affairs to document the successes and efficiencies of Patient-Centered Community Care so we can make the case for allowing more veterans to take advantage of this innovative program.

I strongly support this bill.

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Mr. Chairman, at this time I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. CUELLAR), a strong member of the Appropriations Committee and a tireless fighter for our military veterans and their families.

Mr. CUELLAR. I thank the gentleman for yielding.

First of all, Mr. Chairman, I want to thank the chairman, my friend from Texas, JOHN CULBERSON, and I certainly want to thank our ranking member, Mr. BISHOP. These two gentlemen are true models of what bipartisanship is here in Congress. They have really done a great job to show the American public that when it comes to veterans and the military, this is not a Democratic or a Republican issue, but it is an issue that we all work together. So I certainly want to thank them.

I want to thank them for the work that they have done, but in particular I want to thank both gentleman and the committee about an issue dealing with the backlogs that have existed at the VA for many years.

Veterans of all generations deserve a benefit system that is easy to navigate and is responsive to their needs.

As of April 26, 2014, the VA claims totaled more than 596,000. Of those, 319,000 have been pending for more than 125 days. This is something that has to be cleared. And this is something that Congress is working on.

While Congress has done some work, more has to be done. We need to make sure that in this appropriations bill we not only provide the bureaucrats, with all due respect, with the money, but they have to be provided the oversight and the performance measures to make sure that, if they are given the money, they get to work and eliminate this backlog that has been affecting so many veterans in my district and across the State and the Nation.

So I want to thank the members of the Appropriations Committee for supporting the VA's Veterans Benefit Management System so old claims that are filed on paper can now be converted to digital files to make them more accessible and more searchable.

I also want to thank them for the money for VA employees' overtime so we can end the backlog by 2015. We have to get this job done.

Finally, the last point that I want to make that is extremely important is to make sure that we get the VA and the Department of Defense to create one electronic health records system.

Why is it that the Department of Defense has their own records, and once a veteran retires, the VA has a different record? We have to get them together so they can work together to make sure that we have the right paperwork filed and we speed up claims and the process between the VA and the Department of Defense, working together.

So, in conclusion, these two gentlemen and the members have been a true model of bipartisanship. I think we

need to salute them. If we look at the work that Mr. BISHOP and Mr. CULBERSON have done here, this is the way we get our job done in Congress in a bipartisan way.

Mr. CULBERSON. Mr. Chairman, can I ask how much time we have remaining?

The CHAIR. The gentleman from Texas has 12½ minutes remaining.

Mr. CULBERSON. Mr. Chairman, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Chairman, I want to be sure to acknowledge and thank my friend, Mr. CUELLAR, from Laredo. We have been good friends and served together in the Texas House. I am sure he remembers the appropriations committee in the Texas House. And we understand the value of the power of the purse.

We are indeed using the power of the purse to achieve the goals that Mr. CUELLAR has just mentioned, that is, ensuring the claims backlog is dealt with and that the Department of Defense and the VA have an interoperable medical record.

There really is no more powerful check and balance that the legislative branch has over the executive branch than the power of the purse, which originates in the House.

Article 1, section 9 says that no money may be drawn from the Treasury, except by appropriations.

We are working together arm-in-arm, just as we did in the Texas House, in support of our veterans and military.

In fact, we also have found great common ground when it comes to law enforcement on the border, something that his folks in Laredo have a keen interest in: safe streets, good schools, a strong economy. And that all begins with law enforcement.

I want to thank the gentleman from Laredo because it has been a pleasure working with him on so many of these good issues.

We could have not gotten to this spot, Mr. Chairman, without the help of the committee staff. We have got an extraordinary group of people who have made this possible. The Appropriations Committee is blessed to have had professionals here who have helped us for years.

I want to particularly thank Donna Shabazz, Sue Quantius, and Sarah Young, and make sure that we also recognize the extraordinary contributions by Matt Washington and Tracey Russell.

This has really been a team effort. It is an extraordinary complex piece of legislation to ensure that not only the money that our taxpayers have worked so hard to earn is wisely spent, but that the agencies that are the beneficiaries of these hard-earned tax dollars understand that with the receipt of this money comes the obligation to ensure that it is spent wisely. We are going to continue with aggressive oversight.

When it comes to oversight, Mr. Chairman, I also want to mention that

we are going to have an amendment later today by the Congresswoman from Phoenix to deal with this really deeply concerning situation that we have seen arise in the Phoenix VA where you have got a doctor claiming that folks have lost their lives. They were unable to get access to the medical care they have earned from their medical service at the Phoenix hospital.

That is another way to enforce the law. With additional funding, we are going to use the inspector general's office to investigate this and find out what is actually going on. In that case, if there has been deliberate or intentional refusal to admit veterans to the VA hospital in Phoenix, there are going to be criminal charges.

Certainly, our heart goes out to those families in Phoenix. We are all committed to make sure that any veteran, any member of the military who has served this country, has immediate access to the best medical care in the world.

And that is why this is such a bipartisan bill and one that we offer to the House today, arm-in-arm. Both the gentleman from Georgia and the people of Texas that I represent were pleased to present this to the House and encourage the Members to support it.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Mr. Chairman, I yield 3 minutes to the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ), the ranking member of our Legislative Branch Subcommittee on Appropriations and a strong voice for the needs of our Nation's veterans, with a unique interest in the needs of our female servicemembers and veterans.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. I appreciate the gentleman yielding.

First, let me commend and pile on to the commendations that are so deserving by our colleagues and my good friends, Chairman CULBERSON and Ranking Member BISHOP, on crafting a strong and bipartisan bill. Congress really can work together when we put our heads and our hearts together.

Let me especially recognize their leadership in including language in the bill which will help many of our Nation's veterans transition into careers in civilian health care.

The United States military has the best-trained medics and corpsmen in the world. In fact, the data substantiates that Special Forces medics greatly increase the chances of survival for those who suffer injuries on the battlefield.

Despite this, former military medics have one of the highest unemployment rates among veterans because their extensive medical training in the military doesn't perfectly match qualifications in the civilian world.

For example, Army Specialist Nick Colgin, whom President Obama applauded as an American hero for saving the life of a French soldier shot in Afghanistan, was somehow considered un-

qualified to be an emergency medical technician in Wyoming.

This Military Construction-Veterans Affairs bill that we are considering can help fix this baffling disconnect. It includes language establishing a pilot program for veteran medics that will expand opportunities for physician assistant training at Historically Black Colleges and Universities. This program will leverage the expertise of military medics to strengthen the health care profession and reduce veteran unemployment.

A perfect example of the way veteran medics can, when given the chance, successfully enter into a civilian health care profession is the story of Staff Sergeant Victor Arvizu, who valiantly served for 20 years as a combat medic in the Middle East and South Pacific.

From taking blood samples to pulling out shards of glass from the chests of soldiers to suturing wounds and inserting chest tubes, Sergeant Arvizu developed a special skill set that translated into a successful career when he returned home.

Sergeant Arvizu was able to use this expertise to gain employment as a health tech at a Veterans Affairs clinic in my south Florida district. But there are too many veterans in my district and nationwide who are still struggling to translate their expertise and skills into employment in the civilian workforce.

We need initiatives that will create more stories like Sergeant Arvizu's.

The CHAIR. The time of the gentleman has expired.

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. I yield the gentlelady an additional 30 seconds.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Thank you.

Our veterans make the ultimate sacrifice for our country, and now we need to do our part by providing them with opportunities to use their skill sets. I am proud that this bill includes language that will help to do just that.

I urge support of the bill.

Mr. CULBERSON. Mr. Chairman, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Mr. Chairman, at this time I yield 3 minutes to the gentlewoman from California (Ms. LEE).

Ms. LEE of California. Mr. Chair, let me first thank our ranking member for his tireless leadership on behalf of our veterans and as our ranking member on the MilCon Subcommittee.

I also want to thank our chairman for working with us once again to include language in this bill that would require the VA to provide detailed reporting on the unacceptable claims backlog and its efforts to eliminate it.

Congresswoman JACKIE SPEIER and myself, for example, have been working with our veterans in the Bay area. Some of the stories and some of the cases that we have uncovered, discovered, and worked on are heartbreaking. I know Members throughout the country have many veterans whose benefits

should have been provided and executed many, many years ago.

In order to reduce the veterans' benefit claims backlog, this bill fully funds the President's budget request of \$173 million for the Veterans Benefits Management System and provides an additional \$20 million to the Veterans Benefits Administration for records and staffing needs.

As the daughter of a veteran and the Representative of thousands of veterans in my district, I am deeply troubled to hear that young men and women who serve our country must wait an average of 255 days while the VA processes their claims. This wait is inexcusable and unacceptable. We have heard some of the tragic, tragic stories that have arisen out of this.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, let me just say I am very pleased that the House is moving quickly and in regular order to consider the Military Construction and VA Appropriations bill. It is my hope that this will continue as we move forward in the appropriations process with all of our subcommittees.

As a member of the Labor, Health and Human Services Appropriations Subcommittee, it is my hope that our subcommittee, which is the largest share of funding outside of the Pentagon, will receive a proportionate and adequate increase in our total allocation.

Our subcommittee supports programs that impact nearly every household, every community, and every congressional district, and so we owe it to our constituents to have a full, open, and robust debate as the process moves forward.

Thank you to our chair and ranking member on behalf of all of the veterans in my district. I will support this bill. It is a step forward in our appropriations process.

Mr. CULBERSON. I continue to reserve the balance of my time.

□ 1430

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Mr. Chairman, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Chairman, this is a good bill. It is a bipartisan bill, and it is a bill that, I think, meets the needs of our services for their military construction, as well as for our veterans and our military families.

As far as our military construction, if our services needed it, it is in the bill. If they didn't need it, it is not in the bill.

I am so happy that we have taken very strong steps to address the claims backlog at the Veterans Administration. We have taken strong steps to ensure that we will soon have coordinated, interoperable electronic health records between the Veterans Affairs Department and the Department of Defense; and I am happy that in this bill, together, we will assure accountability for our Nation's veterans.

Mr. Chairman, when our men and women took the oath to serve our

country as part of our Nation's military, they took an oath to serve and defend; and when they completed that service, our Nation has, in fact, figuratively, written a check assuring that they will have the benefits that they need when they come back following their service.

It is our duty as a Nation, our duty as a Congress, and certainly our duty as a part of this committee, to make sure that that check that we figuratively wrote to those veterans never, ever comes back marked "insufficient funds" and to make sure that that check—the benefits of that check don't come back redeemed in a delayed fashion.

So we have done what is necessary to make sure that they get their benefits, that they get them in a timely manner, that the claims backlog is eliminated, and that we facilitate whatever it takes to make sure that they are rewarded for their service to our country because the price of freedom, it is not free.

Somebody had to pay that price, and the people who paid the price are the men and women who served our Nation in uniform and are now veterans and their families who also sacrificed as the servicemembers went to war.

I urge the adoption of this bill and ask my colleagues to support it.

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

Mr. CULBERSON. Mr. Chairman, I join Mr. BISHOP in urging the House to approve this legislation, and I agree with him wholeheartedly about making sure that any check—any check that our veterans have earned doesn't ever come back with insufficient funds.

It is one of the fundamental obligations of the Federal Government to ensure that our veterans are taken care of, they are given everything they need while they serve and they are in uniform, but then also that they are given access to the best medical care the country can provide to them once they enter into the private sector.

We have, in this legislation, given everything that the veterans have asked us for. We have made sure that the VA is fully funded, but we are using the power of the purse to ensure that the law is obeyed. We are making sure that our constituents' hard-earned tax dollars are spent wisely and frugally and carefully and that they actually reach the veterans who need them the most.

We are in an extraordinary era, Mr. Chairman. Survival rates are higher than they have ever been for our men and women in uniform. If they are lucky enough to survive their initial injury and make it to an aid station, the survival rate is in excess of 98, 99 percent.

It is absolutely extraordinary, the blessings of modern medicine. The work that the VA has been doing in prosthetics and helping these young men and women recover from their injuries is extraordinary.

This is our first obligation as a government, is to ensure that the men and

women who make it possible for us to be here in a free society and debate legislation like this, that they are given everything that they have earned by their service to the country.

An important part of this is to be sure that we are also talking to our constituents about the budget problems that lie ahead of us and the importance of making sure that the social safety net, the social safety net that is out there—Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid—those programs remain solvent.

They are, right now, headed into bankruptcy, and we have got to make sure that we deal with those bigger problems for the longer term, so that we can continue to fully fund the needs of our veterans and our men and women in uniform.

It truly has been a privilege for me to work on this subcommittee with my friend from Georgia (Mr. BISHOP). The State of Georgia and the State of Texas—I feel a special kinship with the people of Georgia because they have a commitment to the military that is commensurate to that of the people of Texas.

We both admire our men and women in uniform immensely, and this is a piece of legislation that our folks back home, Mr. Chairman, may not see much disagreement, but that is because we are, all of us, so strongly in support of making sure that our men and women in uniform can focus on their mission and protect this Nation with complete peace of mind.

I urge all the Members of the House to support this legislation which is presented to them by the unanimous vote of the subcommittee and the full committee.

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

Mr. SWALWELL of California. Mr. Chair, I move to strike the last word.

To the veterans who courageously served our country, we owe the best our nation can offer.

I appreciate the opportunity to stand here with my colleagues, working in a bipartisan manner to pass H.R. 4486, the Military Construction and Veteran Affairs and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2015.

Thank you to Chairman CULBERSON and Ranking Member BISHOP from the Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs for your hard work in crafting this legislation.

This bill, in part, provides funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs, and gives much needed support and resources to help the VA end the claims backlog.

We owe our veterans every promise we've made, and unfortunately, we've not been living up to these promises.

One of the pledges we make to our veterans is that, should they be injured during their service, we'll provide them with disability compensation to assist them as they transition home.

While the VA is making strides to reduce the claims backlog, more needs to be done.

Unfortunately, there remains a large claims backlog at many VA Regional Offices across the United States.

At the Oakland Regional Office, which serves my constituents in the 15th Congressional District of California, over 58 percent of claims have been pending for over 125 days.

These numbers are among the worst in the nation, with claims averaging over one full year to complete.

As a former prosecutor I am well acquainted with phrase "justice delayed is justice denied."

In the case of the veterans' claims, delayed care is denied care.

Unfortunately, since the retirement of Director Douglas Bragg in January, the Oakland Regional Office director position has been vacant.

I led a bipartisan letter signed by 19 California Members of Congress to the VA urging it to swiftly reduce the backlog by hiring a new, supremely qualified director of the Oakland VA.

Properly serving our veterans means listening to their concerns and taking action.

I've hosted several veteran town halls, where veterans across the East Bay shared their stories and ongoing struggles regarding pending claims at the VA.

My office is working hard to help every veteran in our district that needs assistance, but the problem goes beyond just one district, region, or state.

That's why we're here today. We're working to ensure that we reach every veteran that needs assistance and hold the VA accountable for its slow claims process.

Our veterans desperately need a VA that will provide both accurate and timely responses. It's what our veterans deserve, and I'll continue to push the VA to provide our veterans with the service and benefits they've earned.

Not only is there a backlog in first-time claims, now the backlog for appeals is becoming a serious problem.

I appreciate that language I supported along with other Members of the California delegation was included in the committee report on the bill to address this appeals backlog. It expresses our deep concern over this issue and encourages the Veterans Benefits Administration to take swift action to lower the wait time for appeals claims.

Thanks again to the Chairman and Ranking Member for accepting this language.

I'll continue working closely with my colleagues to ensure that the few that proudly served our country receive the benefits and care they earned.

Mr. NOLAN. Mr. Chair, I move to strike the last word.

Where I come from, we believe that for those who we send into harm's way to protect and serve us in defense of our freedoms, we have a profound obligation to protect and serve them upon their return.

Last year's Military Construction and Veterans Administration bill did not do enough to fulfill this promise. Therefore I'm glad that this bill is an improvement.

This year's bill: increases funding for vital veterans programs here at home by \$1.5 billion; significantly decreases unnecessary new military construction projects in places all around the world—new projects that the Pentagon itself says are not wanted and not needed; this bill comes closer to fully funding veterans mental health programs; as well as vital health care programs for the more than 3 million veterans living in rural communities; increases funding for technology to reduce the notorious backlog at the VA.

Mr. Chair, I rise specifically today to bring to light my grave concerns with the Regional Command-Southwest Command and Control Facility in the Helmand Province of Afghanistan.

This facility offers 64,000 square feet of space for more than 1,000 military personnel, including accommodations for a three-star general.

Standing two stories tall, this windowless facility is larger than a football field, and was completed in 2013 at a cost of approximately \$34 million.

According to Special Inspector General to Afghanistan John Sopko, this building is the "Taj Mahal" of command centers.

The unconscionable fact about this building, however—is that the military has no plans to use it.

Area commanders insisted three years ago that they did not need this building. They were in the middle of troop withdrawal, and they saw no reason to move in.

In Mr. Sopko's words, "this is an example of what is wrong with military construction in general—once a project is started, it is very difficult to stop."

Mr. Chair, we simply cannot allow any projects like this—projects that the Pentagon itself says are unnecessary—to receive funding from this Congress. It's shameful, it's wasteful, and it needs to stop.

American veterans of foreign wars like Afghanistan are sleeping under bridges—going without the life-saving health care and mental health services they deserve and so desperately need—and waiting for sometimes years for the VA to finally process their benefits claims.

Yet, during last year's debate on this bill, Republicans in the House rejected my amendment that would have doubled funding for veterans hospitals—and would have provided for extra personnel to address this atrocious backlog.

It is simply unconscionable that we allow this to go on while literally throwing billions of dollars away on buildings standing empty overseas.

Where is the outcry in this House? Where is the shock—where is the shame?

It is time we end these unsustainable wars of choice. It is time we cut back on our military footprint in unnecessary outposts around the world. It is time we prioritize those brave men and women whom we send into harm's way to protect us.

When it comes to these brave men and women, we must do everything in our power—we must leave no stone unturned to assure our nation's veterans have the very best medical care—counseling—housing—job training—and all the educational opportunities a grateful nation can provide.

Only the very best is good enough. That is how we keep our promise to our nation's veterans.

In closing, Mr. Chair, once again I commend those of us in the House who have fought for increases to veterans programs here at home, and for those of us in the House who are dedicated to ending these costly and terrible wars abroad.

And I strongly urge you and all my colleagues in the House of Representatives to continue to give veterans the benefits they so rightfully deserve now and in the future.

Mr. GRAYSON. Mr. Chair, I rise today to thank Chairman CULBERSON and Ranking

Member BISHOP for including legislative language I requested in this year's Military Construction, Veteran Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2015. It appears in section 232, as follows:

SEC. 232. None of the funds made available by this Act may be used to award a contract to any contractor if the past performance of the contractor resulted in the completion of a construction project at a facility of the Department of Veterans Affairs more than 24 months after the original agreed-upon completion date for the project.

This language also exists as a stand-alone bill I have introduced, H.R. 4394: the "Serve Our Heroes Now Act". What it means is this—if someone is responsible for a delay of two years, or more, of completion of a VA facility, they cannot awarded future contracts for military or VA construction.

In my own district, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs ("VA") is building a new VA Medical Center ("VAMC") that will serve an area of more than 90,000 veteran patients in East Central Florida. This VAMC will be one of seven members of the VISN 8 Healthcare System, covering parts of Florida, Georgia, and all of Puerto Rico.

The original construction contract for the Orlando VAMC called for a final completion date of October 2, 2012. Eighteen months later, my constituents, who bravely fought for their country, are still waiting. This is a disgrace, and it must be remedied.

Section 232 is clear. If the current contractor for the Orlando VAMC is determined to be at fault for construction delays, it will be ineligible for future contracts awarded from funds appropriated by this bill. That hurts—but it doesn't compare to the pain my constituents suffer while waiting for the VA Medical Center that has been promised to them.

In closing, Mr. Chair, I want every Member here, and anyone else watching, to know that I will request this language in every Military Construction, Veteran Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act that comes to this floor, as long as I serve in this body. Those responsible will be held accountable. I pray other veterans do not have to wait as long as my constituents have, and I pray that the new Orlando VAMC is fully operational by October of this year.

Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON of Texas. Mr. Chair, as we consider H.R. 4486, the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, it is crucial that we protect American workers from any efforts to weaken or repeal the provisions under Davis-Bacon or the use of project labor agreements (PLAs) in federally funded or assisted construction projects.

The Davis-Bacon Act is used to set fair wage rates and benefits that contractors or subcontractors must use to compensate their laborers during the construction, alteration, or repair of public buildings. Project labor agreements are collective bargaining agreements used to establish the terms and conditions of employment for specific construction projects. Both are important tools in ensuring that American workers receive fair pay and treatment for federal contract work, and that taxpayer dollars are being used effectively during public construction projects.

H.R. 4486 must not be used as the vehicle to strip American workers of their rights to fair pay and treatment for federal contract work.

The Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Act should remain about funding critical infrastructure projects in support of our national defense, and to bring reliable benefits and medical care to our men and women in uniform.

Mr. Chair, any efforts to weaken the Davis-Bacon Act will only serve to harm American taxpayers and workers. The provisions under Davis-Bacon and specific PLAs are used to ensure that federal dollars are used responsibly and effectively when building up our nation's infrastructure. Davis-Bacon and PLAs bring needed oversight to federal contract work, while preserving fair compensation for workers. I urge my colleagues to oppose any amendments to H.R. 4486 that would weaken these protections.

The CHAIR. All time for general debate has expired.

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

During consideration of the bill for amendment, the Chair may accord priority in recognition to a Member offering an amendment who has caused it to be printed in the designated place in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD. Those amendments will be considered read.

The Clerk will read.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 4486

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That the following sums are appropriated, out of any money in the Treasury not otherwise appropriated, for military construction, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2015, and for other purposes, namely:

TITLE I

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, ARMY

For acquisition, construction, installation, and equipment of temporary or permanent public works, military installations, facilities, and real property for the Army as currently authorized by law, including personnel in the Army Corps of Engineers and other personal services necessary for the purposes of this appropriation, and for construction and operation of facilities in support of the functions of the Commander in Chief, \$526,427,000, to remain available until September 30, 2019: *Provided*, That of this amount, not to exceed \$51,127,000 shall be available for study, planning, design, architect and engineer services, and host nation support, as authorized by law, unless the Secretary of the Army determines that additional obligations are necessary for such purposes and notifies the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress of the determination and the reasons therefor.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, NAVY AND MARINE CORPS

For acquisition, construction, installation, and equipment of temporary or permanent public works, naval installations, facilities, and real property for the Navy and Marine Corps as currently authorized by law, including personnel in the Naval Facilities Engineering Command and other personal services necessary for the purposes of this appropriation, \$998,772,000, to remain available until September 30, 2019: *Provided*, That of this amount, not to exceed \$33,366,000 shall be available for study, planning, design, and architect and engineer services, as authorized by law, unless the Secretary of the Navy

determines that additional obligations are necessary for such purposes and notifies the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress of the determination and the reasons therefor.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, AIR FORCE

For acquisition, construction, installation, and equipment of temporary or permanent public works, military installations, facilities, and real property for the Air Force as currently authorized by law, \$719,551,000, to remain available until September 30, 2019: *Provided*, That of this amount, not to exceed \$10,738,000 shall be available for study, planning, design, and architect and engineer services, as authorized by law, unless the Secretary of the Air Force determines that additional obligations are necessary for such purposes and notifies the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress of the determination and the reasons therefor: *Provided further*, That none of the funds provided under this heading for military construction in Europe as identified in the table entitled "Military Construction" in the accompanying report may be obligated or expended until the Department of Defense completes a European Consolidation Study.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MS. CASTOR OF FLORIDA

Ms. CASTOR of Florida. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk.

The CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

Page 3, line 23, after the dollar amount, insert "(increased by \$9,800,000)".

Page 11, line 23, after the dollar amount, insert "(reduced by \$9,800,000)".

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

Ms. CASTOR of Florida. Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank Chairman CULBERSON and Ranking Member BISHOP for all of their hard work and the committee, all of your work on behalf of America's servicemembers and veterans to ensure that they have the military facilities that they deserve.

I am very heartened to see the Congress, on both sides of the aisle, working together to ensure that our military families and servicemembers and our veterans have every resource they need to be successful.

My amendment proposes to transfer \$9.8 million to the Air Force construction account from the BRAC account to really highlight an area in military construction and our facilities that needs a little bit of extra attention because I think we can all agree that it is important to ensure that, after our servicemembers serve in hazardous areas across the globe, when they return to the United States and our military installations, that those installations are clean and safe and secure as well.

Mr. Chairman, I have the privilege of representing MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, Florida. MacDill is led by the 6th Air Mobility Wing, but has a host of very important tenants on the base, including United States Central Command, United States Special Operations Command, the 927th Air Refueling Wing, and the Joint Communication Support Element. In fact, at MacDill, we have 39 mission support partners, so it is a very busy base.

I wanted to bring to everyone's attention a deficiency in our mission support facility. Think about this big active base with all of these tenants, 13,000 military and civilian personnel at MacDill. Add on to that 170,000 military retirees in the area.

They all come to the mission support facility to get credentialed and to take care of the very most basic credentialing and security processes at the base.

Our mission support facility is far from the main gate. It is way too small, but most seriously, it contains black mold. It is on the first floor along the walls.

Tampa, of course, is a very damp place, a very humid place, and if you don't take care and maintain these facilities, it causes very expensive problems down the road. They are doing the best they can, but it is very difficult to keep up.

I raise this issue because this has occurred at other military installations before, with the black mold. There was Hampton Roads in Virginia, in military housing and, most notoriously, the Walter Reed building 18, where we had wounded soldiers.

Now, thankfully, through the efforts of the Congress, many of these have been dealt with, but I think it is very important that the Air Force maintain a critical eye on these establishments, to make sure that they are up to standard for our military families.

So I wanted to raise awareness of this matter to the Air Force, to the committee members, and I do hope that you all will work with me to address this critical issue at MacDill Air Force Base and other substandard military facilities across America.

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

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

The CHAIR. The gentleman is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Mr. Chairman, at this time, I would just like to commend the gentlelady for raising a very, very important issue to the health, safety, and welfare of airmen and those who go to MacDill; and I want to assure the gentlelady that the chairman and I will work very closely to make sure that that issue is addressed.

It is our hope that the gentlelady will withdraw her amendment and that we can work on it together, but I assure the gentlelady that we will work together to make sure that that is a safe environment, a healthy environment, so that no one will be exposed to the consequences of black mold.

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

Ms. CASTOR of Florida. Mr. Chairman, I ask unanimous consent that my amendment be withdrawn, and I thank the committee for their attention.

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

There was no objection.

The CHAIR. The Clerk will read.

The Clerk read as follows:

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

For acquisition, construction, installation, and equipment of temporary or permanent public works, installations, facilities, and real property for activities and agencies of the Department of Defense (other than the military departments), as currently authorized by law, \$2,021,690,000, to remain available until September 30, 2019: *Provided*, That such amounts of this appropriation as may be determined by the Secretary of Defense may be transferred to such appropriations of the Department of Defense available for military construction or family housing as the Secretary may designate, to be merged with and to be available for the same purposes, and for the same time period, as the appropriation or fund to which transferred: *Provided further*, That of the amount appropriated, not to exceed \$122,240,000 shall be available for study, planning, design, and architect and engineer services, as authorized by law, unless the Secretary of Defense determines that additional obligations are necessary for such purposes and notifies the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress of the determination and the reasons therefor: *Provided further*, That none of the funds provided under this heading for military construction in Europe as identified in the table entitled "Military Construction" in the accompanying report may be obligated or expended until the Department of Defense completes a European Consolidation Study: *Provided further*, That of the amount appropriated, notwithstanding any other provision of law, \$37,918,000 shall be available for payments to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization for the planning, design, and construction of a new North Atlantic Treaty Organization headquarters.

AMENDMENT NO. 4 OFFERED BY MR. TURNER

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

The CHAIR. The Clerk will designate the amendment.

The text of the amendment is as follows:

Page 4, line 19, insert after the dollar amount the following: "(reduced by \$20,000,000)(increased by \$20,000,000)".

Page 5, line 3, insert after the dollar amount the following: "(increased by \$20,000,000)".

The CHAIR. The gentleman from Ohio is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. TURNER. Mr. Chairman, I want to thank Chairman CULBERSON and Ranking Member BISHOP for their hard work and dedication to ensure that we have a great bill for our vets and men and women in uniform, but also for their tenacity.

I want to thank Chairman CULBERSON for his efforts and working with me on this amendment and also Ranking Member BISHOP.

Today, I rise in support of an amendment to provide funding for the planning, design, and construction of an additional missile defense site capable of protecting the homeland from a long-range ballistic missile attack.

To date, two Presidents, as well as three Secretaries of Defense have recognized the advantage of an additional missile defense site in order to provide additional protection against a long-

range ballistic missile threat from regions like the Middle East.

As you may be aware, we currently possess only two sites, both located on the west coast, limiting our ability to target and intercept incoming ICBMs.

Since 2007, the United States Northern Command, the combatant command in charge of defending the homeland, has, on numerous occasions, recommended the construction of an east coast site for this purpose.

Just last year, in testimony before the House Armed Services Committee—and, again, in testimony this year—General Jacoby, the U.S. Northern commander stated, “The third site, if you built it, would give us better weapons access, it would give us increased inventory and increased battle space with regards to a threat coming from the direction of the Middle East.”

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

With the 2009 cancellation of the missile defense site in Poland, coupled with an increased threat environment, it is imperative that we continue to act to protect the homeland from the long-range ballistic missile threat.

Thank you for your consideration to this amendment. I want to, again, thank Chairman CULBERSON for his leadership in protecting our men and women in uniform, our national security, and our veterans.

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

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

The CHAIR. The gentleman from Texas is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. CULBERSON. Mr. Chairman, I want to rise in strong support of this amendment, and I thank my colleague from Georgia for working with us and making sure that we get this done.

We are long overdue for an antiballistic missile site in the continental United States, here on the east coast in particular.

My good friend from Ohio (Mr. TURNER) is absolutely right. We face an increased threat environment. That is putting it mildly.

The North Koreans, who are still at war with us—we are only under an armistice in North Korea. The North Koreans have demonstrated that they actually have a nuclear weapon in hand.

Visual satellite observers—I am an amateur astronomer, and as a member of a group of amateur observers of artificial satellites, one of the members of our network actually observed and tracked the North Korean intercontinental ballistic missile overflying the United States December 12 of 2012.

□ 1445

That is the first time the North Koreans had demonstrated the ability to

actually fly an intercontinental ballistic missile payload over the United States. That missile flew over Pensacola, Florida, Mr. Chairman. It came up from the south and flew over the southeastern United States and exited the United States over Michigan. So the North Koreans have already demonstrated they have got the ability to deliver a nuclear weapon to the United States. So it is imperative that we move immediately to design and build an antiballistic missile site on the east coast of the United States.

I want to compliment my good friend from Ohio for bringing us this amendment, and it is my privilege to support it. I urge the adoption of the amendment and urge the Department of Defense to build this antiballistic missile site as fast as humanly possible.

I yield back the balance of my time. Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. I move to strike the last word.

The CHAIR. The gentleman from Georgia is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Mr. Chair, I join the chairman in accepting this amendment. I commend the gentleman for offering it, and I think that our national defense will certainly be enhanced by the adoption of this amendment.

I yield back the balance of my time.

The CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. TURNER).

The amendment was agreed to.

The CHAIR. The Clerk will read.

The Clerk read as follows:

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, ARMY NATIONAL GUARD

For construction, acquisition, expansion, rehabilitation, and conversion of facilities for the training and administration of the Army National Guard, and contributions therefor, as authorized by chapter 1803 of title 10, United States Code, and Military Construction Authorization Acts, \$126,920,000, to remain available until September 30, 2019: *Provided*, That of the amount appropriated, not to exceed \$17,600,000 shall be available for study, planning, design, and architect and engineer services, as authorized by law, unless the Director of the Army National Guard determines that additional obligations are necessary for such purposes and notifies the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress of the determination and the reasons therefor.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, AIR NATIONAL GUARD

For construction, acquisition, expansion, rehabilitation, and conversion of facilities for the training and administration of the Air National Guard, and contributions therefor, as authorized by chapter 1803 of title 10, United States Code, and Military Construction Authorization Acts, \$94,663,000, to remain available until September 30, 2019: *Provided*, That of the amount appropriated, not to exceed \$7,700,000 shall be available for study, planning, design, and architect and engineer services, as authorized by law, unless the Director of the Air National Guard determines that additional obligations are necessary for such purposes and notifies the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress of the determination and the reasons therefor.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, ARMY RESERVE

For construction, acquisition, expansion, rehabilitation, and conversion of facilities

for the training and administration of the Army Reserve as authorized by chapter 1803 of title 10, United States Code, and Military Construction Authorization Acts, \$103,946,000, to remain available until September 30, 2019: *Provided*, That of the amount appropriated, not to exceed \$8,337,000 shall be available for study, planning, design, and architect and engineer services, as authorized by law, unless the Chief of the Army Reserve determines that additional obligations are necessary for such purposes and notifies the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress of the determination and the reasons therefor.

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

The CHAIR. The gentleman from Florida is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. MICA. Mr. Chairman, I would ask if the chair of the Military Construction, Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee would rise and engage in a colloquy.

Mr. CULBERSON. It would be my privilege.

Mr. MICA. Thank you, sir.

First of all, I would like to commend you, Chairman CULBERSON and Ranking Member BISHOP and the Appropriations Committee staff, for their efforts in bringing this important measure for our veterans and our military to the floor.

I would also like to take this opportunity to highlight a vital need of our central Florida veterans population. This year, as we approach the completion of construction of the new veterans hospital and medical complex at Lake Nona in Orlando, I would like to request your assistance in helping to keep the existing and valuable medical facilities and clinic at Baldwin Park in service to our veterans. This medical resource is an important Federal asset that must not sit idle even before the new medical center opens. It is critical that the VA make a positive determination on the future use of this property and medical treatment center.

With Florida's growing veteran population that is already the second largest in the Nation, it is important that we plan now for the future medical care of our veterans. Additionally, with those service men and women now returning from overseas conflicts, we must prepare for the future demand for medical services.

Two years ago, I wrote a letter to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to plan for this day in anticipation of keeping this medical facility open and using it for the benefit of our veterans. Most recently, a joint letter from the central Florida congressional delegation, both Democrats and Republicans, has been sent to the Secretary asking for his consideration of this request. I am now hoping, Mr. Chairman, that you will join us in our effort to ensure that the VA takes steps to preserve and utilize this much-needed medical center that we have there. The recently opened Lake Nona veterans 120-bed nursing facility and 60-bed domiciliary care unit

are already at capacity, confirming the need to maintain the Baldwin Park complex.

Mr. Chairman, finally I would just ask for your support of these current efforts to ensure that the existing VA medical facilities in Baldwin Park remain open and continue to provide world-class treatment for our veteran population.

Mr. CULBERSON. Will the gentleman yield?

Mr. MICA. I yield to the gentleman from Texas.

Mr. CULBERSON. I want to assure my good friend from Florida, Chairman MICA, that I look forward to working with you to ensure that the VA does complete its independent study of this facility, and I hope that report is going to come back and show the continued need for the Baldwin Park facility.

I will work closely with you, sir, to make certain that the Veterans Administration does everything in its power to support the results of the independent study and work to keep that facility open.

Mr. MICA. Well, I thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your past work. And I thank the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. BISHOP) and the staff for working with us. We look forward to ensuring that the VA medical complex at Baldwin Park remains open and continues to be used to provide medical services for our veterans.

Finally, Mr. Chair, I would like to insert into the RECORD two letters to Veterans Affairs Secretary Shinseki, one from myself and another from the central Florida congressional delegation.

CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES,
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
Washington, DC, August 13, 2012.

Hon. ERIC SHINSEKI,
Secretary, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs,
Washington, DC.

DEAR SECRETARY SHINSEKI: As we complete the Lake Nona Veterans' Affairs Medical Center (VAMC), I would like to request that the Baldwin Park Clinic and building it occupies continue to be utilized for primary, inpatient and domiciliary care for our returning veterans and those other veterans who require this type of care.

Under this plan, the Baldwin Park clinic would continue to provide essential medical and clinical services for the new VAMC including clinical and primary care assistance, lab work, and pharmacy and outpatient services, including mental health care. Because Florida's veteran population continues to expand, it is important to continue these veteran medical services at this facility for those veterans on the north side of the community so that they can continue to have access to these essential services. I respectfully ask that you give this proposal your full consideration.

The second proposal I am writing to you about is my strong support for maintaining a domiciliary care unit in the remaining portion of the hospital, either by the VA or contract services that would provide inpatient and domiciliary care for both our returning veterans and those others who are in need of this type of care. According to an August, 1995 GAO report, "The former Naval Hospital's 153 beds could be used to meet the VA's service goals for veterans in East Cen-

tral Florida." If implemented, this action would also provide transitional care for our returning veterans and ensure the maximum utilization of space at the Baldwin Park facility. I respectfully request that this proposal be part of your final decision in the space utilization of the Baldwin Park VA site after the Lake Nona complex is complete.

I look forward to working with you to ensure that our veterans receive the best medical care possible and once again respectfully request that you consider these proposals.

Sincerely,

JOHN L. MICA,
Member of Congress.

CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES,
Washington, DC, April 9, 2014.

Hon. ERIC SHINSEKI,
Secretary, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs,
Washington, DC.

DEAR SECRETARY SHINSEKI: This year, as we approach the completion of construction of the new veterans' hospital and medical complex at Lake Nona, we would like to request that you consider keeping the existing clinic and medical facilities at Baldwin Park in service to our veterans. This complex is a valuable federal asset that must not sit idle once the new medical center opens.

With an increasing veteran population that is already the second largest in the nation, including those service men and women now returning from overseas conflicts, it is important that we plan now for their future medical care.

In the past, we have encouraged you to consider keeping this medical care facility open. We are now asking that you act soon to ensure that the VA will preserve and utilize this much needed VA property as Florida's veteran population continues to expand.

The recently opened Lake Nona veterans' 120-bed nursing facility and 60 bed domiciliary care unit are already at capacity and the demand for VA services will continue to grow in the Sunshine State.

These men and women who have faithfully served our nation deserve the very best medical care and the taxpayers valuable assets must not sit idle.

We thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

JOHN L. MICA.
ALAN GRAYSON.
DANIEL WEBSTER.
CORRINE BROWN.

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

The CHAIR. The Clerk will read.

The Clerk read as follows:

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, NAVY RESERVE

For construction, acquisition, expansion, rehabilitation, and conversion of facilities for the training and administration of the reserve components of the Navy and Marine Corps as authorized by chapter 1803 of title 10, United States Code, and Military Construction Authorization Acts, \$51,528,000, to remain available until September 30, 2019: *Provided*, That of the amount appropriated, not to exceed \$2,123,000 shall be available for study, planning, design, and architect and engineer services, as authorized by law, unless the Secretary of the Navy determines that additional obligations are necessary for such purposes and notifies the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress of the determination and the reasons therefor.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, AIR FORCE RESERVE

For construction, acquisition, expansion, rehabilitation, and conversion of facilities

for the training and administration of the Air Force Reserve as authorized by chapter 1803 of title 10, United States Code, and Military Construction Authorization Acts, \$49,492,000, to remain available until September 30, 2019: *Provided*, That of the amount appropriated, not to exceed \$6,892,000 shall be available for study, planning, design, and architect and engineer services, as authorized by law, unless the Chief of the Air Force Reserve determines that additional obligations are necessary for such purposes and notifies the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress of the determination and the reasons therefor.

NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION SECURITY INVESTMENT PROGRAM

For the United States share of the cost of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization Security Investment Program for the acquisition and construction of military facilities and installations (including international military headquarters) and for related expenses for the collective defense of the North Atlantic Treaty Area as authorized by section 2806 of title 10, United States Code, and Military Construction Authorization Acts, \$199,700,000, to remain available until expended.

FAMILY HOUSING CONSTRUCTION, ARMY

For expenses of family housing for the Army for construction, including acquisition, replacement, addition, expansion, extension, and alteration, as authorized by law, \$78,609,000, to remain available until September 30, 2019.

FAMILY HOUSING OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE, ARMY

For expenses of family housing for the Army for operation and maintenance, including debt payment, leasing, minor construction, principal and interest charges, and insurance premiums, as authorized by law, \$350,976,000.

FAMILY HOUSING CONSTRUCTION, NAVY AND MARINE CORPS

For expenses of family housing for the Navy and Marine Corps for construction, including acquisition, replacement, addition, expansion, extension, and alteration, as authorized by law, \$16,412,000, to remain available until September 30, 2019.

FAMILY HOUSING OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE, NAVY AND MARINE CORPS

For expenses of family housing for the Navy and Marine Corps for operation and maintenance, including debt payment, leasing, minor construction, principal and interest charges, and insurance premiums, as authorized by law, \$354,029,000.

FAMILY HOUSING OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE, AIR FORCE

For expenses of family housing for the Air Force for operation and maintenance, including debt payment, leasing, minor construction, principal and interest charges, and insurance premiums, as authorized by law, \$327,747,000.

FAMILY HOUSING OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE, DEFENSE-WIDE

For expenses of family housing for the activities and agencies of the Department of Defense (other than the military departments) for operation and maintenance, leasing, and minor construction, as authorized by law, \$61,100,000.

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE FAMILY HOUSING IMPROVEMENT FUND

For the Department of Defense Family Housing Improvement Fund, \$1,662,000, to remain available until expended, for family housing initiatives undertaken pursuant to section 2883 of title 10, United States Code,

providing alternative means of acquiring and improving military family housing and supporting facilities.

CHEMICAL DEMILITARIZATION CONSTRUCTION,
DEFENSE-WIDE

For expenses of construction, not otherwise provided for, necessary for the destruction of the United States stockpile of lethal chemical agents and munitions in accordance with section 1412 of the Department of Defense Authorization Act, 1986 (50 U.S.C. 1521), and for the destruction of other chemical warfare materials that are not in the chemical weapon stockpile, as currently authorized by law, \$38,715,000, to remain available until September 30, 2019, which shall be only for the Assembled Chemical Weapons Alternatives program.

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BASE CLOSURE
ACCOUNT

For deposit into the Department of Defense Base Closure Account, established by section 2906(a)(1) of the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Act of 1990 (10 U.S.C. 2687 note), as amended by section 2711 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2013 (Public Law 112-239), \$270,085,000, to remain available until expended.

ADMINISTRATIVE PROVISIONS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SEC. 108. None of the funds made available in this title may be used for the procurement of steel for any construction project or activity for which American steel producers, fabricators, and manufacturers have been de-

nied the opportunity to compete for such steel procurement.

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

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

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

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

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

SEC. 114. Not more than 20 percent of the funds made available in this title which are limited for obligation during the current fiscal year shall be obligated during the last 2 months of the fiscal year.

SEC. 115. Funds appropriated to the Department of Defense for construction in prior years shall be available for construction authorized for each such military department by the authorizations enacted into law during the current session of Congress.

SEC. 116. For military construction or family housing projects that are being completed with funds otherwise expired or lapsed for obligation, expired or lapsed funds may be used to pay the cost of associated supervision, inspection, overhead, engineering and design on those projects and on subsequent claims, if any.

SEC. 117. Notwithstanding any other provision of law, any funds made available to a military department or defense agency for the construction of military projects may be obligated for a military construction project or contract, or for any portion of such a project or contract, at any time before the end of the fourth fiscal year after the fiscal year for which funds for such project were made available, if the funds obligated for such project: (1) are obligated from funds available for military construction projects; and (2) do not exceed the amount appropriated for such project, plus any amount by which the cost of such project is increased pursuant to law.

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 118. In addition to any other transfer authority available to the Department of De-

fense, proceeds deposited to the Department of Defense Base Closure Account established by section 207(a)(1) of the Defense Authorization Amendments and Base Closure and Realignment Act (10 U.S.C. 2687 note) pursuant to section 207(a)(2)(C) of such Act, may be transferred to the account established by section 2906(a)(1) of the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Act of 1990 (10 U.S.C. 2687 note), to be merged with, and to be available for the same purposes and the same time period as that account.

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 119. Subject to 30 days prior notification, or 14 days for a notification provided in an electronic medium pursuant to sections 480 and 2883 of title 10, United States Code, to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress, such additional amounts as may be determined by the Secretary of Defense may be transferred to: (1) the Department of Defense Family Housing Improvement Fund from amounts appropriated for construction in "Family Housing" accounts, to be merged with and to be available for the same purposes and for the same period of time as amounts appropriated directly to the Fund; or (2) the Department of Defense Military Unaccompanied Housing Improvement Fund from amounts appropriated for construction of military unaccompanied housing in "Military Construction" accounts, to be merged with and to be available for the same purposes and for the same period of time as amounts appropriated directly to the Fund: *Provided*, That appropriations made available to the Funds shall be available to cover the costs, as defined in section 502(5) of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974, of direct loans or loan guarantees issued by the Department of Defense pursuant to the provisions of subchapter IV of chapter 169 of title 10, United States Code, pertaining to alternative means of acquiring and improving military family housing, military unaccompanied housing, and supporting facilities.

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 120. In addition to any other transfer authority available to the Department of Defense, amounts may be transferred from the Department of Defense Base Closure Account to the fund established by section 1013(d) of the Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Development Act of 1966 (42 U.S.C. 3374) to pay for expenses associated with the Homeowners Assistance Program incurred under 42 U.S.C. 3374(a)(1)(A). Any amounts transferred shall be merged with and be available for the same purposes and for the same time period as the fund to which transferred.

SEC. 121. Notwithstanding any other provision of law, funds made available in this title for operation and maintenance of family housing shall be the exclusive source of funds for repair and maintenance of all family housing units, including general or flag officer quarters: *Provided*, That not more than \$15,000 per unit may be spent annually for the maintenance and repair of any general or flag officer quarters without 30 days prior notification, or 14 days for a notification provided in an electronic medium pursuant to sections 480 and 2883 of title 10, United States Code, to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress, except that an after-the-fact notification shall be submitted if the limitation is exceeded solely due to costs associated with environmental remediation that could not be reasonably anticipated at the time of the budget submission: *Provided further*, That the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller) is to report annually to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress all operation and maintenance expenditures for each individual general or flag officer quarters for the prior fiscal year.

SEC. 122. Amounts contained in the Ford Island Improvement Account established by subsection (h) of section 2814 of title 10, United States Code, are appropriated and shall be available until expended for the purposes specified in subsection (i)(1) of such section or until transferred pursuant to subsection (i)(3) of such section.

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 123. During the 5-year period after appropriations available in this Act to the Department of Defense for military construction and family housing operation and maintenance and construction have expired for obligation, upon a determination that such appropriations will not be necessary for the liquidation of obligations or for making authorized adjustments to such appropriations for obligations incurred during the period of availability of such appropriations, unobligated balances of such appropriations may be transferred into the appropriation "Foreign Currency Fluctuations, Construction, Defense", to be merged with and to be available for the same time period and for the same purposes as the appropriation to which transferred.

SEC. 124. (a) Except as provided in subsection (b), none of the funds made available in this Act may be used by the Secretary of the Army to relocate a unit in the Army that—

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

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

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

SEC. 125. Amounts appropriated or otherwise made available in an account funded under the headings in this title may be transferred among projects and activities within the account in accordance with the reprogramming guidelines for military construction and family housing construction contained in Department of Defense Financial Management Regulation 7000.14-R, Volume 3, Chapter 7, of February 2009, as in effect on the date of enactment of this Act.

SEC. 126. None of the funds made available in this title may be obligated or expended for planning and design and construction of projects at Arlington National Cemetery.

SEC. 127. For an additional amount for "Military Construction, Navy and Marine Corps", "Military Construction, Air Force", "Military Construction, Army Reserve", and "Military Construction, Navy Reserve", \$125,000,000, to remain available until September 30, 2018: *Provided*, That notwithstanding any other provision of law, such funds may be obligated and expended to carry out construction of projects, excluding in Europe, as authorized in division B of Public Law 113-66: *Provided further*, That not later than 30 days after enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Defense shall submit to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress an expenditure plan for funds provided under this heading.

SEC. 128. For an additional amount for "Military Construction, Army", "Military Construction, Army National Guard", and "Military Construction, Army Reserve",

\$245,000,000, to remain available until September 30, 2019: *Provided*, That notwithstanding any other provision of law, such funds may only be obligated to carry out construction of projects as authorized in division B of an Act authorizing appropriations for fiscal year 2015 for military activities of the Department of Defense (relating to Military Construction Authorizations): *Provided further*, That not later than 30 days after enactment of this Act, the Secretary of the Army shall submit to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress an expenditure plan for funds provided under this heading.

(INCLUDING RESCISSION OF FUNDS)

SEC. 129. Of the unobligated balances available for "Military Construction, Army", from prior appropriations Acts (other than appropriations designated by law as being for contingency operations directly related to the global war on terrorism or as an emergency requirement), \$79,577,000 are hereby rescinded.

(INCLUDING RESCISSION OF FUNDS)

SEC. 130. Of the unobligated balances available for "NATO Security Investment Program", from prior appropriations Acts (other than appropriations designated by law as being for contingency operations directly related to the global war on terrorism or as an emergency requirement), \$25,000,000 are hereby rescinded.

(INCLUDING RESCISSION OF FUNDS)

SEC. 131. Of the unobligated balances made available in prior appropriation Acts for the fund established in section 1013(d) of the Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Development Act of 1966 (42 U.S.C. 3374) (other than appropriations designated by law as being for contingency operations directly related to the global war on terrorism or as an emergency requirement), \$100,000,000 are hereby rescinded.

SEC. 132. For the purposes of this Act, the term "congressional defense committees" means the Committees on Armed Services of the House of Representatives and the Senate, the Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs of the Committee on Appropriations of the Senate, and the Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs of the Committee on Appropriations of the House of Representatives.

TITLE II

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

VETERANS BENEFITS ADMINISTRATION

COMPENSATION AND PENSIONS

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

For the payment of compensation benefits to or on behalf of veterans and a pilot program for disability examinations as authorized by section 107 and chapters 11, 13, 18, 51, 53, 55, and 61 of title 38, United States Code; pension benefits to or on behalf of veterans as authorized by chapters 15, 51, 53, 55, and 61 of title 38, United States Code; and burial benefits, the Reinstated Entitlement Program for Survivors, emergency and other officers' retirement pay, adjusted-service credits and certificates, payment of premiums due on commercial life insurance policies guaranteed under the provisions of title IV of the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (50 U.S.C. App. 541 et seq.) and for other benefits as authorized by sections 107, 1312, 1977, and 2106, and chapters 23, 51, 53, 55, and 61 of title 38, United States Code, \$78,687,709,000, to remain available until expended: *Provided*, That not to exceed \$15,430,000 of the amount appropriated under this heading shall be reimbursed to "General Operating Expenses, Veterans Benefits Administration" and "Information Technology Systems" for necessary expenses in implementing the provi-

sions of chapters 51, 53, and 55 of title 38, United States Code, the funding source for which is specifically provided as the "Compensation and Pensions" appropriation: *Provided further*, That such sums as may be earned on an actual qualifying patient basis, shall be reimbursed to "Medical Care Collections Fund" to augment the funding of individual medical facilities for nursing home care provided to pensioners as authorized.

READJUSTMENT BENEFITS

For the payment of readjustment and rehabilitation benefits to or on behalf of veterans as authorized by chapters 21, 30, 31, 33, 34, 35, 36, 39, 41, 51, 53, 55, and 61 of title 38, United States Code, \$14,761,862,000, to remain available until expended: *Provided*, That expenses for rehabilitation program services and assistance which the Secretary is authorized to provide under subsection (a) of section 3104 of title 38, United States Code, other than under paragraphs (1), (2), (5), and (11) of that subsection, shall be charged to this account.

VETERANS INSURANCE AND INDEMNITIES

For military and naval insurance, national service life insurance, servicemen's indemnities, service-disabled veterans insurance, and veterans mortgage life insurance as authorized by chapters 19 and 21, title 38, United States Code, \$63,257,000, to remain available until expended.

VETERANS HOUSING BENEFIT PROGRAM FUND

For the cost of direct and guaranteed loans, such sums as may be necessary to carry out the program, as authorized by subchapters I through III of chapter 37 of title 38, United States Code: *Provided*, That such costs, including the cost of modifying such loans, shall be as defined in section 502 of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974: *Provided further*, That during fiscal year 2015, within the resources available, not to exceed \$500,000 in gross obligations for direct loans are authorized for specially adapted housing loans.

In addition, for administrative expenses to carry out the direct and guaranteed loan programs, \$160,881,000.

Ms. BROWNLEY of California. Mr. Chairman, I move to strike the last word.

The CHAIR. The gentlewoman is recognized for 5 minutes.

□ 1500

Ms. BROWNLEY of California. Mr. Chairman, I rise today to bring the House's attention to an important issue.

The Veterans Retraining Assistance Program, also known as VRAP, which has helped our veterans retrain to develop the skills they need for jobs of today, expired on March 31. I had planned to offer an amendment today to reauthorize the program and provide funding for the Veterans Retraining Assistance Program. However, I understand the amendment would have been subject to a point of order. Nevertheless, this critical issue is deserving of the House's attention.

As a member of the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity, I know well the struggles our unemployed veterans face on a daily basis to reenter the workforce. In my home district in Ventura County, where I am proud to represent Naval Base Ventura County, we have a large community of veterans who have sacrificed for our country and who deserve

every effort we can to ensure they receive the training they need to find the jobs they deserve, especially after the recent recession.

It is deeply disappointing that the 113th Congress has allowed this critical job training program to expire. VRAP helps veterans who are no longer eligible for the GI Bill to get the training they need at community colleges and technical schools in high-demand occupations. One such veteran who is being helped by VRAP is my constituent, Jonathan Pascua. Jonathan is a first-generation Filipino American from Oxnard who served in the United States Marine Corps from 1995 to 2013.

As an Active Duty marine, he handled telecommunications on a vessel in theater during the Iraq war supporting his brothers and sisters who landed ashore. When Jonathan was preparing to retire from the Marine Corps, he learned about VRAP through their education benefits class and signed up for the program. He is currently a full-time student in Oxnard majoring in business management and is scheduled to graduate in 2015.

As a result of VRAP's expiration, Jonathan may not be able to afford to continue. That would be devastating for Jonathan and a tragedy for our country. That is why I introduced H.R. 4149, the bipartisan Help Hire Our Heroes Act, which has gained support from the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars and the Association of the United States Navy.

Despite the obvious need for reauthorization of this important program and this body's solemn obligation to serve our veterans as they have served our Nation, my bill has still not been brought forward for a vote. My amendment would have ensured that this critical program continue, and I am disappointed that I was unable to offer it here today.

The Veterans Retraining Assistance Program has succeeded in helping many veterans retrain and find employment, and it should not have been allowed to lapse. Because our veterans, like Jonathan, were there for us, it is our duty to be there for them. Therefore, I urge the leadership of this Chamber to quickly bring forward legislation that will extend the VRAP program and help our unemployed veterans.

I yield back the balance of my time.

The CHAIR. The Clerk will read.

The Clerk read as follows:

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION LOANS PROGRAM
ACCOUNT

For the cost of direct loans, \$10,000, as authorized by chapter 31 of title 38, United States Code: *Provided*, That such costs, including the cost of modifying such loans, shall be as defined in section 502 of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974: *Provided further*, That funds made available under this heading are available to subsidize gross obligations for the principal amount of direct loans not to exceed \$2,877,000.

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

The CHAIR. The gentleman from Washington is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. KILMER. Mr. Chairman, I rise today to speak in support of Project Labor Agreements.

As the House begins consideration of the annual Department of Veterans Affairs-Military Construction Appropriations bill later today, I urge my colleagues to continue to support Project Labor Agreements.

We have a great example of just how effective and efficient PLA projects can be with the Navy's largest ongoing military construction project—the construction for the second Explosives Handling Wharf at Naval Base Kitsap. The Explosive Handling Wharf is a critical component of our Nation's nuclear deterrent capability. The use of a PLA at a site of this significance is telling.

The Navy recently shared with me that:

To date, the PLA has performed its primary function by ensuring no labor disputes interfered with the progress of work on the project and that the project is on schedule and the PLA is operating as intended.

Mr. Chairman, why would we remove such a useful tool for military construction, especially at a time when budgets are tight and milestones are tighter? Let's stay on the path to success and maintain the continued use of Project Labor Agreements.

I yield back the balance of my time.

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

The CHAIR. The gentleman from Colorado is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. LAMBORN. Mr. Chairman, I rise for the purpose of engaging in a colloquy with the gentleman from Texas.

Mr. Chairman, I believe we can all agree that honoring our Nation's veterans is of vital importance. They sacrifice so much for us and ask for so little in return. One thing that means so much to so many veterans in the Fifth Congressional District of Colorado is the establishment of a Southern Colorado National VA Cemetery.

Would the chairman agree that it is critical to provide dignified final resting places for our heroes and that it is important to conveniently locate them near large veterans populations?

Mr. CULBERSON. Will the gentleman yield?

Mr. LAMBORN. I yield to the gentleman from Texas.

Mr. CULBERSON. I thank the gentleman for yielding.

Yes, of course, I completely agree with you that one of the fundamental obligations of the United States of America is to ensure that these men and women who have served their country have earned that piece of earth as a convenient and dignified final resting place.

Mr. LAMBORN. I thank the chairman for his words of agreement. Given the advanced stage of the project and the amount of work that has already taken place on the Southern Colorado National VA Cemetery, including land

being purchased in southeast Colorado Springs and master planning due to start in mere months, would the chairman also agree that it is vital that we work together to ensure that construction is fully funded in the appropriations process for upcoming fiscal years?

I yield to the gentleman.

Mr. CULBERSON. I completely agree with you, Mr. LAMBORN, that this project is too far along, and it is important that we fund it in fiscal year 2016, and I will work with you and your colleagues from Colorado to ensure it is funded.

Mr. LAMBORN. Well, I thank the chairman, and I look forward to working with him. I appreciate the hard work he does for our military and for our veterans, including this particular important project. I pledge to work with him on these and other matters as we seek to honor our Nation's veterans.

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

The CHAIR. The Clerk will read.

The Clerk read as follows:

In addition, for administrative expenses necessary to carry out the direct loan program, \$361,000, which may be paid to the appropriation for "General Operating Expenses, Veterans Benefits Administration".

NATIVE AMERICAN VETERAN HOUSING LOAN
PROGRAM ACCOUNT

For administrative expenses to carry out the direct loan program authorized by subchapter V of chapter 37 of title 38, United States Code, \$1,130,000.

VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION
MEDICAL SERVICES

For necessary expenses for furnishing, as authorized by law, inpatient and outpatient care and treatment to beneficiaries of the Department of Veterans Affairs and veterans described in section 1705(a) of title 38, United States Code, including care and treatment in facilities not under the jurisdiction of the Department, and including medical supplies and equipment, bioengineering services, food services, and salaries and expenses of healthcare employees hired under title 38, United States Code, aid to State homes as authorized by section 1741 of title 38, United States Code, assistance and support services for caregivers as authorized by section 1720G of title 38, United States Code, loan repayments authorized by section 604 of the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010 (Public Law 111-163; 124 Stat. 1174; 38 U.S.C. 7681 note), and hospital care and medical services authorized by section 1787 of title 38, United States Code, \$47,603,202,000, plus reimbursements, shall become available on October 1, 2015, and shall remain available until September 30, 2016: *Provided*, That notwithstanding any other provision of law, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall establish a priority for the provision of medical treatment for veterans who have service-connected disabilities, lower income, or have special needs: *Provided further*, That notwithstanding any other provision of law, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall give priority funding for the provision of basic medical benefits to veterans in enrollment priority groups 1 through 6: *Provided further*, That notwithstanding any other provision of law, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs may authorize the dispensing of prescription drugs from Veterans Health Administration facilities to enrolled veterans with privately written prescriptions based on

requirements established by the Secretary: *Provided further*, That the implementation of the program described in the previous proviso shall incur no additional cost to the Department of Veterans Affairs.

MEDICAL SUPPORT AND COMPLIANCE

For necessary expenses in the administration of the medical, hospital, nursing home, domiciliary, construction, supply, and research activities, as authorized by law; administrative expenses in support of capital policy activities; and administrative and legal expenses of the Department for collecting and recovering amounts owed the Department as authorized under chapter 17 of title 38, United States Code, and the Federal Medical Care Recovery Act (42 U.S.C. 2651 et seq.), \$6,144,000,000, plus reimbursements, shall become available on October 1, 2015, and shall remain available until September 30, 2016.

MEDICAL FACILITIES

For necessary expenses for the maintenance and operation of hospitals, nursing homes, domiciliary facilities, and other necessary facilities of the Veterans Health Administration; for administrative expenses in support of planning, design, project management, real property acquisition and disposition, construction, and renovation of any facility under the jurisdiction or for the use of the Department; for oversight, engineering, and architectural activities not charged to project costs; for repairing, altering, improving, or providing facilities in the several hospitals and homes under the jurisdiction of the Department, not otherwise provided for, either by contract or by the hire of temporary employees and purchase of materials; for leases of facilities; and for laundry services, \$4,915,000,000, plus reimbursements, shall become available on October 1, 2015, and shall remain available until September 30, 2016.

MEDICAL AND PROSTHETIC RESEARCH

For necessary expenses in carrying out programs of medical and prosthetic research and development as authorized by chapter 73 of title 38, United States Code, \$588,922,000, plus reimbursements, shall remain available until September 30, 2016.

NATIONAL CEMETERY ADMINISTRATION

For necessary expenses of the National Cemetery Administration for operations and maintenance, not otherwise provided for, including uniforms or allowances therefor; cemeterial expenses as authorized by law; purchase of one passenger motor vehicle for use in cemeterial operations; hire of passenger motor vehicles; and repair, alteration or improvement of facilities under the jurisdiction of the National Cemetery Administration, \$256,800,000, of which not to exceed \$25,600,000 shall remain available until September 30, 2016.

DEPARTMENTAL ADMINISTRATION

GENERAL ADMINISTRATION

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

For necessary operating expenses of the Department of Veterans Affairs, not otherwise provided for, including administrative expenses in support of Department-Wide capital planning, management and policy activities, uniforms, or allowances therefor; not to exceed \$25,000 for official reception and representation expenses; hire of passenger motor vehicles; and reimbursement of the General Services Administration for security guard services, \$321,591,000, of which not to exceed \$16,080,000 shall remain available until September 30, 2016: *Provided*, That funds provided under this heading may be transferred to "General Operating Expenses, Veterans Benefits Administration".

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MS. SINEMA

Ms. SINEMA. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

Page 31, line 12, after the first dollar amount, insert "(reduced by \$1,000,000)".

Page 36, line 5, after the first dollar amount, insert "(increased by \$1,000,000)".

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

Ms. SINEMA. Mr. Chairman, the Sinema-Salmon amendment is a commonsense, budget-neutral fix that helps restore our veterans' trust in the VA by transferring additional resources to the VA Office of Inspector General so that it can carry out its mission to provide oversight and accountability.

Our amendment increases funding for the VA OIG by \$1 million and offsets this increase by reducing VA General Administration funding by the same amount.

I want to thank the chairman and ranking member of the Military Construction and VA appropriations subcommittee, Mr. CULBERSON and Mr. BISHOP, for supporting this amendment and for working with us on this issue.

Mr. Chairman, we offer this amendment because the recent allegations of secret lists and long wait times at the Phoenix VA, which may have caused some 40 veteran deaths, require answers and action. This is immoral, unconscionable, irresponsible, and un-American.

We need answers in Phoenix. But this is not an isolated incident. A December 2012 GAO report found that Veterans Health Administration wait times are unreliable. Stories of health complications and deaths because of wait times have surfaced in other parts of the country, including South Carolina and Texas. That this is happening to the good people who have defended our flag and our freedoms is beyond the pale.

I have worked on veterans' issues for a long time, and it is wrong that it took deaths to get action—but there had better be action now. I vow to help veterans and veteran families in any way I can, and I urge families to reach out to my office so we can help.

The morning after the story was reported in Arizona, the parents of Daniel Somers, a veteran who committed suicide in my district last summer, called me, and they told me that they believe Daniel may have been one of the 40 on that list.

Our veterans and their families—families like the Somers—need answers, and we must hold accountable those responsible. That is the only way that we can restore veterans' trust and the public trust in the VA health care system. The Sinema-Salmon amendment, which will improve oversight and accountability at the VA, is a step towards restoring that trust.

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

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

The CHAIR. The gentleman from Arizona is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. SALMON. Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the gentlewoman from the Ninth Congressional District of Arizona, which is right adjacent to mine. She is my neighbor, and I am proud to cosponsor this with her to show a strong unity of bipartisanship for our veterans. And if there isn't a better cause here in Washington, D.C., to stand bipartisan with, I don't know what it is.

I want to echo some of the things that Congresswoman SINEMA has said. This is unconscionable. And since these allegations have come to light, we have received numerous phone calls in our district from other like-minded people that have said, I had a similar circumstance happen to me.

So when Representative SINEMA approached me about cosponsoring this amendment to allocate \$1 million from the general fund of the Veterans Administration and appropriate it to the IG so that we can get a thorough investigation, it seems to me that this is the least we can do.

Why is this important? You might remember just a few years ago that a gentleman named—I call him gentleman, I think that is a loose term—Ken Lay, the CEO of Enron, went to prison for cooking the books. Now we have got some serious allegations about those that are entrusted with a sacred trust—our veterans' very livelihood—at stake. And I believe that this group of folks in the Veterans Administration has betrayed that trust. But we have got to get to the bottom of it.

Why is it important? Because it is the integrity of the system. A lot of the folks in my district, the veterans, have said that they don't have the confidence to even be utilizing that system anymore, and so they are right now going out of network. They are paying out of their pocket. I have heard many of them say that, as well.

So we, as a Congress, are required to provide oversight for these kinds of programs and ensure that they are getting the best—not the mediocre, and certainly not the worst, which I believe is happening right now in our own State in Arizona—and we demand justice. We demand some sunshine. Sunshine is the best disinfectant, and we demand some sunshine on this process. That is why we want to investigate it.

I yield back the balance of my time.

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

The CHAIR. The gentleman from Texas is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. CULBERSON. Mr. Chairman, I rise in strong support of this amendment and urge my colleagues to adopt it. I am, as we all are, appalled, mortified, and heartsick over these reports out of the Phoenix VA. It is appalling to think that any veteran who has served our country would be denied access to medical care, much less lose their life or have permanent damage to their health.

I cannot imagine the agony these families are going through, so therefore the amendment is a good idea to give an additional \$1 million to the inspector general, who is capable of conducting the type of investigation necessary to determine what actually happened here. In the instant, if there does, indeed, appear to be deliberate, intentional refusal to put these folks into the VA system, there will be criminal charges, and we will make sure of that. We will make sure that if anyone has been denied service, they are held accountable for it.

It is an appalling set of circumstances genuinely. It is a terrible reflection on all the good men and women, the doctors, and the health care professionals that work throughout the VA system do, do their best to provide top quality medical care to our veterans as they come out of Active Duty service to the country.

□ 1515

So we are anxious to see what the facts are and criminal charges be pressed if, indeed, it turns out to be as we have seen in the press, so I strongly support the amendment and urge Members to adopt it.

I yield back the balance of my time. Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Mr. Chairman, I move to strike the last word.

The CHAIR. The gentleman is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Mr. Chairman, when I learned of the allegations of intentional misrepresentation of wait times, which may have caused some 40 deaths at the Phoenix VA, I was deeply disappointed and downright disgusted.

I am pleased to see a bipartisan approach, and I believe this amendment will provide additional resources to the VA Office of Inspector General to improve oversight and accountability at the VA.

I agree with my colleagues from Arizona that this situation requires answers and a thorough investigation. I believe Congress should allow the VA IG to complete its investigation, so the Congress can take appropriate action, if needed. The last thing I want is a knee-jerk reaction that could cause additional problems.

I believe this amendment is the right approach, and I fully support it, and I urge all Members to do the same. I believe that a thorough investigation of the matter is the only way to restore our veterans' trust and the public trust in the VA health care system.

We owe it to our veterans to ensure that the VA is providing the best possible care and that care is timely and accessible. I think this amendment will help achieve that goal.

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

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

The CHAIR. The gentleman from Arizona is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. GOSAR. Mr. Chairman, I rise today in support of this amendment,

which seeks to redirect funds from the general administration account to the Department of Veterans Affairs inspector general's office.

As a member of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, I am a firm believer in oversight of the Federal Government. The more sunlight on Federal activity, the more honest and efficient it will be. I am also a strong proponent of the inspector general community.

Since the Inspector General Act was passed into law, the IG community has saved taxpayers billions of dollars and has uncovered countless examples of wrongdoing in the Federal Government.

These allegations about the Phoenix VA health care system are troubling, but I am also a firm believer of the rule of law. These investigations must be completed in order for us to have these answers. The answers from the IG report will yield both improvements to the VA process and hold accountable anyone who has done any harm.

I support this amendment because I support a timely, but thorough resolution to the investigation. Let us give the IG's office the resources it needs. I urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to support passage of this commonsense amendment.

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

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

The CHAIR. The gentleman from Colorado is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. COFFMAN. Mr. Chairman, I rise in support as the chairman of the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee for the House Veterans' Affairs Committee.

I rise in support of the Sinema-Salmón bipartisan amendment to transfer funds from the general administration line item within the Department of Veterans Affairs to the Office of Inspector General for the purpose of really looking into this issue, the issue of veterans dying from preventable illnesses because, in fact, the VA was playing a game in the Phoenix VA hospital with appointment times.

My office—my investigators last Monday turned over this "secret list" that the VA was using that they, in fact, are denying today to the VA Office of Inspector General.

In that list, it will demonstrate that there are veterans with preventable illnesses that died waiting for an appointment, and we also know that there were administrators who received bonuses for supposedly bringing down these wait times for appointments.

My greatest fear is not only that this act which has criminal implications, this alleged act which has criminal implications, occurred in the Phoenix VA hospital, but also my concern is that it is more widespread, it is more systematic, that it is something that the leadership in the VA has knowingly or unwittingly allowed to occur, and so I think it is important for us to get down to the bottom of it.

It is a great tragedy that we don't have confidence—certainly, I don't have confidence in the leadership of the Veterans Administration in and of themselves to get down to the bottom of it, and it takes the Office of the Inspector General and that it takes my investigators in the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee for the House Veterans' Affairs Committee to uncover these things, bring these things to light, and move them forward.

So, again, I rise in support of the Sinema-Salmón bipartisan amendment to transfer moneys from the administration of the Veterans Administration to the Office of Inspector General to move these investigations forward; and if, in fact, they are found to be true, I certainly hope that they are referred to criminal prosecution.

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

Mr. MURPHY of Florida. Mr. Chairman, I move to strike the last word.

The CHAIR. The gentleman is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. MURPHY of Florida. Mr. Chairman, I rise today in support of the Salmón-Sinema amendment to increase funding for the VA Office of the Inspector General in order to provide accountability at the VA and increase quality of care.

It has been recently reported that veterans are dying while waiting for treatment, including at the West Palm Beach VA facility that serves my district. Following this news, allegations have surfaced that 40 veterans in the Phoenix VA health care system died while being placed on a secret wait list. This is beyond unacceptable.

Mr. Chairman, it is vital that the inspector general get to the bottom of these claims as soon as possible so that veterans of the Palm Beaches, Treasure Coast, and around the country who fought for our freedoms get the timely and high-quality care they deserve.

I thank my colleagues from Arizona, Congresswoman SINEMA and Congressman SALMON, for their leadership on this pressing issue.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Mrs. KIRKPATRICK. Mr. Chairman, I move to strike the last word.

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

Mrs. KIRKPATRICK. Mr. Chairman, I support this amendment. It is my job as ranking member of the House Veterans' Affairs Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee to ensure that we get to the bottom of the allegations that patients died at the Phoenix VA due to delayed care.

I want to ensure that the inspector general has the resources it needs to conduct a swift and thorough investigation of the Phoenix VA and at other facilities where treatment delays are reported.

We need to ensure there is accountability and that veterans will never again wait for the care they deserve.

Delayed care is denied care, and veterans should never have to fight to receive care when they have already served and sacrificed for our country.

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

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

The CHAIR. The gentleman from Arizona is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. BARBER. Mr. Chairman, I rise today in support of this important bipartisan amendment that will provide additional funding to support the VA Office of Inspector General. This will help provide the oversight and accountability that is currently needed in the VA. As we all know, recently, allegations of a secret waiting list at the Phoenix VA health care system may well have led to the preventable deaths of up to 40 veterans.

I am appalled and infuriated to think that the VA ignored the needs of those who served our country and forced them to wait months to see a doctor.

We have demanded that the VA Secretary address these allegations of falsified records, preventable or premature deaths, mismanagement, and other systematic problems in the VA; but more must be done. We must quickly get to the bottom of this and bring about swift action to prevent a reoccurrence, so that our veterans get prompt access to the best possible care that they so richly deserve.

The amendment we are introducing will provide the necessary resources to the VA inspector general that he or she will need to investigate these horrendous allegations and provide the public and the grieving families the answers they deserve.

Once the investigation is completed, those who are found responsible should be quickly held accountable. We must restore our veterans' trust in the VA health care system, so that our men and women who have sacrificed so much for our country can finally get the care they have earned.

As the son of a veteran and a Member of Congress representing 85,000 veterans, Mr. Chairman, I urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to support this amendment, so we can find the answers and take action to hold the VA accountable.

Ms. SINEMA. Will the gentleman yield?

Mr. BARBER. I yield to the gentleman from Arizona.

Ms. SINEMA. Mr. Chair, I just want to thank the chair of the committee, Mr. CULBERSON; our ranking member, Mr. BISHOP; and Mr. SALMON for cosponsoring the amendment, as well as all of my colleagues from Arizona and around the country for joining together on this bipartisan amendment.

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

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

The amendment was agreed to.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. COSTA

Mr. COSTA. Mr. Chairman, I rise today to offer an amendment to H.R. 4486.

The CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

Page 31, line 12, after the first dollar amount, insert the following: "(reduced by \$10,500,000)".

Page 32, line 5, after the dollar amount, insert the following: "(increased by \$10,000,000)".

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

Mr. COSTA. Mr. Chairman, this bill makes critical investments in our military and upholds a sacred promise we make to our men and women in uniform that we will stand by them when they return home, but we can do more.

My amendment provides additional funding to end what has been a shameful backlog of disability claims that, for too long, has delayed benefits for veterans throughout the west coast, especially in the San Joaquin Valley that I represent.

The Oakland regional office services the majority of veterans throughout the west coast and in my district. Sadly, it has one of the largest loads of backlogged casework. Currently, more than 10,000 entitlement claims are stuck in this backlog, and the average claim is left pending for nearly 400 days, which is over a year. This is unacceptable. It is immoral.

Yesterday, the Central Valley Honor Flight brought 68 World War II veterans from California to see the World War II Memorial and other important monuments in our Nation's capital. These men and women raised their right hand over 70 years ago and took an oath that they would defend our Nation and our freedom for the future of democracy throughout the world.

Their efforts and their honor is without question. This is a depth that we can never repay. Therefore, it is our obligation to provide them with the care that they earned for their service to our country.

This amendment I am offering today honors the service of these World War II veterans and veterans of all the wars who have served our Nation. Specifically, this amendment provides \$10 million to the Veterans Benefit Administration to pay for programs like the veterans' claims intake program, the centralized mail initiative, and staff overtime.

□ 1530

No one can deny that the Veterans Administration recently has taken strong and meaningful steps to end the backlog, but we can do more. They have gone from 2½ years now to over 400 days. Well, that is progress, but it is not good enough.

Our work is not complete until we are able to strip every bit of red tape separating a veteran from the benefits that they have earned and should receive.

I want to thank my colleagues who have cosponsored this amendment: Congressman LAMALFA, Congressman THOMPSON, Congressman DENHAM, and Congressman LOWENTHAL; and I want to thank Chairman CULBERSON, as well as Ranking Member BISHOP for their efforts and good work on this important bill.

I hope that we will adopt this amendment, so that we can do the right thing, which is end this backlog once and for all, so veterans who have served their country can receive the benefits that they so richly deserve.

I yield back the balance of my time.

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

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

Mr. LAMALFA. Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank my colleague Mr. COSTA and my other California colleagues, as well as everybody in this body that seeks to make things right with our veterans and the VA.

While I always support reasonable spending, I would rather direct appropriate funding from the general fund towards the issue that is causing all the other horrendous issues at the VA. It is the backlog of veterans' claims.

All the illegal and unthinkable activities that have been uncovered in the last year, much of it, I believe, stems from the backlog that is only going to increase if the VA does not get things right and quickly.

I have veterans in my district that have claims that have been pending for over a year. This is simply unacceptable—in many cases, well over a year; in some cases, decades.

Much like Mr. COSTA, my veterans feed into the Oakland VA. This facility has the longest wait time for claims to be finished in all of the U.S. Our veterans do not deserve this. Something has to change, and it has to happen now. Today, we are drawing a line in the sand that this backlog is unacceptable.

My hope is that this amendment offered by Mr. COSTA, Mr. THOMPSON, myself, and several others will be a step in the right direction in getting these claims closed in a fair and timely manner. We are giving the VA the necessary resources to get this done. We expect them to actually get it done.

I yield back the balance of my time.

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

The CHAIR. The gentleman from Texas is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. CULBERSON. Mr. Chairman, I rise in support of the gentleman's amendment. Along with the electronic medical records, there is no more important thing this committee and this Congress can do to help our veterans to ensure the rapid disposal of this terrible backlog in disability claims.

I fully support the amendment. It builds on the \$20 million increase we have already provided in the bill. I assure my colleagues that Mr. BISHOP and I will continue to exercise aggressive oversight to ensure the money is

spent wisely and carefully to reduce the backlog and that the VA meet their deadlines to get the backlog disposed of as quickly as humanly possible.

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

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

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

Mr. LOWENTHAL. Mr. Chairman, first, I rise in support of the Costa amendment.

I also want to thank Chairman CULBERSON and Ranking Member BISHOP and also Representative COSTA for the time that they have given me to speak about this. My congressional district is home to the Long Beach VA, which is one of the largest institutions for veterans in southern California.

In California, there is currently one congressional affairs analyst to assist 33 congressional offices that have questions about casework. There are delays in responses to congressional caseworkers and an even longer delay in aid and attendance claims, particularly when those claims regard elderly frail veterans with rapidly declining health issues and sometimes, unfortunately, approval comes too late.

While it is critically important that we provide overtime pay for workers who are already stretched thin—and I think that is critically important—I also encourage the department to use some of these funds to hire additional staff.

I urge my colleagues to support the Costa amendment to H.R. 4486 and encourage the Veterans Benefits Administration to hire more staff to address the VA backlog and to help our Nation's veterans.

I yield back the balance of my time.

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

The amendment was agreed to.

The CHAIR. The Clerk will read.

The Clerk read as follows:

BOARD OF VETERANS APPEALS

For necessary operating expenses of the Board of Veterans Appeals, \$94,294,000, of which not to exceed \$9,429,000 shall remain available until September 30, 2016.

GENERAL OPERATING EXPENSES, VETERANS BENEFITS ADMINISTRATION

For necessary operating expenses of the Veterans Benefits Administration, not otherwise provided for, including hire of passenger motor vehicles, reimbursement of the General Services Administration for security guard services, and reimbursement of the Department of Defense for the cost of overseas employee mail, \$2,514,254,000: *Provided*, That expenses for services and assistance authorized under paragraphs (1), (2), (5), and (11) of section 3104(a) of title 38, United States Code, that the Secretary of Veterans Affairs determines are necessary to enable entitled veterans: (1) to the maximum extent feasible, to become employable and to obtain and maintain suitable employment; or (2) to achieve maximum independence in daily living, shall be charged to this account: *Provided further*, That of the funds made available under this heading, not to exceed

\$125,000,000 shall remain available until September 30, 2016.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. RUIZ

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

The CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

Page 32, line 5, after the dollar amount, insert "(reduced by \$5,000,000)(increased by \$5,000,000)".

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

Mr. RUIZ. Mr. Chairman, I rise today to offer an amendment to H.R. 4486, the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies Appropriations Act.

This amendment is for the brave men and women who have served our country, our veterans. Right now, in my district and across the Nation, thousands of veterans who have sacrificed for our country are struggling to receive access to benefits that they have earned. This is due to the enormous claims backlog at the Veterans Affairs Administration.

Currently, California is home to almost 2 million veterans, almost 140,000 in Riverside County alone. There is an additional 40,000 veterans expected to return to the State every year for the next several years.

As our troops continue to return home and assimilate back into civilian life, it is critical we are able to keep faith with our veterans and ensure they have timely access to critical benefits.

Too often, Washington becomes bogged down with statistics on a page or numbers on a screen that show how this backlog is affecting veterans, but the people this is affecting are not just a statistic. They are men and women, like retired Air Force Master Sergeant Andrew Walker and his family from Beaumont, California, who I represent.

Mr. Walker and his family struggled with the VA, waiting years on end, without receiving the critical health benefits he earned and needed. Due to what seemed like an insurmountable claims backlog, Mr. Walker told me that he suffered pain and frustration, leading to hopelessness and despair. He felt dejected and lost. This is unconscionable and no way to treat a veteran and his family.

I am thankful I was able to help resolve Mr. Walker's claim, but the reality is there are many more stories just like this one that continue every day across the country. It is critical that we as a Nation work urgently to address the claims backlog.

That is why I am offering this amendment to advocate for an additional \$5 million to fund the digital scanning of health and benefits files to reduce the backlog by redirecting funding within the general operating expenses account of the Veterans Benefits Administration.

This amendment simply directs funds towards the digital scanning of health and benefit files that will reduce the claims backlog without any new spend-

ing. As an emergency medicine physician, I understand the importance of efficiency in health care.

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

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

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

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

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

The CHAIR. The gentleman from Texas is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. CULBERSON. Mr. Chairman, I rise in support of the gentleman's amendment.

This is something that we have all worked together arm in arm and welcome the additional resources with the assurance to our employers—the taxpayers—that we will provide aggressive oversight and ensure that the money is actually used to reduce the backlog as fast as humanly possible and, above all, to enforce the law because the greatest check and balance we have as guardians of the Treasury and good stewards of our taxpayers' hard-earned tax dollars is the power of the purse.

I welcome the gentleman's amendment and look forward to supporting it.

I yield back the balance of my time.

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

The amendment was agreed to.

Mr. LARSEN of Washington. Mr. Chairman, I move to strike the last word.

The CHAIR. The gentleman from Washington is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. LARSEN of Washington. Mr. Chairman, I would like to engage in a colloquy of the subcommittee leadership.

First off, I want to thank the chairman and the ranking member for agreeing to work with me on an issue that is very important to former servicemembers.

After a decade at war, many women servicemembers, for instance, are at risk for reproductive and urinary tract problems. This risk results from deployment conditions and a lack of predeployment women's health information.

In addition, the nature of the current conflict and increasing use of improvised explosive devices have left servicemembers with blast injuries that include spinal cord injury and trauma to the reproductive and urinary tracts.

The result is a severe impact to these servicemembers and their ability to create and raise a family upon their return from the battlefield.

According to the Department of Defense, between 2003 and 2011, nearly 2,000 women and men suffered these life-changing battle injuries during Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom.

Disabled veterans have already paid much too high a price in service to our country. They should not have to pay a higher cost when they come home to try to start a family. The Department of Veterans Affairs cannot provide the care that they need.

While the Department of Defense and TRICARE are already able to provide the necessary treatment to servicemembers with these injuries, the VA services are not able to meet the complex needs of severely injured veterans.

I hope I can continue to call up on the able leadership of the subcommittee to help resolve this issue as we move forward on this bill and move it to conference.

With that, I yield to the ranking member.

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. I would like to thank the gentleman from Washington for bringing this issue to our attention. I will certainly work with you, as well I am sure the chairman will and the members of our subcommittee, as we go forward to find a meaningful solution to this problem.

Mr. LARSEN of Washington. I want to thank the ranking member and the leadership of the subcommittee, Mr. Chairman.

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

The CHAIR. The Clerk will read.

The Clerk read as follows:

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SYSTEMS
(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

For necessary expenses for information technology systems and telecommunications support, including developmental information systems and operational information systems; for pay and associated costs; and for the capital asset acquisition of information technology systems, including management and related contractual costs of said acquisitions, including contractual costs associated with operations authorized by section 3109 of title 5, United States Code, \$3,870,552,000, plus reimbursements: *Provided*, That \$1,039,000,000 shall be for pay and associated costs, of which not to exceed \$31,170,000 shall remain available until September 30, 2016: *Provided further*, That \$2,283,217,000 shall be for operations and maintenance, of which not to exceed \$160,000,000 shall remain available until September 30, 2016: *Provided further*, That \$548,335,000 shall be for information technology systems development, modernization, and enhancement, and shall remain available until September 30, 2016: *Provided further*, That amounts made available for information technology systems development, modernization, and enhancement may not be obligated or expended until the Secretary of Veterans Affairs or the Chief Information Officer of the Department of Veterans Affairs submits to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress a certification of the amounts, in parts or in full, to be obligated and expended for each

development project: *Provided further*, That amounts made available for salaries and expenses, operations and maintenance, and information technology systems development, modernization, and enhancement may be transferred among the three subaccounts after the Secretary of Veterans Affairs requests from the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress the authority to make the transfer and an approval is issued: *Provided further*, That amounts made available for the "Information Technology Systems" account for development, modernization, and enhancement may be transferred among projects or to newly defined projects: *Provided further*, That no project may be increased or decreased by more than \$1,000,000 of cost prior to submitting a request to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress to make the transfer and an approval is issued, or absent a response, a period of 30 days has elapsed: *Provided further*, That funds under this heading may be used by the Interagency Program Office through the Department of Veterans Affairs to develop a standard data reference terminology model: *Provided further*, That of the funds made available for information technology systems development, modernization, and enhancement for VistA Evolution, not more than 25 percent may be obligated or expended until the Secretary of Veterans Affairs submits to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress, and such Committees approve, a report that describes: (1) the status of VistA Evolution project development and any corrective actions taken where the plan established in the VistA Evolution program plan (hereinafter referred to as the "Plan"), VistA 4 product roadmap (Roadmap), or the VistA Evolution cost estimate, dated March 24, 2014 may have fallen short; (2) any changes to the scope of the VistA Evolution program as established in the Plan; (3) actual program costs incurred and any refinements to the cost estimate presented in the Plan based on actual costs incurred; (4) progress in meeting the schedule milestones that have been established in the Plan; (5) program performance relative to the performance measures that have been identified in the Plan and the Roadmap; (6) plans for testing the VistA system and test results; (7) VistA Evolution program risks and issues that have been identified and any agency responses to such risks and issues; (8) the effort to achieve interoperability between the electronic health record systems of the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs, including the scope, cost, schedule, and performance benchmarks of the interoperable record; and (9) progress toward developing and implementing the interoperable electronic health record throughout the two Departments' medical facilities: *Provided further*, That the funds made available under this heading for information technology systems development, modernization, and enhancement, shall be for the projects, and in the amounts, specified under this heading in the report accompanying this Act.

OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

For necessary expenses of the Office of Inspector General, to include information technology, in carrying out the provisions of the Inspector General Act of 1978 (5 U.S.C. App.), \$121,411,000, of which \$10,000,000 shall remain available until September 30, 2016.

CONSTRUCTION, MAJOR PROJECTS

For constructing, altering, extending, and improving any of the facilities, including parking projects, under the jurisdiction or for the use of the Department of Veterans Affairs, or for any of the purposes set forth in sections 316, 2404, 2406, and chapter 81 of title 38, United States Code, not otherwise

provided for, including planning, architectural and engineering services, construction management services, maintenance or guarantee period services costs associated with equipment guarantees provided under the project, services of claims analysts, offsite utility and storm drainage system construction costs, and site acquisition, where the estimated cost of a project is more than the amount set forth in section 8104(a)(3)(A) of title 38, United States Code, or where funds for a project were made available in a previous major project appropriation, \$561,800,000, of which \$527,800,000 shall remain available until September 30, 2019, and of which \$34,000,000 shall remain available until expended: *Provided*, That except for advance planning activities, including needs assessments which may or may not lead to capital investments, and other capital asset management related activities, including portfolio development and management activities, and investment strategy studies funded through the advance planning fund and the planning and design activities funded through the design fund, including needs assessments which may or may not lead to capital investments, and salaries and associated costs of the resident engineers who oversee those capital investments funded through this account, and funds provided for the purchase of land for the National Cemetery Administration through the land acquisition line item, none of the funds made available under this heading shall be used for any project which has not been approved by the Congress in the budgetary process: *Provided further*, That funds made available under this heading for fiscal year 2015, for each approved project shall be obligated: (1) by the awarding of a construction documents contract by September 30, 2015; and (2) by the awarding of a construction contract by September 30, 2016: *Provided further*, That the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall promptly submit to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress a written report on any approved major construction project for which obligations are not incurred within the time limitations established above.

CONSTRUCTION, MINOR PROJECTS

For constructing, altering, extending, and improving any of the facilities, including parking projects, under the jurisdiction or for the use of the Department of Veterans Affairs, including planning and assessments of needs which may lead to capital investments, architectural and engineering services, maintenance or guarantee period services costs associated with equipment guarantees provided under the project, services of claims analysts, offsite utility and storm drainage system construction costs, and site acquisition, or for any of the purposes set forth in sections 316, 2404, 2406, and chapter 81 of title 38, United States Code, not otherwise provided for, where the estimated cost of a project is equal to or less than the amount set forth in section 8104(a)(3)(A) of title 38, United States Code, \$495,200,000, to remain available until September 30, 2019, along with unobligated balances of previous "Construction, Minor Projects" appropriations which are hereby made available for any project where the estimated cost is equal to or less than the amount set forth in such section: *Provided*, That funds made available under this heading shall be for: (1) repairs to any of the nonmedical facilities under the jurisdiction or for the use of the Department which are necessary because of loss or damage caused by any natural disaster or catastrophe; and (2) temporary measures necessary to prevent or to minimize further loss by such causes.

GRANTS FOR CONSTRUCTION OF STATE
EXTENDED CARE FACILITIES

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

GRANTS FOR CONSTRUCTION OF VETERANS
CEMETERIES

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

ADMINISTRATIVE PROVISIONS
(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 201. Any appropriation for fiscal year 2015 for “Compensation and Pensions”, “Readjustment Benefits”, and “Veterans Insurance and Indemnities” may be transferred as necessary to any other of the mentioned appropriations: *Provided*, That before a transfer may take place, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall request from the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress the authority to make the transfer and such Committees issue an approval, or absent a response, a period of 30 days has elapsed.

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 202. Amounts made available for the Department of Veterans Affairs for fiscal year 2015, in this Act or any other Act, under the “Medical Services”, “Medical Support and Compliance”, and “Medical Facilities” accounts may be transferred among the accounts: *Provided*, That any transfers between the “Medical Services” and “Medical Support and Compliance” accounts of 1 percent or less of the total amount appropriated to the account in this or any other Act may take place subject to notification from the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress of the amount and purpose of the transfer: *Provided further*, That any transfers between the “Medical Services” and “Medical Support and Compliance” accounts in excess of 1 percent, or exceeding the cumulative 1 percent for the fiscal year, may take place only after the Secretary requests from the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress the authority to make the transfer and an approval is issued: *Provided further*, That any transfers to or from the “Medical Facilities” account may take place only after the Secretary requests from the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress the authority to make the transfer and an approval is issued.

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

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

SEC. 205. No appropriations in this title shall be available for hospitalization or examination of any persons (except beneficiaries entitled to such hospitalization or examination under the laws providing such benefits to veterans, and persons receiving such treatment under sections 7901 through 7904 of title 5, United States Code, or the

Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5121 et seq.), unless reimbursement of the cost of such hospitalization or examination is made to the “Medical Services” account at such rates as may be fixed by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

SEC. 206. Appropriations available in this title for “Compensation and Pensions”, “Readjustment Benefits”, and “Veterans Insurance and Indemnities” shall be available for payment of prior year accrued obligations required to be recorded by law against the corresponding prior year accounts within the last quarter of fiscal year 2014.

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

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 208. Notwithstanding any other provision of law, during fiscal year 2015, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall, from the National Service Life Insurance Fund under section 1920 of title 38, United States Code, the Veterans’ Special Life Insurance Fund under section 1923 of title 38, United States Code, and the United States Government Life Insurance Fund under section 1955 of title 38, United States Code, reimburse the “General Operating Expenses, Veterans Benefits Administration” and “Information Technology Systems” accounts for the cost of administration of the insurance programs financed through those accounts: *Provided*, That reimbursement shall be made only from the surplus earnings accumulated in such an insurance program during fiscal year 2015 that are available for dividends in that program after claims have been paid and actuarially determined reserves have been set aside: *Provided further*, That if the cost of administration of such an insurance program exceeds the amount of surplus earnings accumulated in that program, reimbursement shall be made only to the extent of such surplus earnings: *Provided further*, That the Secretary shall determine the cost of administration for fiscal year 2015 which is properly allocable to the provision of each such insurance program and to the provision of any total disability income insurance included in that insurance program.

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

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 210. Funds available in this title or funds for salaries and other administrative expenses shall also be available to reimburse the Office of Resolution Management of the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Office of Employment Discrimination Complaint Adjudication under section 319 of title 38, United States Code, for all services provided at rates which will recover actual costs but not to exceed \$42,904,000 for the Office of Resolution Management and \$3,400,000 for the Office of Employment Discrimination Complaint Adjudication: *Provided*, That payments may be made in advance for services to be furnished based on estimated costs: *Provided further*, That amounts received shall be credited to the “General Administration” and “Information Technology Systems” accounts for use by the office that provided the service.

SEC. 211. No appropriations in this title shall be available to enter into any new lease

of real property if the estimated annual rental cost is more than \$1,000,000, unless the Secretary submits a report which the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress approve within 30 days following the date on which the report is received.

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

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

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

SEC. 214. Amounts made available under “Medical Services” are available—

(1) for furnishing recreational facilities, supplies, and equipment; and

(2) for funeral expenses, burial expenses, and other expenses incidental to funerals and burials for beneficiaries receiving care in the Department.

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

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

SEC. 216. The Secretary of Veterans Affairs may enter into agreements with Indian tribes and tribal organizations which are party to the Alaska Native Health Compact with the Indian Health Service, and Indian tribes and tribal organizations serving rural Alaska which have entered into contracts with the Indian Health Service under the Indian Self Determination and Educational Assistance Act, to provide healthcare, including behavioral health and dental care. The Secretary shall require participating veterans and facilities to comply with all appropriate rules and regulations, as established by the Secretary. The term “rural Alaska” shall mean those lands sited within the external boundaries of the Alaska Native regions specified in sections 7(a)(1)–(4) and (7)–(12) of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, as amended (43 U.S.C. 1606), and those lands within the Alaska Native regions specified in sections 7(a)(5) and 7(a)(6) of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, as amended (43 U.S.C. 1606), which are not within the boundaries of the municipality of Anchorage, the Fairbanks North Star Borough, the Kenai Peninsula Borough or the Matanuska Susitna Borough.

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 217. Such sums as may be deposited to the Department of Veterans Affairs Capital

Asset Fund pursuant to section 8118 of title 38, United States Code, may be transferred to the "Construction, Major Projects" and "Construction, Minor Projects" accounts, to remain available until expended for the purposes of these accounts.

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

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

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 220. Amounts made available under the "Medical Services", "Medical Support and Compliance", "Medical Facilities", "General Operating Expenses, Veterans Benefits Administration", "General Administration", and "National Cemetery Administration" accounts for fiscal year 2015 may be transferred to or from the "Information Technology Systems" account: *Provided*, That before a transfer may take place, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall request from the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress the authority to make the transfer and an approval is issued.

SEC. 221. Of the amounts made available to the Department of Veterans Affairs for fiscal year 2015, in this Act or any other Act, under the "Medical Facilities" account for non-recurring maintenance, not more than 20 percent of the funds made available shall be obligated during the last 2 months of that fiscal year: *Provided*, That the Secretary may waive this requirement after providing written notice to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress.

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 222. Of the amounts appropriated to the Department of Veterans Affairs for fiscal year 2015 for "Medical Services", "Medical Support and Compliance", "Medical Facilities", "Construction, Minor Projects", and "Information Technology Systems", up to \$252,366,000, plus reimbursements, may be transferred to the Joint Department of Defense-Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Facility Demonstration Fund, established by section 1704 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2010 (Public Law 111-84; 123 Stat. 3571) and may be used for operation of the facilities designated as combined Federal medical facilities as described by section 706 of the Duncan Hunter National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2009 (Public Law 110-417; 122 Stat. 4500): *Provided*, That additional funds may be transferred from accounts designated in this section to the Joint Department of Defense-Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Facility Demonstration Fund upon written notification by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress.

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 223. Such sums as may be deposited to the Medical Care Collections Fund pursuant to section 1729A of title 38, United States Code, for healthcare provided at facilities designated as combined Federal medical facilities as described by section 706 of the Duncan Hunter National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2009 (Public Law 110-417; 122 Stat. 4500) shall also be available: (1) for transfer to the Joint Department of Defense-Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Facility Demonstration Fund, established by section 1704 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2010

(Public Law 111-84; 123 Stat. 3571); and (2) for operations of the facilities designated as combined Federal medical facilities as described by section 706 of the Duncan Hunter National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2009 (Public Law 110-417; 122 Stat. 4500).

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 224. Of the amounts available in this title for "Medical Services", "Medical Support and Compliance", and "Medical Facilities", a minimum of \$15,000,000 shall be transferred to the DOD-VA Health Care Sharing Incentive Fund, as authorized by section 8111(d) of title 38, United States Code, to remain available until expended, for any purpose authorized by section 8111 of title 38, United States Code.

(INCLUDING RESCISSIONS OF FUNDS)

SEC. 225. (a) Of the funds appropriated in title II of division J of Public Law 113-76, the following amounts which become available on October 1, 2014, are hereby rescinded from the following accounts in the amounts specified:

(1) "Department of Veterans Affairs, Medical Services", \$1,400,000,000.

(2) "Department of Veterans Affairs, Medical Support and Compliance", \$100,000,000.

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

(b) In addition to amounts provided elsewhere in this Act, an additional amount is appropriated to the following accounts in the amounts specified to remain available until September 30, 2016:

(1) "Department of Veterans Affairs, Medical Services", \$1,400,000,000.

(2) "Department of Veterans Affairs, Medical Support and Compliance", \$100,000,000.

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

SEC. 226. The Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs shall notify the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress of all bid savings in major construction projects that total at least \$5,000,000, or 5 percent of the programmed amount of the project, whichever is less: *Provided*, That such notification shall occur within 14 days of a contract identifying the programmed amount: *Provided further*, That the Secretary shall notify the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress 14 days prior to the obligation of such bid savings and shall describe the anticipated use of such savings.

SEC. 227. The scope of work for a project included in "Construction, Major Projects" may not be increased above the scope specified for that project in the original justification data provided to the Congress as part of the request for appropriations.

SEC. 228. The Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs shall provide on a quarterly basis to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress notification of any single national outreach and awareness marketing campaign in which obligations exceed \$2,000,000.

SEC. 229. The Secretary shall submit to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress a reprogramming request if at any point during fiscal year 2015, the funding allocated for a medical care initiative identified in the fiscal year 2015 expenditure plan is adjusted by more than \$25,000,000 from the allocation shown in the corresponding congressional budget justification. Such a reprogramming request may go forward only if the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress approve the request or if a period of 14 days has elapsed.

SEC. 230. Of the funds provided to the Department of Veterans Affairs for fiscal year 2015 for "Medical Services" and "Medical

Support and Compliance", a maximum of \$8,371,000 may be obligated from the "Medical Services" account and a maximum of \$114,703,000 may be obligated from the "Medical Support and Compliance" account for the VistA Evolution and electronic health record interoperability projects: *Provided*, That funds in addition to these amounts may be obligated for the VistA Evolution and electronic health record interoperability projects upon written notification by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress.

SEC. 231. The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall provide written notification to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress 15 days prior to organizational changes which result in the transfer of 25 or more full-time equivalents from one organizational unit of the Department of Veterans Affairs to another.

Mr. CULBERSON (during the reading). Mr. Chairman, I ask unanimous consent that the remainder of the bill through page 53, line 25, be considered as read, printed in the RECORD, and open to amendment at any point in order to expedite the process.

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

There was no objection.

The CHAIR. The Clerk will read.

The Clerk read as follows:

SEC. 232. None of the funds made available by this Act may be used to award a contract to any contractor if the past performance of the contractor resulted in the completion of a construction project at a facility of the Department of Veterans Affairs more than 24 months after the original agreed-upon completion date for the project.

(INCLUDING RESCISSION OF FUNDS)

SEC. 233. Of the unobligated balances available to the Department of Veterans Affairs from prior year discretionary appropriations (other than appropriations designated by law as being for an emergency requirement) \$38,000,000 are hereby rescinded.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. TERRY

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

The CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

Page 54, after line 12, insert the following:

SEC. 224. None of the funds made available in this Act for "Department of Veterans Affairs—Departmental Administration—General Administration" for administrative expenses of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs may be obligated or expended until the Secretary of Veterans Affairs meets with the Nebraska delegation to discuss alternative options for the Department of Veterans Affairs hospital planned for construction in Omaha, Nebraska.

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

The CHAIR. A point of order is reserved.

The gentleman from Nebraska is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. TERRY. Mr. Chairman, I first want to thank my colleagues on the VA-MilCon Subcommittee—in particular, Mr. FORTENBERRY and Mr. CULBERSON and their staff—for their excellent work on this legislation in helping me facilitate this amendment and discussion.

I also want to thank, of course, the committee staff, who has just been wonderful.

□ 1545

My amendment would require that no funds in this appropriations bill shall be used for the administrative expenses until the Secretary meets with the Nebraska delegation. The Secretary's calendar should never be so busy that he cannot meet with an entire delegation.

Mr. Chairman, on June 6 of 2013—almost 11 months ago—our delegation asked for a meeting with Secretary Shinseki. When I say “delegation,” I mean all of the House Members and both Senators signed on to this letter, which I will submit for the RECORD.

CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES,
Washington, DC, June 6, 2013.

Hon. ERIC K. SHINSEKI,
Secretary of Veterans Affairs,
Washington, DC.

DEAR SECRETARY SHINSEKI: We respectfully ask for a personal meeting with you to discuss the current state of the Veterans Affairs (VA) hospital in Omaha, Nebraska.

We are pleased that Omaha is on the VA's construction list and as such will someday have a new facility built. However, as number 18 out of 20 on the VA's major construction projects list, the reality seems to indicate that there is a small chance a new facility will be built by the end of the decade. As the condition of the current facility continues to deteriorate and the new hospital's timeline continues to slide, veterans in the Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System will be placed at risk of not receiving the proper health care that they have come to know and deserve.

The situation with the Omaha VA hospital is dire. The management and staff are doing their best, but unforeseen circumstances have provided obstacles to ensuring our veterans receive quality care. For example, operating rooms were closed in March 2013 due to failing humidifiers. Though the situation is being addressed, we are concerned that the aging facility will only continue to face operational challenges and will continue to require significant maintenance in order to keep it functioning until a new facility can be built. Another major issue is the condition of the boilers, air conditioners, and emergency generators. Without replacement soon the Omaha VA Hospital could face major shutdowns for complex and costly replacements of this equipment.

The veterans of Nebraska and western Iowa, who rely on this declining facility, need to know that the VA has valid and viable plans in place to continue the excellent care they receive without avoidable interruptions or endangerment to their health and welfare. We ask that you meet with us to discuss these items so we, as the Nebraska delegation, can communicate to and alleviate the concerns of our veteran constituents.

Several questions we would like to discuss with you include:

How does the VA establish funding priorities for construction of new VA hospitals and whether or not the major construction list will be re-evaluated based on the current status of existing facilities?

When is Omaha's facility reasonably expected to begin physical construction?

What is the VA's plan to fund unexpected and required repairs to continue Omaha's operations until a new facility is completed?

What is preventing the VA from placing higher priority on seriously degrading facilities such as the Omaha VA hospital?

What are other possible solutions/options for a new hospital and is the VA open to exploring these possibilities?

Please let us know as soon as possible as to your availability to meet in June. Time is of the essence. Please ask your staff to coordinate with Katie Amacio, scheduler for Senator Johanns, at kathleen_amacio@johanns.senate.gov. Ms. Amacio will coordinate with the rest of the delegation.

We look forward to working with you to best serve our nation's cherished heroes, our veterans.

Sincerely,

LEE TERRY,
Member of Congress,
ADRIAN SMITH,
Member of Congress,
JEFF FORTENBERRY,
Member of Congress,
MIKE JOHANNS,
United States Senator,
DEB FISCHER,
United States Senator.

CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES,
Washington, DC, November 1, 2013.

Hon. ERIC K. SHINSEKI,
Secretary of Veterans Affairs,
Washington, DC.

DEAR SECRETARY SHINSEKI: On June 6, 2013, we wrote you a letter requesting a meeting to discuss the Veterans Affairs (VA) hospital in Omaha, Nebraska and to discuss options regarding the current hospital situation, as well as a timeline and options for the new facility. We would like to meet with you as soon as possible to talk with you about our concerns.

We appreciate that your staff offered to meet with us. However, the situation at our VA hospital is so grave that this meeting requires your personal attention. As noted in our letter of June 6th, the condition of the current facility is problematic, while the new hospital's timeline continues to slide. Veterans in the Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System may be placed at risk of not receiving the proper health care that they have come to know and deserve if something is not done very soon to rectify the current situation.

Our communications with your congressional affairs staff have been numerous in the hopes that we could work to find a mutually agreeable time to meet. It is now the beginning of November and we are still anxiously awaiting the opportunity to meet. In the meantime, our veterans continue to seek treatment at a facility that has outlived its usefulness. Given your longstanding service to our country, we know that you share the goal of giving the best possible care to those who have served our nation so bravely. We respectfully request that a meeting be scheduled as early as possible.

Please contact Congressman Terry's Chief of Staff, Mark Anderson, to arrange a meeting. He can be reached via email at Mark.Anderson@mail.house.gov. He will coordinate a date and time for our meeting with you.

We believe that you are as interested as we are in serving those who deserve it most, our nation's veterans who depend upon the Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System. We know that we can work together to solve the problems at the Omaha facility and begin making the dreams of a new hospital a reality.

We look forward to hearing from your office in the coming days.

Sincerely,

LEE TERRY,
Member of Congress,
JEFF FORTENBERRY,
Member of Congress,
ADRIAN SMITH,

Member of Congress,
MIKE JOHANNS,
United States Senator,
DEB FISCHER,
United States Senator.

Mr. TERRY. Now, the purpose of this inquiry was to discuss some health care alternatives for the VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System. Our hospital for 170,000 area veterans is in serious disrepair—boilers, HVAC, emergency generators. The very sewer and water pipes are literally duct-taped together. We have heard that it is the second worst hospital infrastructure in all of their hospital inventory. Even last March, the operating rooms had to be closed down due to failing humidifiers. We are talking about the basic functioning of this hospital that is out of date.

Without replacement soon, the hospital could face additional major shutdowns for the complex and costly replacements of this infrastructure. Currently, we are on the list to be built somewhere around '18-'20, but the reality is, for years now, the list hasn't moved. Now our VA employees are being told that it will be somewhere in the 2021-2022 range. I fear it will be even later than that before the new inpatient tower can be built.

Why do we need to talk to the general, or to Secretary Shinseki, about this hospital?

It is that there are alternatives available in our community that we need to discuss with the decision maker.

I will tell you that, even though we made the request in June of 2013—as we head into May of 2014 now—they did get back to us in November of '13 when they said that we could meet with a low-level employee. So the entire delegation rewrote a letter in November, rejecting a meeting with the low-level employee. We need to meet with the Secretary, the decision maker, on these types of alternatives that would be available and that are, frankly, much cheaper than the \$600 million budgeted.

The Secretary then did call back in December when the House was out of session and when the Senate was wrapping up, I think it was, the debt resolution issue for Friday, but even the Senators left on Wednesday. They at late notice scheduled a meeting, but that was when no one was here. We have made numerous requests for additional meetings to discuss these great options that would be available. Some of them would involve a leaseback type of provision by which people would put up the money, build the hospital, and then lease it back, reducing the burdens on the VA's budget, but we have no one to talk to. That is why I am saying let's hold back the administrative budget until the head of the administration for the VA meets with the Nebraska delegation on this really important safety and health issue for our veterans.

I yield to my colleague, JEFF FORTENBERRY, from Lincoln, Nebraska.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. I thank my friend and colleague, Congressman TERRY, for his steadfast commitment in trying to find some creative resolution for this problem.

Mr. Chairman, he is very right in outlining this timeline of frustrations that we have had in dealing with the VA and in simply trying to get a hearing to discuss innovative ideas that are potentially out there to resolve this very difficult situation that we have in giving veterans the highest service that they deserve.

I did want to mention to my colleague and thank Chairman CULBERSON as well for working with me on getting some language in the current bill that, hopefully, gets us out of this dilemma and reframes it.

The Acting CHAIR (Mr. MCCLINTOCK). The time of the gentleman has expired.

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

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

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Mr. Chairman, I would like to read the language that is in this bill.

It reads:

Alternative Financing:

The committee is concerned about meeting the need for access to high-quality veterans' health care facilities, including in rural areas where access to facilities, including clinics and hospitals, is more limited. The committee directs the Department of Veterans Affairs to work collaboratively with other executive branch agencies with substantial construction portfolios, private sector contractors and other nongovernmental experts, together with the appropriate congressional committees, to explore the feasibility of employing new funding mechanisms to meet the need for such facilities, including but not limited to private development leaseback arrangements, and to provide a report on their conclusions to the committee no later than September 30 of this year.

So it is right around the corner. We did not want this to linger any longer.

A bit of a new development I should bring up as well is that the VA Secretary did appear before our committee. I laid out some of these concerns. He appeared to be open to new ideas and suggestions, but we wanted to fortify this by putting this language in the underlying bill. Hopefully, this gets us some resolution quickly. If we don't resolve this, there is something called "opportunity cost." Veterans who deserve the highest quality care may not be getting that care over the longer term when we could be doing something creative right now and innovative to build out, potentially, a new facility or rehab older ones to modern standards so that we can ensure they get the best and highest quality care. This puts us, hopefully, on a pathway to creating new and innovative ideas to simply move past the old way of doing things, which makes us wait and wait and wait for who knows how long.

I want to thank my colleague for, again, bringing awareness to this issue.

Mr. TERRY. Will the gentleman yield?

Mr. FORTENBERRY. I yield to the gentleman from Nebraska.

Mr. TERRY. Thank you, Mr. FORTENBERRY.

I think the language is innovative and absolutely necessary, and I compliment you on your perseverance on this issue as well and on the insertion of this language into the bill.

Mr. Chairman, the lend-lease or the leaseback provisions could be helpful. There are at least two community options that, I think, are highly credible options. One of them would be a leaseback type of option. The VA does that on clinics, but they refuse to do it on hospitals.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. And, by the way, on housing. As the Secretary pointed out, the VA does this on housing as well.

Mr. Chairman, there are creative options out there that do not give the government a longer term budgetary risk, but they nonetheless help us move past a process that seems to be very stuck—simply putting money under the mattress until we finally get enough someday way into the future when we can get the veterans the services that they need.

Mr. TERRY. The Secretary mentioned he was open to the language that you have inserted, which is a great step forward. Was he open to actually meeting with the delegation on the options that our community is putting forward?

Mr. FORTENBERRY. We discussed not necessarily the specific language. We, in working with the committee, came up with this. Again, I want to thank Chairman CULBERSON for his leadership in helping craft this. The Secretary expressed a general openness toward creative thinking about alternative models that are already being deployed, as you rightly recognized, in clinics as well as in veterans' housing. I did not raise the issue about meeting with us, but hopefully, again, this conversation and this language will help further that cause.

Mr. TERRY. I am intending, Mr. Chairman, to withdraw this amendment at the end of the gentleman's 5 minutes; but I do want to encourage General, Secretary Shinseki to actually sit down and listen to these options. We are not there to berate him or the VA but to simply say that our community is serious about finding solutions in working with the VA, and Mr. FORTENBERRY has now inserted language that would encourage that.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Again, I want to thank my colleague, LEE TERRY, for his steadfast commitment to this important issue.

Mr. Chairman, I think we should all be on the same page. Everybody shares the general goal and mission as to how to get this new hospital potentially in a much better situation either with a new facility or with something that is rehabilitated to modern standards. We have got some innovative ways to do this.

I yield back the balance of my time.

The Acting CHAIR. Without objection, the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. TERRY) withdraws his amendment.

There was no objection.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. LAMALFA

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

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

Page 54, after line 12, insert the following: Sec. _____. If Department of Veterans Affairs casework is brokered out to another office of the Department from its original submission site, a caseworker in a congressional office may contact the brokered office to receive an update on the constituent's case, and that office of the Department is required to update the congressional staffer regardless of their thoughts on jurisdiction.

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

The Acting CHAIR. A point of order is reserved on the amendment.

The gentleman from California is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. LAMALFA. I appreciate Chairman CULBERSON for allowing the time here today on this important topic.

Mr. Chairman, the VA continues to broker cases as a means to lessen the backlog that many Members are clamoring about. This amendment I am offering with my colleague, Mr. HUFFMAN, who wished to speak today, is very important to both of us and to many of my other colleagues.

When a case is brokered out of the Oakland VA office to the San Diego VA office, for example, San Diego will tell my staff that they are not allowed to update them on the status of a case because it is not in San Diego's jurisdiction to do so, they basically claim. We know there are no VA rules in law that state that caseworkers cannot be updated on a veteran's case.

This amendment simply states, if a congressional office is looking for an update on a veteran's case that has been brokered to another VA office, that the staff will be given a status update with no jurisdictional concerns.

As Members, we serve our constituents. It is a reasonable request that caseworkers in our offices should be allowed to receive an update on a case regardless of where that case has been sent so that this VA backlog can be solved. Our veterans should not suffer because of this backlog. This issue of jurisdiction needs to be clear to all VA facilities across the U.S. so that our veterans are getting the answers they need through our casework staff. If we are going to continue to broker cases, then the brokered office must be communicating with our staff members, who are trying to get the answers that they need to the veterans.

Mr. Chairman, at this time, I would like to yield to my colleague from California (Mr. GARAMENDI).

Mr. GARAMENDI. Mr. Chairman, let's see. There are 435 of us in this House and maybe another 100 over on

the other side, give or take a few who may be retiring or who are on their way to other jobs. Each and every one of us has constituents come to us, seeking help and seeking our assistance in solving a problem. It is our work. That is what a Representative is. We represent the people in our districts, and we help solve their problems.

The veterans have a very special place in our offices, in my own notion of what I am supposed to do as a Representative. I know they have in Mr. LAMALFA's and, quite probably, in the offices of every other Member of this House. We have over 130 active cases with veterans in our districts, working through the problems that they have with the Veterans Administration. I must tell you that one thing that sets me off is when my staff tells me that we are not able to contact the Veterans Administration because they have sent the case to another office and that that office won't respond to us.

□ 1600

We talked about this amongst ourselves, Mr. LAMALFA and I and other Representatives in our area, and, frankly, we have had enough. We are the legislature of the United States Government. And the Veterans Administration has a task, and they had better be responsible and responsive to veterans and to those who represent veterans, namely the 435 Members of this House. It is part of our job.

When the Veterans Administration office in some far-off land or county or other State has been given a file from our district to handle and to work through because of an overload in our area and then they don't respond to us, then they get this piece of legislation.

Mr. LAMALFA, thank you very much. This ought to become law, notwithstanding the objection. We thank you for carrying this bill. Let's make this part of a law, and let's make this organization responsive to us and to our constituents.

Mr. LAMALFA. Mr. Chairman, I appreciate my colleagues. This has been a bipartisan effort on a lot of VA issues here today we are seeing, which is a really good sign.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for allowing me some time to speak on this subject. I will be withdrawing this amendment at this time, but we will be following up on this issue via other means soon, because it is very key that we have the ability as the elected officials and our staff to communicate fully with all aspects of the VA, especially since there is, as I mentioned earlier, no law or no rule stating that we cannot have this but more, maybe, roadblocks put in place by certain staff.

Mr. Chair, I ask unanimous consent to withdraw my amendment at this time.

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

There was no objection.

Ms. TITUS. Mr. Chair, I move to strike the last word.

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

Ms. TITUS. As the ranking member of the Disability Assistance Memorial Affairs Subcommittee of the Veterans' Affairs authorizing committee, I rise today in support of this appropriations bill, and I thank the chairman and the ranking member for the hard work that they put into this bill.

One of the main reasons that I support it is because it furthers our goal of eliminating the VA benefits backlog, which is an issue our committee has worked on daily for the last year and a half. One of my top priorities is ensuring that our Nation's heroes receive all the benefits they have earned in a timely fashion.

While I support this bill, I would like to take just a minute or two to raise an issue that is troubling to me and hope to bring it to the attention of the other Members of the House.

I know many of my colleagues will be deeply saddened to learn that some veterans and their families across the country are being denied the benefits that they earned while serving our Nation. A recent example of this discrimination against some of our Nation's veterans was highlighted in a report by CBS News just last week.

Seventy-four-year-old Madelynn Taylor of Boise, Idaho, proudly served her country in the United States Navy for 6 years. She lost her spouse in 2012 and soon after began the task of making arrangements to ensure that the two of them would be together in death just as they were in life. Being a veteran, Madelynn had the right to be interred at a State or national veterans cemetery. Since the closest national cemetery to Boise was nearly 8 hours away in western Oregon, Madelynn decided to inquire about a joint spot and memorial wall with her and her spouse's ashes to lay in rest together, just as hundreds of other couples have done, at the Idaho State Veterans Cemetery in her hometown of Boise.

The Idaho State Veterans Cemetery was opened a decade ago with 100 percent of the funding for the design, construction, and equipment costs coming from a Federal grant from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' State Cemetery Grants Program, and the cemetery continues to receive Federal funding for operations.

When Madelynn brought the necessary paperwork, including her discharge papers and marriage certificate, she was told that she and her spouse would not be allowed to be buried together.

Why, you ask, was she denied this right? The answer is that Madelynn is a lesbian. Idaho State law does not recognize the legality of a marriage between Madelynn and her wife, Jean, and therefore is denying the couple the honor and dignity earned through Madelynn's service as a member of the United States Navy.

Madelynn said this of her situation:

I just feel that it's the right place for me. I am a veteran, so they should let me . . . in fact, they would let me alone be in that crypt, but I don't want to be alone. I want Jean with me.

We rightfully elevate our veterans and their families because of their service and sacrifice, yet today some veterans across the country face discrimination by the States and the Federal Government they sought to defend. No veteran or their family should be treated as second-class citizens.

Nearly a year after the landmark Supreme Court decision to strike down the Defense of Marriage Act, which effectively extended Federal benefits to legally married couples, we see the Nation's gay and lesbian veterans face obstacles accessing the benefits that they have earned and rightfully deserve.

While in uniform, our LGBT soldiers have access to the full complement of benefits available to members of the armed services. The second they transition out of the military, they are forced to leave these benefits behind.

I have introduced legislation to end this disservice, and I invite my colleagues to join me in supporting this important effort.

Mr. Chairman, today we debate legislation to fund the critical work of the VA and the earned benefits of our Nation's heroes and their families. My hope is that this body will give equal attention to all our veterans and their families and end the discrimination they experience when seeking benefits, including the right to be buried with their legally married, same-sex spouses.

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

Mr. HUDSON. Mr. Chair, I move to strike the last word in order to engage in a colloquy.

The Acting CHAIR. The gentleman from North Carolina is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. HUDSON. Mr. Chairman, we are all aware of the tragic backlog that deeply affects so many of our Nation's heroes all across this country, and particularly in my district back home in North Carolina. Fixing this issue needs to be one of the highest priorities of Congress and this administration. We owe it to our veterans, and I know that many of my colleagues agree that we owe them to do this.

However, the solution is not necessarily to continually throw money at the problem. We have done that for years without the results we are looking for. The reality is the fiscal situation we find ourselves in today means that we can no longer afford to be so shortsighted in our approach.

In order to reform the VA—or any other department, for that matter—we need to have a clear understanding of what costs are associated with running their programs so we can evaluate their effectiveness and root out those that are wasteful, duplicitous, and are underperforming.

Mr. Chairman, I know you have been a leader on this issue and have tried for years to get from the VA a clear breakdown of what their administrative costs are. Is that correct?

Mr. CULBERSON. Will the gentleman yield?

Mr. HUDSON. I yield to the gentleman from Texas.

Mr. CULBERSON. Yes, I have. It is an ongoing problem trying to get any of the agencies to tell you what their administrative costs are. It is extraordinarily important. I really appreciate you bringing it to our attention. We are going to continue to work on this with you and other Members to ensure that our constituents' hard-earned tax dollars are spent wisely.

Mr. HUDSON. Mr. Chair, I thank the gentleman for his hard work and commitment, and I share his frustration. I have had a very difficult time, as well, trying to understand how the VA deals with its overhead. In fact, I have got a story I just heard from a veteran in my district that is probably not unique.

This gentleman went to the VA center in Winston-Salem for an appeals hearing. A veterans service officer, one of the very hardworking veterans service officers around the country, accompanied him to this meeting. He sat down with the VA employee, and he asked the employee: Do you have my file? I don't see it sitting on your desk. The employee said: Well, we computerized all the files, so I have got it all here in the computer. The veteran said: Well, just so I know where you are, which page are you looking at? Somewhat sheepishly, the VA employee said: Well, actually, I don't know how to access the files in the computer.

It is outrageous. It got worse from there.

They went forward with the hearing. At the conclusion of the hearing, the employee turned off a tape recorder and popped out the cassette. The veteran said: Well, what do you do with that cassette? He said: Well, we send that to San Diego so they can transcribe it. In about 6 weeks, we will get the transcription back and then we can start processing your claim.

Mr. Chairman, this is not what we intended when we asked that we go to a computerized VA system, and it is outrageous that our veterans are having to see these kind of delays. I would just ask that you work with us to try to resolve this problem.

Mr. CULBERSON. Mr. Chair, if the gentleman will yield, I would point out I have a software application on here called Dragon Naturally Speaking. You just talk into it and it transcribes it instantly. As we used to say, "Get with the nineties," get with the modern era and just download a few apps on the computers.

We will bird-dog them relentlessly. That is absurd.

Mr. HUDSON. It is absurd.

I appreciate your commitment to this, the time you put into it. Our veterans deserve the best we can give

them. They deserve to be treated with the highest respect, and they deserve to not have to wait these extraordinary amounts of time just to be heard.

Mr. Chairman, I commit to working with you to continue to deal with this issue, to take care of our veterans not just in North Carolina's Eighth District, but around the country.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. DUNCAN of South Carolina. Mr. Chair, I move to strike the last word.

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

Mr. DUNCAN of South Carolina. Mr. Chair, I rise today in support of the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Act, and I will commend the chairman of the committee for his efforts on this.

This legislation not only provides the necessary funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs' operation, but it also sets a clear priority of addressing the massive problems at hand at the VA. We have read the recent news article saying we are aware as a Congress of all the problems that we are seeing in the VA. For too long, the heroes that have served this country have been mistreated, overlooked, or flat-out ignored by the VA. When these brave men and women signed up to defend our Nation, they were promised to be taken care of when they returned home. However, today we see less than adequate care—doctor's visit wait times stretching months and, in some cases, years, and hundreds of thousands of backlog benefit cases.

The incident the gentleman from North Carolina just talked about is prevalent all across this land in every congressional district, including mine. Mr. Chairman, when I talk to the veterans back home in my district, I hear loss of confidence in a government that promised to be there for them. I hear from war veterans who are just plain giving up on the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The latest report on VA claims from April 28, 2014, shows there are almost 600,000 pending claims with over 300,000 considered backlogged that have been pending for over 125 days. Mr. Chairman, that is 125 days without an answer or resolution that these veterans will never get back.

Just in my office, we have seen a multitude of cases that demonstrate the current ongoing crisis at the VA. One Korean war veteran has been working with my office on a Decision Review Officer review for over 18 months now. This is a decision process that was supposed to be quicker than a Board of Veterans' Appeal in Washington. After waiting for more than a year for a meeting before his appeal, he couldn't wait any longer and just asked for the decision to be with the information that was at hand. While he is still waiting for an answer, I am praying for a resolution for that veteran.

We have seen other instances where we were able to send documentation on behalf of constituents to various Vet-

erans Administration offices, for the very same offices to turn around months later and ask for the same information again. Is this any way to treat the men and women who sacrificed their lives to defend the very freedoms our country enjoys?

Thankfully, this legislation we are considering today makes a stride in the right direction by concentrating efforts to end the current backlog; holding the VA offices accountable through office performance measurements, not just awarding bonuses for someone when the facilities are in need of some attention, we will say; and increasing medical services for veterans, and that is the most important part.

This bill prioritizes the timely and accurate exchange of medical data, updating the VA health records system, and ensuring the system is operable with the Department of Defense.

This is not a silver bullet, Mr. Chairman, and we still have a long way to go to get the VA clicking and ticking again, but I hope we can use that momentum to continue working towards fulfilling the promises made to our veterans and improving the lives of our Nation's heroes. They deserve it.

May God bless our Nation's troops and veterans, and may God continue to bless the United States of America.

I yield back the balance of my time.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will read.

The Clerk read as follows:

TITLE III

RELATED AGENCIES

AMERICAN BATTLE MONUMENTS COMMISSION SALARIES AND EXPENSES

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

FOREIGN CURRENCY FLUCTUATIONS ACCOUNT

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

UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS FOR VETERANS CLAIMS

SALARIES AND EXPENSES

For necessary expenses for the operation of the United States Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims as authorized by sections 7251 through 7298 of title 38, United States Code, \$31,386,000: *Provided*, That \$2,500,000 shall be available for the purpose of providing financial assistance as described, and in accordance with the process and reporting procedures set forth, under this heading in Public Law 102-229.

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE—CIVIL
CEMETERIAL EXPENSES, ARMY
SALARIES AND EXPENSES

For necessary expenses for maintenance, operation, and improvement of Arlington National Cemetery and Soldiers' and Airmen's Home National Cemetery, including the purchase or lease of passenger motor vehicles for replacement on a one-for-one basis only, and not to exceed \$1,000 for official reception and representation expenses, \$61,881,000, of which not to exceed \$7,000,000 shall remain available until September 30, 2016. In addition, such sums as may be necessary for parking maintenance, repairs and replacement, to be derived from the "Lease of Department of Defense Real Property for Defense Agencies" account.

ARMED FORCES RETIREMENT HOME
TRUST FUND

For expenses necessary for the Armed Forces Retirement Home to operate and maintain the Armed Forces Retirement Home—Washington, District of Columbia, and the Armed Forces Retirement Home—Gulfport, Mississippi, to be paid from funds available in the Armed Forces Retirement Home Trust Fund, \$63,400,000, of which \$1,000,000 shall remain available until expended for construction and renovation of the physical plants at the Armed Forces Retirement Home—Washington, District of Columbia, and the Armed Forces Retirement Home—Gulfport, Mississippi.

ADMINISTRATIVE PROVISION

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

TITLE IV
GENERAL PROVISIONS

SEC. 401. No part of any appropriation contained in this Act shall remain available for obligation beyond the current fiscal year unless expressly so provided herein.

SEC. 402. None of the funds made available in this Act may be used for any program, project, or activity, when it is made known to the Federal entity or official to which the funds are made available that the program, project, or activity is not in compliance with any Federal law relating to risk assessment, the protection of private property rights, or unfunded mandates.

SEC. 403. No part of any funds appropriated in this Act shall be used by an agency of the executive branch, other than for normal and recognized executive-legislative relationships, for publicity or propaganda purposes, and for the preparation, distribution, or use of any kit, pamphlet, booklet, publication, radio, television, or film presentation designed to support or defeat legislation pending before Congress, except in presentation to Congress itself.

SEC. 404. All departments and agencies funded under this Act are encouraged, within the limits of the existing statutory authorities and funding, to expand their use of "E-Commerce" technologies and procedures in the conduct of their business practices and public service activities.

SEC. 405. Unless stated otherwise, all reports and notifications required by this Act shall be submitted to the Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies of the Committee on Appropriations of the House of Representatives and the Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies of the Committee on Appropriations of the Senate.

SEC. 406. None of the funds made available in this Act may be transferred to any department, agency, or instrumentality of the United States Government except pursuant to a transfer made by, or transfer authority provided in, this or any other appropriations Act.

SEC. 407. None of the funds made available in this Act may be used for a project or program named for an individual serving as a Member, Delegate, or Resident Commissioner of the United States House of Representatives.

SEC. 408. (a) Any agency receiving funds made available in this Act, shall, subject to subsections (b) and (c), post on the public Web site of that agency any report required to be submitted by the Congress in this or any other Act, upon the determination by the head of the agency that it shall serve the national interest.

(b) Subsection (a) shall not apply to a report if—

(1) the public posting of the report compromises national security; or

(2) the report contains confidential or proprietary information.

(c) The head of the agency posting such report shall do so only after such report has been made available to the requesting Committee or Committees of Congress for no less than 45 days.

SEC. 409. (a) None of the funds made available in this Act may be used to maintain or establish a computer network unless such network blocks the viewing, downloading, and exchanging of pornography.

(b) Nothing in subsection (a) shall limit the use of funds necessary for any Federal, State, tribal, or local law enforcement agency or any other entity carrying out criminal investigations, prosecution, or adjudication activities.

SEC. 410. None of the funds made available in this Act may be used by an agency of the executive branch to pay for first-class travel by an employee of the agency in contravention of sections 301–10.122 through 301–10.124 of title 41, Code of Federal Regulations.

SEC. 411. (a) IN GENERAL.—None of the funds appropriated or otherwise made available to the Department of Defense in this Act may be used to construct, renovate, or expand any facility in the United States, its territories, or possessions to house any individual detained at United States Naval Station, Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, for the purposes of detention or imprisonment in the custody or under the control of the Department of Defense.

(b) The prohibition in subsection (a) shall not apply to any modification of facilities at United States Naval Station, Guantánamo Bay, Cuba.

(c) An individual described in this subsection is any individual who, as of June 24, 2009, is located at United States Naval Station, Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, and who—

(1) is not a citizen of the United States or a member of the Armed Forces of the United States; and

(2) is—
(A) in the custody or under the effective control of the Department of Defense; or

(B) otherwise under detention at United States Naval Station, Guantánamo Bay, Cuba.

□ 1615

AMENDMENT NO. 5 OFFERED BY MR. MORAN

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

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will designate the amendment.

The text of the amendment is as follows:

Page 60, beginning on line 10, strike section 411.

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

Mr. MORAN. Mr. Chairman, this amendment would strike section 411, which specifically restricts the Defense Department from transferring Guantanamo detainees to the United States.

Striking section 411 would enable the U.S. military to be able to make the most responsible decisions on transferring the 77 detainees who have been cleared by our intelligence community and the Joint Chiefs of Staff to be able to go to their home countries and bring those not cleared for release to the United States to be charged, tried, and sentenced.

The Obama administration has made some real progress on this issue over the last year, but it is still the case that Guantanamo is a rallying cry for extremists around the world, and until we transfer and try these detainees, there is no denying that Guantanamo is in fact hurting our national security.

We need to reevaluate our response to the long-term threat of terrorism and realize that policies that mock the rule of law make it more likely, rather than less likely, that we will be attacked again.

How can we expect Americans who are captured abroad to be accorded the right to be sentenced and brought to trial when we hold 154 prisoners in Guantanamo without charge and without trial?

Some of my colleagues are going to argue that detaining or trying suspected terrorists in the United States would endanger national security, but it is not the case. More than 400 defendants charged with crimes related to international terrorism have been successfully convicted in the United States since 9/11. That includes the Times Square bomber; the shoe bomber; and Zacarias Moussaoui, who was tried and convicted in my congressional district for his role in the 9/11 attack.

All of them are in our prisons here in the United States. Most Americans don't know that because there haven't been any security incidents. In fact, more than 300 individuals convicted of crimes related to international terrorism are currently incarcerated in 98 Federal prisons within the United States, with no escapes and no attempts to free them.

There are six Defense Department facilities less than half full where Guantanamo detainees could be held here in the United States.

The current approach of military commissions has proven unworkable because many of these prisoners merit a trial, but they are not getting the kind of trial that can withstand scrutiny. In fact, the only two guilty verdicts these commissions issued were both overturned.

Keeping Guantanamo open is expensive. We are currently spending \$2.67 million per detainee each year at Guantanamo, compared to \$34,046 per

inmate at a high security Federal prison here in the United States.

This year alone, the Defense Department estimates that it will spend \$443 million in operations and personnel costs to operate this detention facility.

When we are facing the negative effects of sequestration, it just does not make sense to continue what is in effect a permanent scar on our judicial system.

In conclusion, the political and legal expediency of the detention center at Guantanamo has not been worth the cost to America's reputation around the world, nor to the erosion of our own legal and ethical standards here at home.

I support the President in his recent statements, and I encourage the Members of this body to support this amendment. It is the right thing to do morally, ethically, and legally.

I yield back the balance of my time.

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

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

Mr. CULBERSON. Mr. Chairman, I rise in opposition to the gentleman's amendment.

We have presented this piece of legislation to the House in a bipartisan fashion. We have got unanimous support for it. This is one of those areas where we have an honest but earnest philosophical disagreement.

This is something my good friend from Virginia (Mr. MORAN), has been pursuing over the years, but it is, again, something the constituents I represent, the folks of Texas, I know oppose the idea of giving constitutional rights to enemy soldiers captured on foreign battlefields, especially these cowardly terrorists who hide behind women and children and launch sneak attacks against our men and women in uniform.

We have asked the Congressional Research Service to attempt to tell us when, if ever, constitutional rights have been granted to enemy soldiers captured on foreign battlefields. The Congressional Research Service tells us the only example they can find is Manuel Noriega, the dictator of Panama, who was captured during the Bush 41 administration and brought to trial in Florida.

The individuals at Guantanamo Bay are the most dangerous, radical individuals that have been captured during the war on terror. These folks are extremely dangerous.

Any evidence that has been gathered, for example, even if they were to be transferred to the United States and given a criminal trial under the Constitution, which I strenuously object to, but even if they were brought to the United States and put on trial, how would any of the evidence gathered against them in Guantanamo be used to convict them?

So this presents unsurmountable problems and is a divisive issue that is going to cause a tremendous amount of

disagreement among the Members of Congress on a bill that has enjoyed unanimous and enthusiastic support from everyone in this body to make sure that our veterans and our men and women in uniform are taken care of.

It is essential that this amendment be defeated in order to make sure that enemy soldiers are not given the protections of the United States Constitution. It is fundamentally something I strenuously disagree with, as do my constituents, and I urge the Members of this House to reject this amendment. And I hope to also have the support of the people of Georgia in opposing this amendment as well.

I yield back the balance of my time.

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

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

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Mr. Chairman, I rise in support of this amendment.

I believe we need to set the conditions for the closure of the detention facility at Guantanamo. It is in the United States' national security interest to do so.

Guantanamo has become a rallying cry. It serves as a recruitment tool for terrorists and increases the will of our enemies to fight, while reducing the will of others to work with America.

Part of the rationale for establishing Guantanamo in the first place was the misplaced idea that the facility would be beyond the law—a proposition that has been soundly rejected by the Supreme Court. As a result, continued operation of this facility creates the impression in the eyes of our allies and our enemies that the United States selectively observes the rule of law.

There is no reason that we should impose on ourselves the legal and moral problems arising from the prospects of indefinite detentions at Guantanamo.

Working through civil courts since 9/11, hundreds of individuals have been convicted of terrorism or terrorism-related offenses and are now serving long sentences in Federal prison. Not one single person has ever escaped custody.

For these reasons, I believe that the time has come to take the actions needed to initiate closure of the detention facility at Guantanamo. I think this amendment sends that strong message.

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

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

The Acting CHAIR. The gentleman from New York is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. NADLER. Mr. Chairman, I rise in support of the Moran-Smith-Nadler amendment.

We are told by some in the majority that enemy soldiers should not have constitutional rights. But, Mr. Chairman, a majority, concededly, of those at Guantanamo, were never involved in a hostile act against the United States, and 86 percent were turned in for bounties.

We don't know whether these people are enemy soldiers. Some of them may be and some of them are probably not. And we don't know that they are terrorists.

Those facts must be determined in a fair proceeding of some sort, but at Guantanamo there are no proceedings. They haven't managed to hold military trials. And we can't hold civilian trials there.

So we are holding people for no purpose, with no proceedings, no hearings, no opportunity, for essentially forever.

The time to close Guantanamo is now. Guantanamo is a stain on our national honor. Never mind all the foreign policy reasons why it is poisoning our relations with foreign countries and instigating terrorism against it. The fact is, it is wrong.

We are holding 154 people at Guantanamo, 77 of whom have been cleared for release. That is to say, they have been found guilty of nothing, are thought to be guilty of nothing, and have been judged not to pose any danger. Nonetheless, they are not released.

There is no reason and there is no right for us to hold them further. The others should be brought to the United States and tried for their offenses.

Mr. Chairman, I wonder which of our colleagues does not believe in the American system of justice. I wonder which one of us does not trust our own American courts. I wonder who among us does not believe in the Bill of Rights, who does not believe in the right to counsel or that people should have an opportunity to have their guilt or innocence established in court.

What we have at Guantanamo is a system that is an affront to those beliefs and to the United States.

In the last decade, we have begun to let go of our freedoms bit by bit with each new executive order, each new court decision, and yes, each new act of Congress. We have begun giving away our rights to privacy, our right to our day in court when the government harms us, and with this legislation we are continuing down the path of destroying the right to be free from imprisonment without due process of law.

Indeed, I wonder if some of the people in Guantanamo broke out of jail, inflicted injuries on American personnel in so doing, and were caught, how we would defend ourselves when they said, We were just victims of kidnapping. The United States Government kidnapped us, with no claim of right. We had every right to use force to escape an illegal kidnapping by a government acting, essentially, under no law.

I want to commend the gentleman from Virginia and the gentleman from Washington for fighting to close the detention facility at Guantanamo.

The language in this bill, without our amendment, prohibits moving any detainees into the United States and guarantees that we will continue holding people indefinitely—people who may not be terrorists, some of whom we may suspect to be terrorists, none

of whom have had a day in court to prove they are or are not terrorists. We will continue to hold them indefinitely without charge, contrary to every tradition this country stands for, contrary to any notion of due process.

Because of this momentous challenge to the founding principles of the United States that no person may be deprived of liberty without due process of law—and certainly may not be deprived of liberty indefinitely without due process of law—we must close the detention facility at Guantanamo now in order to restore our national honor. This will afford the detainees no additional constitutional rights. The Supreme Court has already ruled detainees at Guantanamo have the same constitutional rights as they would if they were brought here.

We must close this facility, try these people or let them go, and restore our national honor. Support this amendment.

I yield back the balance of my time.

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

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

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Chair, I have listened over the years to my good friend from Virginia, my friend from New York, and Mr. SMITH from Washington advance this issue. I think maybe now is the time for us to address this, if only as a going-away present. Because this is the last time Mr. MORAN is going to be able to offer this. Since he has decided to leave us for greener pastures someplace else, I think it would be fitting for us to address this directly.

□ 1630

I have great respect for my dear friend from the State of Texas who talks about what the people he represents feel about this issue; and I, with all due respect, wonder if the conversations with his constituents in Texas were like the conversations I have with my constituents in Oregon, if people knew that we are spending eight times as much to incarcerate these people as if they were in other Federal facilities.

The gentleman from Virginia talks about the space that is available now in terms of Federal facilities. Do people know that we have convicted hundreds of people suspected of terrorists acts and, under the provisions of the military tribunal, none? What do our constituents really want if they knew that fact?

The sad truth is that Americans are at greater risk because of our reckless behavior failing to close this sad chapter. The vast majority of these people probably don't pose a risk, and they certainly wouldn't pose a risk incarcerated in our maximum security facilities in the United States.

It is time to close this facility, to honor the rule of law. It strengthens our position internationally, it saves

money, and it allows us to actually get some of these people who may be bad guys actually convicted.

Military tribunal doesn't work. Our courts do.

I hope that we will step up, do the right thing, approve this amendment, and give Mr. MORAN a going-away present as he leaves Congress.

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

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

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

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Chairman, I demand a recorded vote.

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

The Clerk will read.

The Clerk read as follows:

SEC. 412. None of the funds made available in this Act may be used to execute a contract for goods or services, including construction services, where the contractor has not complied with Executive Order No. 12989.

SEC. 413. None of the funds made available by this Act may be used to enter into a contract, memorandum of understanding, or cooperative agreement with, make a grant to, or provide a loan or loan guarantee to, any corporation that was convicted of a felony criminal violation under any Federal law within the preceding 24 months, where the awarding agency is aware of the conviction, unless the agency has considered suspension or debarment of the corporation and has made a determination that this further action is not necessary to protect the interests of the Government.

SEC. 414. None of the funds made available by this Act may be used to enter into a contract, memorandum of understanding, or cooperative agreement with, make a grant to, or provide a loan or loan guarantee to, any corporation that has any unpaid Federal tax liability that has been assessed, for which all judicial and administrative remedies have been exhausted or have lapsed, and that is not being paid in a timely manner pursuant to an agreement with the authority responsible for collecting the tax liability, where the awarding agency is aware of the unpaid tax liability, unless the agency has considered suspension or debarment of the corporation and has made a determination that this further action is not necessary to protect the interests of the Government.

SEC. 415. None of the funds made available by this Act may be used by the Department of Defense or the Department of Veterans Affairs to lease or purchase new light duty vehicles for any executive fleet, or for an agency's fleet inventory, except in accordance with Presidential Memorandum—Federal Fleet Performance, dated May 24, 2011.

SPENDING REDUCTION ACCOUNT

SEC. 416. The amount by which the applicable allocation of new budget authority made by the Committee on Appropriations of the House of Representatives under section 302(b) of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974 exceeds the amount of proposed new budget authority is \$0.

AMENDMENT NO. 1 OFFERED BY MR. ROTHFUS

Mr. ROTHFUS. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk printed as No. 1 in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will designate the amendment.

The text of the amendment is as follows:

At the end of the bill (before the short title), insert the following:

SEC. ____ None of the funds made available by this Act may be used by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to pay a performance award under section 5384 of title 5, United States Code.

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

Mr. ROTHFUS. Mr. Chairman, I rise today to stand with our Nation's veterans and their families.

This morning, I had an opportunity to honor and thank Sergeant George Thursby. Sergeant Thursby served in the Army Air Force during World War II and was held as a prisoner of war.

Today, decades after his release, he finally received his long-overdue recognition. You should have heard the rapturous applause he received from the families, servicemembers, and citizens.

We owe veterans like Sergeant Thursby a debt of gratitude that can never be repaid. That is why I rise in strong support of the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Act under consideration today. It is also why this amendment I am offering today is so important.

As public servants, employees of the VA have a solemn obligation to ensure that veterans receive the respect, support, and care they have earned and rightly expect.

Unfortunately, the VA has failed veterans in western Pennsylvania and across the country. At least six veterans contracted Legionnaires' disease and died because of mismanagement, mistakes, and systemic failures at the Pittsburgh VA.

William Nicklas, one of these veterans, was a loving husband, father, and grandfather. Nicklas was known for his practical jokes, his love of sports, and being the first and last person on the dance floor.

He started an auto body shop when he returned to civilian life and helped two of his sons begin their own business as contractors. More than anything, he was uncommonly dedicated to his family, his fellow servicemembers, veterans, and his country.

A proud and loyal veteran from Hampton Township in Pennsylvania's 12th District, Mr. Nicklas was a tail gunner in the Navy air-sea rescue force during World War II. Mr. Nicklas survived Guam, Saipan, and Okinawa, but fell victim to Legionnaires' disease in Pittsburgh.

Over the last year, I have worked with my colleagues to find answers and demand accountability for the families of Bill Nicklas, John Ciarolla, Clark Compston, John McChesney, Lloyd Wanstreet, and Frank "Sonny" Calcagno.

John Ciarolla, the first of these veterans to fall to Legionnaires' disease,

died in July 2011. Bill Nicklas, the last, died in November 2012. It has been almost 1½ years since Mr. Nicklas died and almost 3 years since Mr. Ciarolla died.

Where is the accountability? Where is the transparency?

My colleagues and I have asked VA Secretary Shinseki and Under Secretary for Health Petzel what actions they will take to hold accountable those responsible for these deaths. Officials at the VA owe the families answers, but they have provided none.

Even more outrageous, the regional director responsible for leading the Pittsburgh VA at the time of these deaths—he is now retired—was awarded and accepted the government's highest award for civil servants and a \$63,000 bonus only 3 days after the inspector general found that systemic failures resulted in these deaths.

Across the Nation, the VA has demonstrated a widespread and systemic lack of accountability, according to a recent investigation by the Veterans' Affairs Committee. This has manifested itself in not just infectious disease outbreaks and preventable deaths, but also in wasteful spending and backlogged disability claims.

I thank the Veterans' Affairs Committee and Chairman JEFF MILLER for their tremendous work fighting for our Nation's veterans and promoting accountability and transparency at the VA.

Paying bonuses to senior executives of an organization with an abysmal performance record is ridiculous; yet the VA gave its senior executives bonuses totaling \$2.8 million in 2011 and \$2.3 million in 2012. These valuable resources should be used to ensure that our veterans receive the first-rate service and care they rightly deserve.

VA executives need to take responsibility, fix the problems, and do their jobs. Last year, I offered an amendment directing that none of the funds appropriated may be used to pay for senior executive bonuses. The amendment was adopted by voice vote and was included in last year's MilCon-VA bill, which passed the House by a vote of 421-4.

The Senate did not consider a MilCon bill last year, and the measure was not included in the omnibus. Unfortunately, 1 year has passed, and this measure is still needed.

I thank Chairman MILLER and Congressmen GOSAR, OLSON, BENISHEK, MCKINLEY, TIPTON, HUELKAMP, CRAWFORD, KELLY, LANCE, COLLINS, LAMALFA, GOODLATTE, and MEADOWS for their support of our Nation's veterans and this amendment.

I urge my other colleagues to stand with our Nation's veterans and support increased transparency and accountability at the VA by voting "yea" on this amendment.

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

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

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

Mr. CULBERSON. Mr. Chairman, I rise in support of this amendment. Many Members have also requested language that would ban performance bonuses for senior-level executives at the VA in response to the concerns Mr. ROTHFUS has just mentioned.

I join him in grieving for those veterans who lost their lives as a result of the Legionnaires' disease outbreak. My heart goes out to them and their families.

The authorizing committees have, indeed, as Mr. ROTHFUS says, taken action on this issue. The GI Bill Tuition Fairness Act of 2013 that passed in February contains a 5-year ban on performance bonuses for VA Senior Executive Service employees.

In February, the Chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee introduced legislation that would give the VA Secretary complete authority to fire or demote Veterans Affairs senior executive employees based on performance. That is a sorely needed performance tool that the VA Secretary, I know, will use.

Mr. Chairman, we have also included language in our report reiterating that the Secretary of the VA already has all the authority they need to reward employees for good performance and withhold rewards for poor performance, just like the private sector.

That is a question I specifically asked during our hearing with the VA Secretary, and we have established that from the Secretary's own testimony, reaffirmed that in our bill itself.

The Secretary demonstrated his commitment to linking awards to performance when he withheld awards for everyone in the Veterans Benefit Administration last year because the claims backlog targets have not been met.

This is, I believe, an important amendment. I support it and urge the Members of the House to support it to send a clear signal to the VA that the Members of the United States Congress are unhappy with their performance, and they need to step it up.

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

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

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

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Mr. Chairman, we are all outraged in regards to the claims backlog and the incidences of poor quality health services and safety. The current claims backlog is, indeed, unacceptable.

There is no question that the VA has struggled to successfully deliver one of its key missions: to provide timely ratings of disability. However, the VA has reduced the backlog by 44 percent. Should we ignore that?

It is also clear that some VA health facilities have had serious issues that put the health, safety, and well-being of our veterans at risk. This too is unacceptable. Where have these failures occurred?

It is hard to imagine how the VA leaders of these facilities could have received high performance ratings and substantial bonuses.

However, this amendment will not provide any solution in the short term and, in fact, may have the long-term consequences and compound the very problems that it attempts to address.

This amendment would make the VA a less attractive option than other agencies when it comes to recruiting and retaining quality executive leaders, and it will not have the very talent it needs to solve the problems it faces today, like the claims backlog and the health care deficiencies.

Furthermore, SES pay and bonuses are governed by title 5 of the United States Code and administered by the Office of Personnel Management. Any change to title 5 to address the VA would then also apply to all other Federal agencies.

Attempting an across-the-board, one-size-fits-all fix will penalize those who are dedicated VA executives who are working hard and doing a good job to find solutions to the VA problems.

I urge all Members to vote "no" on this amendment. We are throwing out the baby with the bathwater. This is not a good amendment, and I urge this House to defeat it.

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

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

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

Mr. GOSAR. Mr. Chairman, I rise in support of this amendment.

I would first like to thank the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. ROTHFUS) for offering this amendment. Our offices have worked closely on this issue.

To reiterate, this amendment to the Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act is a simple one. Senior leadership at the VA has repeatedly failed the very veterans they are meant to support.

Initial responses for benefit claims hover close to a year in many cases, with appeals responses taking significantly longer. In too many instances, these matters even require Congressional intervention.

My staff, though happy to do so, has far too many cases open on behalf of the veterans trying to receive their earned benefits with the Veterans Administration.

With so many of our veterans being let down by their government, those in charge of the administration of benefits should not be rewarded. This should be common sense.

I would also like to take a quick moment to thank Congressman JEFF MILLER, chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, for introducing similar legislation that would allow the Secretary of the VA to fire senior executives or cut their pay for lack of performance.

There are many Members on both sides of the aisle interested in shaking things up at the VA. I suggest we start here today by adopting these relevant amendments that will hold these government employees accountable.

Again, I urge passage of this amendment.

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

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

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

Mr. BENISHEK. Mr. Chairman, I rise in support of the amendment introduced by my friend, Mr. ROTHFUS, to deny bonuses to members of the VA Senior Executive Service.

Bonuses are paid for a job well done, but at the VA, the job is very clearly not getting done. The tragic story out of Phoenix is only the latest example.

□ 1645

As a member of the Veterans' Affairs Committee and a doctor who served at the Iron Mountain VA for 20 years, I have watched in disgust as the stories keep rolling in. Pittsburgh; Atlanta; Memphis; Colombia, South Carolina; and Augusta, Georgia, have all seen preventable veteran deaths linked to severe mismanagement. Make no mistake, these are not isolated incidents. This is a national crisis, and it must be treated with the significance it deserves.

We can keep dragging VA leaders in front of the committee, but I, for one, am sick and tired of hearing their excuses. We are well past the time when explanations and apologies would be enough. It is time to hold the people that have repeatedly and egregiously failed our veterans accountable for their actions.

This amendment is a good, common-sense first step, and I am proud to support it. However, it alone is not enough. The problem goes deeper than the Senior Executive Service, and our veterans are demanding real accountability. That is why I have introduced the Demanding Accountability for Veterans Act, to provide a permanent solution to getting the VA to provide the care our veterans need. I am pleased this bill was passed unanimously by the VA Committee, and I look forward to its consideration on the floor. We can't wait any longer to make the essential changes to the VA that our veterans deserve.

I yield back the balance of my time. Mr. MORAN. I move to strike the last word.

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

Mr. MORAN. Mr. Chairman, the amendment before us reflects the concerns that Congress has had over senior executives at the Department of Veterans Affairs receiving performance bonuses when VA hospital standards were not up to par and when we continue to see a backlog of disability claims.

I share those concerns that VA truly does need to tackle. But recent actions taken by this Congress through the good work of the MilCon Appropriations Subcommittee and the Veterans Administration have, in fact, improved the operational efficiency of those hospitals and reduced the backlog.

The VA has also instituted much greater transparency in the process of awarding bonuses for its Senior Executive Service. In fact, VA has centralized senior executive award decisions. They have added an additional level of review in consideration of those awards. And the VA has significantly reduced the value of those awards compared to prior years. Most importantly, the Secretary has already demonstrated his willingness to use the bonus system as a way to reward and penalize staff based on their performance. As it stands, the Secretary has all the authority he needs to use bonuses to influence performance.

I think this amendment is something of a political ploy, Mr. Chairman. It is designed to misdirect our frustrations to the good men and women who have chosen to serve their government in the civilian workforce. I take serious issue with this very popular practice of continuing to punish a workforce that is predominantly composed of hard-working Federal servants that have already suffered a disproportionate amount.

If we want to retain the individuals that make up what is, in fact, the best large Federal civil service in the world, we need to change this culture very quickly. After 3 years of pay freezes, pension cuts, pay cuts, and furloughs, our Senior Executive Service, which is largely composed of the best of the best in the Federal workforce, has, at the very least, earned these bonuses.

The Congressional Budget Office has confirmed that Federal employees in highly skilled professions could be earning much more in the private sector. Why do they choose public service? Not for monetary gain but for love of country and the opportunity to make people's lives better, particularly our veterans. But they have families to feed and mortgages to pay and children to send to college. Where does it end?

No matter how many times this House majority says the government can't solve problems, can't create jobs, can't help the American people, it will never be the case. The fact is this government does help the American people. We should be proud of our government, not punish our civil servants. And the fact is that you can find far more veterans who are appreciative of the good work that the people in the Veterans Administration do than those who disparage it.

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

Mr. LAMALFA. I move to strike the last word.

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

Mr. LAMALFA. Mr. Chairman, I rise today as a cosponsor of the amendment offered by my friend from Pennsylvania (Mr. ROTHFUS). I appreciate his effort on that.

It is hard to believe what I am here hearing in here today. When you look at the backlog, when you look at how veterans are being treated in this country, in northern California, it is amazing that we are on complete different wavelengths here.

The lack of accountability and transparency within the VA is nothing short of shameful. Yet again and again I have heard from many veterans in the north State concerned about the timeliness and the frustrating claims process at VA facilities in California, namely, the Oakland office, which is one of the slowest regional offices in the Nation. Despite past promises from the VA to improve the backlog, service to our veterans has continued to deteriorate. This negligence and mismanagement is completely unacceptable.

When veterans are being denied access to the care and services they rightly deserve and expect, reform is necessary, certainly not bonuses to senior executives. When a program funded by taxpayers is failing to provide the level of services expected, accountability, not compensation, should be demanded.

Rewarding incompetency not only exacerbates the most pressing issues within the VA, but also serves as an insult to the men and women who have given so much for our country, as well as the very many good caseworkers on the VA staff who see no bonus but yet still try to do their jobs underneath that regime.

This amendment is about fairness and doing what is right by fulfilling the promise to our veterans. It ensures our veterans receive the benefits and services they were promised and restores accountability within the VA to make certain taxpayer money is rightfully spent, fixing the backlog and incompetency that is harming our veterans' health and insulting them, as well as the American taxpayer.

This amendment isn't about throwing the baby out with the bathwater. This is about throwing the bonuses out with the bathwater.

I applaud Congressman ROTHFUS for his leadership in standing up for our Nation's veterans. I urge my colleagues to support this important measure.

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

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

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

Mr. HUELSKAMP. Mr. Chairman, I am glad to join my colleague from Pennsylvania in cosponsoring this important amendment. But I must admit, it is regrettable—actually, no. It is actually shameful we actually have to be here today discussing this topic.

As a member of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, I have heard over

and over and over again stories of abuse, neglect, and mismanagement within the VA, but the one thing I never hear about is accountability. In fact, under the leadership of the current Secretary, a Senior Executive Service employee who has presided over mismanagement at the VA is more likely to receive a sizable bonus than to be disciplined or fired.

This culture of anything goes has got to stop, and the best way to stop this is to send a strong signal across the Department of VA that Congress means business. It is obvious from the headlines about the sizable bonuses received by VA administrators at facilities in Georgia, South Carolina, Pittsburgh, and Phoenix that the performance award system at the VA is a failure.

I have asked the VA in congressional hearing after hearing after hearing for a specific list of disciplinary actions that the Department has imposed on employees and executives who have presided over these delays and preventable veteran deaths. Instead of giving answers, they have only pointed to retirements, transfers, or bureaucratic slaps on the wrist, but not a single undeserved performance bonus has been returned to the taxpayers. These smokescreen attempts to create the appearance of accountability are unacceptable.

Unfortunately, the story last week from Phoenix is not an isolated event. Just 3 weeks ago, in our committee, the VA admitted to another 23 preventable deaths occurring within their facilities. The senior VA bureaucrats responsible for the management of the facilities consistently received sizable bonuses from hardworking taxpayers. These administrators have been given a sacred trust to care for and serve our Nation's veterans. And, quite frankly, Mr. Chairman, they have broken that trust; and it's time for accountability.

For these reasons, I urge my colleagues to support this amendment, to defund these VA bonuses, and to return some accountability to the VA.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. COLLINS of Georgia. Mr. Chairman, I move to strike the last word.

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

Mr. COLLINS of Georgia. Mr. Chairman, I rise today to appeal to those on both sides of the aisle to hold the executives in the Department of Veterans Affairs accountable.

I think what has been interesting in what we have heard a little bit is really a tale of not the two cities, as Dickens would have it, but a tale of two opinions. And one opinion is the preponderance of evidence we see in our district offices and our Washington offices of problems in the VA; and then on the other side, it is basically a, yes, it is bad, but let's still do business the same way. And I think that is where the American people get frustrated.

I believe by now, everyone is already aware of the lapse in ethical and moral judgment in many of these areas, from

Atlanta and South Carolina, others, but also at the Phoenix veterans hospital. You know, the decision there to cook the books that denied care to needy veterans is simply unconscionable. That fact alone should anger every Member of this body, and it certainly angers the 62,000 veterans and their family members in the Ninth District of Georgia.

Sadly, though, it doesn't end there. One has to question our civil service compensation system. The executive at the Phoenix VA facility there received a \$170,000 salary plus \$9,000 in bonuses. For what? Saving taxpayer money? Mr. Chairman, \$9,000 is unbelievable. We rewarded an executive who, in reality, was failing our fellow Americans.

As a member of the United States Air Force Reserve, we instill in our members the universal core value of "integrity first." In the case of the hospitals in the VA system, some put getting accolades over integrity. This angers me, and I will not tolerate this kind of behavior in our government.

The vast majority of Americans and the vast majority of the VA employees work sacrificially and for their fellow Americans—the vast number of them. Except for a select few, those at the Veterans Administration have answered a call to provide care and compensation to those that gave the most of themselves and for our country. To them, I want to pass along a sincere thank-you. It is disheartening that your reputation could be tarnished by association of the few at the top of your organization.

This scandal is really two problems: One is the outrageous use of secret lists to manage care so a few could thicken their wallets; the other is how we awarded bonuses to senior executives. These individuals wouldn't have received bonuses if we had known the metrics on patient appointments were exaggerated. They apparently didn't think of the consequences of their actions. And I would like to think the issue was isolated to certain areas, but my fear is that this may be a systematic problem, a problem that needs to be corrected immediately.

I want to applaud Chairman MILLER's efforts to investigate the potential secret lists at all VA hospitals.

Honorably discharged veterans don't earn the label "honorably" by doing what is right some of the time; they earn it by doing what is right all the time. Should we allow the hospital administrators to receive bonuses for doing what is right only some of the time?

We have an opportunity here to demonstrate that the U.S. Congress is good stewards of taxpayer money, and unethical and un-American behavior in our government will not be condoned. On behalf of the veterans that I proudly represent, I support the chairman's investigation, I support Mr. ROTHFUS' amendment, and I support the underlying appropriations measure here so that these things will not happen again.

In looking at this, it was stated just a few moments ago on the floor, it was insinuated on this floor that this was a political ploy. I don't think it is a political ploy to do what is right. I don't think it is a political ploy to take care of those who took care of us. And if that is where this debate has really taken center on—and I will say for a fact, as I said just a moment ago, that the vast majority of VA employees do a great job with what they are working with, but they are being betrayed at the top, and it is not time to award these kinds of behaviors with taxpayer dollars.

This is what we are here for, not a political ploy, but to do what the Congress is supposed to do, and that is to keep our money going where it is supposed to go in order to provide the benefits that these veterans deserve.

With that, I will support the amendment, I support the underlying bill, and I yield back the balance of my time.

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

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

Mr. STIVERS. Mr. Chairman, I rise in support of the Rothfus amendment, of which I am a cosponsor.

I want to thank Representative ROTHFUS for his leadership on this issue. I also want to recognize the chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee for his leadership on legislation to ensure that no member of the Senior Executive Service can abuse their power and, in fact, that they will be held accountable and promoted and fired based on performance.

Unfortunately, our Veterans Affairs has failed to take appropriate action to increase transparency and hold Senior Executive Service employees accountable for their actions and their performance. Recent critical reports by the VA inspector general and the GAO have shown that some VA executives have continued to receive praise in their performance reviews and collected generous cash bonuses up to \$63,000. Let me be clear, though. Most VA employees are hardworking, dedicated public servants, but there are a few at the top who need to be held accountable.

□ 1700

The Veterans Affairs Department began the month of April proudly proclaiming success in reducing the stubborn backlog of disability claims, however, they improved that number by denying incomplete claims and creating a huge appeals backlog. The backlog is causing our veterans to be denied disability compensation and access to health care, and we shouldn't allow these executives to take bonuses for false success. The VA is clearly not fulfilling its commitment to our veterans.

This amendment is simple. It ensures that senior VA officials are held accountable for their performance and

cannot be rewarded for false performance.

In addition to our backlog problem, Congress passed in 2012 in the consolidated appropriations an amendment that required the VA to share prescription information with State Prescription Drug Monitoring Programs. As many of my colleagues know, our veteran population is facing a huge epidemic of opioid addiction, and it is leading to a high number of our veterans committing suicide and overdosing.

The VA finalized the rule in April, but it has not been fully implemented to share information with these Prescription Drug Monitoring Programs. We can't wait any longer for this program. Participation in Prescription Drug Monitoring Programs will ensure that our VA hospitals, civilian hospitals, and doctors no longer overprescribe opioids to our veterans. Not having this rule fully implemented and in use by our States is just another reason to prohibit performance benefits for our senior VA officials.

I urge all Members to support this amendment and the entire Milcon-VA Appropriations bill, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Chair, I rise today in support of Mr. ROTHFUS' amendment to restrict funds from being used to pay for bonuses for all employees of the Senior Executive Service at the Department of Veterans Affairs.

This amendment is consistent with Section 11 of my legislation, H.R. 357, which passed the House earlier this year by a vote of 390-0. My bill would require a five year moratorium on bonuses for SES employees and I am glad to see that this amendment satisfies the intention of the first year of my legislation for FY 2015.

Mr. Chair, over the past three years the Veterans' Committee has uncovered, and continues to uncover, numerous instances of gross negligence and incompetence by senior VA officials. Regrettably, some of these instances have resulted in preventable deaths, yet senior VA officials have continued to receive performance awards.

The most recent stories from whistleblowers in Phoenix allege that over 40 veterans could have died due to delays in consult times and alleged secret wait lists. Yet the director received a bonus in 2013 of more than \$9000.

If these allegations are proven to be true, it only further shows what we have seen in other locations that when a senior executive fails they are more likely to receive a bonus than any type of meaningful punishment.

It is well past time for VA leaders to realize that rewarding failure only breeds more failure, and that is why I believe this amendment and my legislation to end all bonuses for senior executives at VA is not only necessary, it is what our veterans and their families deserve.

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

The amendment was agreed to.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. MURPHY OF FLORIDA

Mr. MURPHY of Florida. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will designate the amendment.

The text of the amendment is as follows:

At the end of the bill (before the short title), insert the following new section:

SEC. ____ . None of the funds made available by this Act may be used to maintain or improve Department of Defense real property with a zero percent utilization rate according to the Department's real property inventory database, except in the case of maintenance of an historic property as required by the National Historic Preservation Act (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.) or in the case of maintenance to prevent a negative environmental impact as required by the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.).

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

Mr. MURPHY of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to offer an amendment to the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations bill that would eliminate wasteful spending on unused facilities, which would save tens of millions of dollars for fiscal year 2015 alone.

The Defense Department has hundreds, possibly thousands, of buildings and structures that it has rated at zero percent utilization. This is an incredible number of useless facilities the DOD is paying to maintain.

Federal agencies, as a whole, must do a better job at managing their facilities. Taxpayers cannot continue paying for unused and underused buildings while the Nation is at record debt levels. That is not good government, and that is not smart spending.

That is why I joined with Representatives DAVID JOYCE of Ohio and MIKE COFFMAN of Colorado to introduce the SAVE Act to root out about \$230 billion in wasteful and duplicative government spending over the next 10 years. This amendment is an extension of one of those commonsense solutions included in the bipartisan SAVE Act preventing the Department of Defense from spending money on facilities that the Department itself has rated at zero percent utilization.

I offered the same amendment last year, which this Chamber accepted by voice vote, and I ask for your same support today.

I understand the Department of Defense may be concerned that this amendment would prevent them from carrying out BRAC work. I believe BRAC is an essential process, and I have no intention of disrupting it. After investigating the Department's concerns, my understanding is that no additional BRAC work will happen before 2017 at the earliest, long after this appropriations bill has expired. Any ongoing environmental remediation from previous BRACs is exempted from my amendment, which gives the Department the flexibility to properly address any environmental threats at unused facilities, as well as maintain historic military sites.

With that said, I would welcome the opportunity to work with the com-

mittee to address any BRAC-related issues in conference.

Mr. Chairman, we all agree that we must rein in wasteful government spending. My amendment is a commonsense solution to do just that, and I urge my colleagues to support this amendment.

I yield back the balance of my time.

The Acting CHAIR. Is there further discussion on the amendment? Seeing none, the question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MURPHY).

The amendment was agreed to.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. ROSS

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

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

At the end of the bill (before the short title), insert the following:

SEC. ____ . None of the funds made available by this Act may be used by the Secretary of Defense to close a commissary store.

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

Mr. ROSS. Mr. Chairman, I rise today to offer an important amendment to this year's Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations bill.

My amendment would protect access to commissaries for our Active Duty servicemembers, our veterans, and their families. As a representative of a community with such a strong military presence, I have had the honor to be advised by a number of active veterans and military leaders. The requests have always been consistent. We must not balance our Nation's fiscal problems on the backs of our veterans and Active Duty personnel.

Unfortunately, the Secretary of Defense released his fiscal year 2015 budget request for the Department of Defense, which included the proposed closure of commissaries. Just last night, I held a town hall meeting, and a retired chief master sergeant, Richard Redhill, voiced his concern over the closure of commissaries. Now, look, there are already attempts out there to gut their health care by way of cutting TRICARE, and there are attempts out there to gut their cost-of-living adjustments. Let's at least leave their commissaries alone. Let us respect the obligations that we owe to those who raised their right hands to give the ultimate sacrifice of their life in the defense of this country.

Our military is the most advanced and well trained the world has ever seen, not just because we are the best in technology and weapons systems, but also because of those men and women who volunteer to stand in defense of their country.

I want to thank Chairman CULBERSON and Ranking Member BISHOP for their hard work on this important funding measure and hope that my colleagues will join me in adopting this important amendment.

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

The Acting CHAIR. Is there further discussion on the amendment? Seeing none, the question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Florida (Mr. ROSS).

The amendment was agreed to.

AMENDMENT NO. 3 OFFERED BY MR. TAKANO

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Chairman, I rise to offer amendment No. 3.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will designate the amendment.

The text of the amendment is as follows:

At the end of the bill (before the short title) insert the following:

SEC. _____. None of the funds appropriated or otherwise made available in this Act for the All-Volunteer Force Educational Assistance Program under chapter 30 of title 38, United States Code, or the Post 9/11 Educational Assistance Program under chapter 33 of such title may be used for career education programs at proprietary institutions unless the successful completion of the curriculum fully qualifies a student—

(1) to take an examination required for entry into an occupation or profession, including satisfying all State-mandated programmatic and specialized accreditation requirements; and

(2) to be certified or licensed or to meet other academically-related pre-conditions of employment in the State in which the institution is located.

Mr. CULBERSON. Mr. Chairman, I reserve a point of order against the amendment.

The Acting CHAIR. A point of order is reserved.

The gentleman from California is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Chairman, career education programs—programs of less than 2 years that are designed to prepare students for direct entry into a specific profession—too often fail our student veterans. Many of these programs at for-profit schools leave our student veterans with unsustainable debt and worthless credentials.

My amendment would ensure that veterans' education benefits are only used for career education programs that qualify students to take an examination required for entry into an occupation or profession or provide them with certificates or licenses that meet State and industry requirements.

I have heard time and time again that a key for successful transition from Active Duty to veteran status is gainful employment. And that is why we must make sure that the education our veterans receive is truly helping them enter the workforce. Again, I urge all my colleagues to support this amendment, and I yield back the balance of my time.

POINT OF ORDER

Mr. CULBERSON. Mr. Chairman, I make a point of order against the amendment because it proposes to change existing law and constitutes legislation in an appropriations bill and therefore violates clause 2 of rule XXI. The rule states in pertinent part, Mr. Chairman, that an amendment to a

general appropriation bill shall not be in order if changing existing law, and the amendment in this case requires a new determination.

I would ask for a ruling from the Chair.

The Acting CHAIR. Does any Member wish to address the point of order? Seeing none, the Chair is prepared to rule.

The Chair finds that this amendment includes language requiring a new determination as to whether curricula at proprietary institutions satisfy various requirements.

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

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

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. BLUMENAUER

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

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

At the end of the bill (before the short title), insert the following:

SEC. _____. None of the funds made available by this Act may be used to implement Veterans Health Administration directive 2011-004 with respect to the prohibition on "VA providers from completing forms seeking recommendations or opinions regarding a Veteran's participation in a State marijuana program."

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

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Chairman, I deeply appreciate the hard work of the committee to make sure that our veterans are properly cared for. They deserve our best.

Too many are returning from Iraq and Afghanistan with obvious wounds—missing limbs. But over 2.3 million are returning suffering from wounds that are not visible. They are suffering from depression and PTSD. That is why we lose 22 veterans per day who take their lives, long since outnumbering the battlefield deaths. They deserve our best.

Over 100 million people reside in the 21 States, including your home State of California, which was the first to legalize medical marijuana. Twenty-one States and the District of Columbia passed laws that provide for legal access to medical marijuana. As a result, as I say, over 1 million people now have access to it, including many of our veterans who use medical marijuana at the recommendation of their physician to treat conditions ranging from seizures, glaucoma, anxiety, chronic pain, and the symptoms associated with chemotherapy. There are also nine States, including my home State of Oregon, that now allow physicians to recommend medical marijuana for the symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder.

I have heard those stories myself. I will enter into the RECORD one story that was in the NBC News on April 1 about marine veteran Logan Edwards, who describes how access to medical marijuana may have saved his life.

'OUT OF OPTIONS': VETERANS WITH PTSD HIT POT UNDERGROUND

(By Bill Briggs)

[From NBC News, Apr. 1, 2014]

Marine veteran Logan Edwards worried he could become one of the 22 former members of the armed services who, on average, commit suicide every day.

Then, he says, he tried marijuana.

Edwards, who served eight months in Iraq, is one of an unknown number of veterans who have turned to marijuana to manage Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, which may afflict as much as 20 percent of veterans from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, according to experts. The Department of Veterans Affairs doesn't let its doctors prescribe weed, so the former service members buy it illegally, fib to their doctors, accept it as a gift, or grow it themselves.

In Edwards' case, he says the drug may have saved his life.

"The first time I used it, I wanted to cry. Because it took away my anxiety. Because it did everything for me that the Oxycontin, benzodiazepines and anti-depressants the VA prescribed me for three years did not do," said Edwards, 26, a resident of Davenport, Iowa. His symptoms—an unrelenting "hypervigilance," insomnia and nightmares—emerged "the moment we walked off the plane" in 2008.

"I can function completely fine all day just by using cannabis. I'm back in school. My attendance is good. My grades are good. My relationships have healed," added the former Marine. "It allowed me to get my life back."

In a March 12 letter, federal health officials approved a long-delayed study to explore if pot relieves PTSD. But doctors employed by the VA are banned from prescribing medical marijuana—and from completing forms that allow veterans to enroll in medical-marijuana programs. While medical weed is legal in 20 states, only eight states recognize PTSD as a qualifying condition for which physicians can write cannabis prescriptions.

"... Due to the way the federal government and the state want to handle this medical marijuana issue, I still am forced to spend time away from family, treating these wounds of war."

Across that tangled post-war legal landscape, thousands of combat veterans are tapping underground sources to buy bootleg marijuana to self-treat PTSD. And in 12 states where the drug is legal but prohibited for PTSD, many are lying to doctors that they need medical weed for allowable conditions like chronic pain, advocates assert. Meantime, vast numbers of other veterans can't find it, can't afford it, abuse alcohol to self-medicate, or rely on conventional VA drugs.

"My brothers are killing themselves because they're out of options," Edwards said. "These VA pharmaceuticals only exacerbate the problem. The listed side effects on (some) of the bottles say: 'Will increase suicidal ideation.' So the suicide rate is really what this comes down to."

U.S. Army veteran Tom Studley, 28, served as a machine gunner in Iraq for 15-months. He returned to civilian life with chronic back pain and was diagnosed with PTSD. Studley was prescribed numerous pharmaceuticals, but he said that by inhaling marijuana with a vaporizer, he's been able to stop using those drugs. Here, Studley stands in the shed where he grows some of the 15 plants he's legally allowed as a medical marijuana patient in Washington state in Nov. 2011.

With marijuana federally classified as a Schedule I controlled substance (like heroin and LSD), VA physicians "will not provide

for use," said Gina Jackson, a VA public affairs officer. At the same time, veterans who participate in legal, medical-marijuana programs "will not be denied access to care for VA clinical programs but should be assessed for misuse, adverse effects, and withdrawal."

The possibility of federal drug monitoring—plus fears of losing VA benefits and the threat of legal trouble—has driven scores of veterans to secretly use marijuana for decades to address their PTSD symptoms, several veterans said.

"Us veterans have already conducted tests on pot and PTSD—and it works!" said Vietnam veteran Bob Walker, 69. "It's nice to see the feds playing catch up."

PTSD expert Dr. Harry Croft, a San Antonio-based psychiatrist who has treated veterans for combat-related anxiety and substance abuse, applauds the federally approved investigation.

"We owe it to our veterans with this condition," Croft said. "Unfortunately, present treatment options are not helpful to many veterans and, therefore, other newer options should be scientifically explored, including medical marijuana."

At Walker's home in Northern California, he ingests pot via a vaporizer each night before bed. A Marine veteran grows that marijuana and supplies it free to Walker and a local network of other Vietnam vets. Diagnosed with PTSD, Walker tried VA-prescribed Xanax and anti-depressants but found he could not function on the pharmaceuticals. About 15 years ago, he said, a VA counselor quietly suggested Walker use cannabis to relieve his insomnia, anxiety, stuttering and cold sweats.

"It solved a big problem for me. You feel, well, lighter," said Walker, a former Army aircraft mechanic who served in Vietnam in 1965 and 1966, watching his best friend die in a chopper crash. "Probably 60 to 70 percent of the vets I know use marijuana for stress reduction and sleep. It's their baseline medication."

"I'm back in school. My attendance is good. My grades are good. My relationships have healed. It allowed me to get my life back."

Near Denver, retired Marine and Iraq veteran Sean Azzariti, 32, sees roughly the same rate of pot use among ex-service members with PTSD. He, too, was diagnosed with the disorder. But in Colorado, PTSD is not a qualifying condition under which private doctors can prescribe cannabis to veterans. So, for four years, Azzariti could not tell his physician the real reason he needed cannabis and instead said the prescription would help treat chronic nausea.

Simply because of that forced ruse, pro-marijuana advocates ensured Azzariti was the first customer in Colorado to buy legal weed on Jan. 1 when the state began allowing anyone 21 and older to purchase pot. He paid \$70 for a strain called Bubba Kush and pot-infused candy truffles.

"If veterans had another avenue (to treat PTSD), most would take that and it would save lives. I wouldn't be talking to you if I didn't have cannabis," said Azzariti, who smokes daily to manage his symptoms. "Veterans have been ignored for 30 years, denied what they truly need to heal. Vietnam veterans could have told us this stuff works."

"That's why I'm open about using it. Sure, there's a chance I'll lose my \$120-a-month (VA) disability benefits. But that's a small sacrifice to save one life and potentially change the world," Azzariti said. "With all of these people coming home from war, (the PTSD and veteran-suicide crises) are only going to get worse. How are we going to treat that? We can't just keep throwing pills at people."

Near Seattle, Iraq veteran Tom Studley, 28, stopped swallowing pharmaceuticals for

his PTSD symptoms four years ago and instead, he said, gained inner peace by smoking, vaporizing and eating marijuana.

"The anxiety begins to go away pretty quick and stays away for a while," said Studley, who served as an Army machine gunner.

After returning, he was prescribed muscle relaxants, Percocet and methadone for chronic back pain plus Trazodone, Celexa and hydroxyzine pamoate for sleep and anxiety. On his property, Studley now grows, harvests and uses cannabis from his 15 marijuana plants—a legal crop in Washington State.

"I feel," he said, "less out of control."

In Iowa, Marine veteran Edwards is taking control—but with a painful plan.

In May, he will move to Colorado, away from his girlfriend and 3-year-old daughter. He's relocating and transferring colleges, he said, for one reason: to legally access medical marijuana to continue managing his PTSD. He's tired of breaking the law.

"I thought my deployment days, being away from my family, ended when I got out of the Marine Corps. But due to the way the federal government and the state want to handle this medical marijuana issue, I still am forced to spend time away from family, treating these wounds of war," Edwards said.

"I never thought I would have to leave the state and community I grew up in to get access to medicine that's working and is better for me than the FDA-approved stuff. I never thought I would end up being a medical refugee."

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Chairman, any of my colleagues, whether they are in the State that has legalized medical marijuana or not, can find examples of veterans who are benefiting from this treatment, yet the Veterans Administration specifically prohibits its medical providers from completing forms brought by their patients seeking recommendations or opinions regarding a veteran's participation in a legal State marijuana program.

The amendment which I am offering today with Representatives FARR, ROHRBACHER, and POLIS is simple. It ensures that no funds be made available to the VA to implement this prohibition. The amendment would not authorize the possession or use of marijuana at VA facilities. It would simply free up VA providers to recommend medical marijuana or to provide advice upon it in accordance with State laws if they choose.

Over 20 percent of those 2.3 million American veterans suffer from PTSD or depression. While there is no single approach to aiding our veterans with PTSD, we should not use an outmoded policy to serve as a roadblock to the path to recovery. We found that there are nearly 1 million veterans who receive opiates to treat chronic painful conditions. More than half of them continue to use it chronically after the treatment regimen.

Another study found that the death rate from opiate overdoses among VA patients is twice the national average. In States where patients can legally access medical marijuana for painful conditions as an alternative, we shouldn't tie the hands of that primary provider or prevent our veterans from talking to their primary care physi-

cians. They should not be forced outside the VA system to seek a simple recommendation or to get information about these conditions or eligible conditions granted to them by State law. Our VA physicians should not be denied the ability to offer recommendations and advice that they think meets the needs of their patients.

□ 1715

This shouldn't be controversial. According to a poll published in the New England Journal of Medicine, over 70 percent of physicians said they would, when appropriate, recommend the use of medical marijuana to their patients.

We all know of people with violent nausea as a result of chemotherapy. Why would you deny that to our veterans or at least being able to discuss it? Physicians who support legalizing medical marijuana nationally have exceeded 70 percent in major national polls.

This amendment simply allows veterans to consult with their primary provider, the same right enjoyed by over 100 million Americans today. I urge you to treat our veterans fairly and approve this amendment.

I yield back the balance of my time. Mr. CULBERSON. Mr. Chairman, I move to strike the last word.

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

Mr. CULBERSON. Mr. Chairman, I rise in opposition to this amendment because, even though I am a strong believer in the 10th Amendment and public health and public safety is reserved to the States under the 10th Amendment, here we are talking about Federal facilities.

Marijuana is prohibited under Federal law. Any Federal facility funded with Federal dollars—I think it is entirely appropriate that it continue to be prohibited on a Federal facility. This is an issue that should be left to the States.

Nothing is prohibiting a veteran from seeking medical attention in a State where this is legal or where medical marijuana is permitted. They can certainly go to a private physician. Frankly, in the States where it is legal, in some of these States, I think they are even working on vending machines for them.

I understand the gentleman's position, but again, these are Federal facilities funded with Federal dollars. It is prohibited under Federal law, and it is an issue best left to the States.

I think we would all do better as a Congress to honor the 10th Amendment and leave those issues involving public health and public safety to the States. We ought to focus on the issues specifically delegated to the Federal Government by the Constitution and leave the vast majority of issues in the hands of voters, their local elected officials, and State officials. This is certainly one of them.

When it comes to a federally-funded facility, I think it is appropriate that

the VA has a policy against their doctors prescribing or recommending the use of a substance that is prohibited under Federal law. If they need it, they can go to States where it is permitted. I urge Members to oppose the amendment.

I yield back the balance of my time.

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

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

Mr. FARR. Mr. Chairman, I couldn't disagree more with my respected chairman. This is really a medical issue that ought to be in the hands of medical doctors. It does not allow them to prescribe marijuana. They can prescribe Oxycontin.

What this amendment does, it says if your State has legalized for medical purposes, as a doctor in a VA facility, you can have a discussion with a vet seeking medical advice on whether you ought to have access to—he can't write out the prescription, he doesn't have authority to do that. It is a conversation. It is a discussion. It is a medical conversation.

I don't care whether you are for or against marijuana. That is not the issue here. The issue is—and Mr. Chairman, you know this issue from Eric Seastrand in our California State Legislature who happened to be a Republican assemblyman dying of cancer, he got up and made the most impassioned plea I have ever heard in my life on a legislative floor, saying members—and he was a pretty conservative guy. He said: you know, when you are dying, don't deny us access to hope.

The issue was about getting access to a prescription drug that hadn't yet been licensed. So I think we are in this debate now in this country whether we like it or not. The voters of California overwhelmingly passed—and I think it is pretty much a senior citizen issue—that if we are having chronic pain and if we think medical marijuana can help alleviate that pain, don't deny us access to it.

All this amendment says is that if you are in a VA clinic and you want to have a discussion with your doctor about relieving pain or other things, you can have that conversation.

As a medical adviser, I think they want to have that authority. They can't do it in every State, they can't do it in every VA building, only in those States where the dialogue is going to be on the streets anyway; but they are not going to be professional dialogues unless you allow doctors to do this.

This is a very simple amendment. Let doctors be doctors. Let them advise patients accordingly. Pass this amendment, regardless of how you feel about marijuana.

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Will the gentleman yield?

Mr. FARR. I yield to the gentleman.

Mr. BLUMENAUER. I listened to my good friend from Texas. I am troubled here. Why would we force veterans who

are entitled to veterans' health and have a primary physician that meets their needs say, sorry, you don't get it in this case, go out on your own nickel, go out and find a new doctor?

We are not talking about prescribing it. We are not talking about using it on Federal facilities. We are talking about giving access to information and having that conversation.

I dare say there is no other medical condition, if it were polio or cancer, that you would say: nope, go someplace else. Go on your own dime. Find somebody—build a relationship with someone who doesn't know your history, who hasn't seen you regularly. You are out of here.

I think that is a disservice to our veterans. I don't think it is anything that—if you talk to veterans' groups, if you talk to the people who benefit from it, that they think that they ought to be denied the ability to consult with their trusted medical provider.

Mr. CULBERSON. Will the gentleman yield?

Mr. FARR. I yield to the gentleman from Texas.

Mr. CULBERSON. Very quickly, we are talking about those States where it is already permitted—either medical marijuana is in Colorado, and I think Washington State has already permitted it.

It is a 10th Amendment issue. It is something that is left up to the States, but we are talking about federally-funded facilities, and that is the concern here, in a federally-funded facility, where it is illegal under Federal law, that is the problem.

Mr. FARR. No, it isn't.

Mr. CULBERSON. This is a federally-funded facility.

Mr. FARR. Yes. And so you are going to have the doctor say: I am sorry, you are in a Federal facility. I can't talk to you about a prescription of medical marijuana, even though you have asked the question. I can answer your question about abortions. I can answer your question about Oxycontin. I can answer your question about alcohol. I can talk about any other kind of evil that may be in your mind or benefit that may be in your mind, but I am prohibited by Federal law because I am a doctor in this State working for the Veterans Administration, from having a conversation with you about medical marijuana.

That just doesn't make sense. It is not good medical practice.

Mr. CULBERSON. Because it is prohibited by Federal law.

Mr. FARR. Because it is prohibited by Federal law and I happen to be in a State where Federal law ignores this because law enforcement, medical folks, it is part of our system. We have worked out the regulations.

You don't see the Feds coming in and busting clinics in California or people using medical marijuana. You would be busting a lot of senior citizens. Look, we have a hypocrisy in the law. That is

what this amendment is trying to clear up. I ask for an "aye" vote.

I yield back the balance of my time.

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

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

Mr. PERLMUTTER. To my friends from Texas and Oregon, I would say to the gentleman from Texas: you are absolutely right, it is against Federal law, and that is something that we as a legislature need to look at very closely.

We are dealing with issues right now in Colorado where we have legalized the use of marijuana. In respect to certain banking laws, there may be a question of whether banks can provide financial services to marijuana businesses, and as a consequence, cash is building up.

So you may be absolutely right, I say to my friend from Texas; but the gentleman from Oregon does, as does the gentleman from California, state a valid case from a medical point of view. I would just say that I had a brother-in-law who had melanoma, and the only thing that gave him any relief was marijuana.

Now, subsequently, he has passed away, but from a medical standpoint, there ought to be an opportunity for a doctor to consult with a patient to prescribe something that gives that kind of relief.

So you are correct, Mr. Chairman, but I think we need to really take a good look at this. In Colorado, we see a lot of people coming to Colorado to help treat epilepsy because marijuana may have some positive effects on epilepsy. We need to take a look at that in a whole variety of ways.

Mr. CULBERSON. Will the gentleman yield?

Mr. PERLMUTTER. I yield to the gentleman from Texas.

Mr. CULBERSON. That is absolutely a valid issue for the States to take up. We should all honor the 10th Amendment. The Constitution delegates limited powers to the Congress. If it crosses State lines, interstate commerce, that is a valid Federal concern. If it is using Federal dollars, that is a valid Federal concern.

But that debate, you are exactly right, should be held at the State level. When it comes to police powers, public health, public safety, that is reserved to the States under the 10th Amendment, and I would absolutely agree; but in a Federal facility, that is different.

That is using Federal dollars to talk about a substance that is prohibited under Federal law. I have a problem with that.

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

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

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

Mr. ROHRBACHER. Mr. Chairman, I am very happy to hear my good friend from Texas supporting the other legislation that we have that leaves it up to the States to make sure that they can declare marijuana legal or illegal. I am very happy to have you on board.

I rise in strong support today, however, of the Blumenauer-Farr-Rohrabacher-Polis amendment to the MilCon-VA Appropriations bill, which would essentially remove an unreasonable barrier that prevents VA physicians from recommending that our veterans have the benefit of State medical marijuana programs.

The idea that VA physicians, totally legitimate doctors who treat veterans and their illnesses, cannot recommend marijuana—or, by the way, any other drug to their patients—and to treat things especially when they are going to recommend a drug that might be used in treatment for posttraumatic stress disorder, this is extremely troubling.

Our veterans have benefited from using medical cannabis to treat PTSD and other ailments, so why are we denying our veterans the ability to access something through their health care provider that is available to the general public through access to their providers?

The fact that our veterans cannot receive recommendations from VA physicians means that they are forced to go outside the VA system just to get a simple recommendation on a drug.

Restricting the freedom and ability of our Nation's heroes, individuals who have sacrificed so much for our freedom, to obtain medicine that their doctor believes would alleviate their problem and would be a treatment to an ailment that may be as a result of a war that we sent them off to fight, but now to deny them the right to actually have their doctor give the recommendation that he thinks would help them is just simply not right.

There are numerous physicians who believe that medical marijuana can have a great impact on these patients, on these veterans, on these people who are perhaps suffering as a result of the battles that we put them through. To fence off our veterans from such benefits is simply not acceptable.

I sincerely hope that all of my colleagues will stand up for patients and veterans by rejecting this heavy-handed government intervention into the doctor-patient relationship.

Vote for this amendment and get out of the way of the medical judgment of VA physicians who are treating our veterans. Get out of the way. Let our VA physicians do what they believe is right for our veterans. That is what the issue is today.

We are talking about medical marijuana or other treatments, and certainly, our VA physicians would know more about that and have more concern for their patients than we here in Congress and those people who set up national rules have.

So let's get out of the way, make sure we give the power and empower the VA physicians to do their job. Our veterans deserve that from us. They don't deserve obstructionism between the United States Congress and the veterans' physicians. I call on my colleagues to join me in support of this amendment.

I yield back the balance of my time.

□ 1730

Ms. TITUS. Mr. Chairman, I move to strike the last word.

The Acting CHAIR. The gentlewoman from Nevada is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. TITUS. Mr. Chairman, I rise in support of this amendment by Messrs. BLUMENAUER, ROHRBACHER, and FARR. I am strongly in favor of it.

The people of Nevada voted overwhelmingly to legalize medical marijuana. In the coming months, the first medical marijuana depositories will go online throughout the State. At the same time, we also have a brandnew VA hospital, which will be serving the veterans of my district and all across southern Nevada.

Unfortunately, due to VA's current restrictions, the more than 250,000 veterans who call Nevada home will be unable to receive a prescription for medical marijuana through their VA doctors, and so they will not have the opportunity to take advantage of this available in Nevada medical option.

This is just not fair. I believe that the VA should have the flexibility. It has been said much more eloquently than I can by the sponsors of this amendment; but the VA should have the flexibility to recommend the best medical treatments available to our Nation's veterans, especially if that treatment is approved under the State laws where the veteran lives.

As a Member of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, I regularly speak with both VA doctors and patients about advances in care for our Nation's heroes. Forcing those people—those brave men and women who have sacrificed so much—now to seek outside medical evaluation to access legal medical treatment from doctors who have little or no understanding of the unique challenges that our veterans face is simply bad policy—bad political policy and bad medical policy.

We have already seen the positive results that medical marijuana can have for patients suffering from PTSD and other ailments associated with traumatic experiences, such as combat. More studies are underway—including by the VA itself—that are anticipated to show these same kinds of results, and we have heard numerous stories firsthand.

I support this. I think it is common sense, it is bipartisan, we should move forward, and I urge my colleagues to join.

At this time, I yield the remainder of my time to Mr. BLUMENAUER.

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the gentlelady's courtesy and the points that she made.

I heard my friend, the chair of the committee, talk about it being against the law. I am not aware of any place—and I would direct this to Mr. CULBERSON—I am not aware of any place in the statutes where it is illegal for our VA doctors to give advice to our veterans about a treatment that is legal in a State.

What we are talking about is a prohibition that is a directive, so if there is a statute, I would be interested in knowing about it; but even if it is, what if the advice that the VA doctor wants to give is don't use medical marijuana?

They know their patient. Even if it is legal in their State, they think it is not in the best interest of the patient. Your policy would prohibit that doctor from telling that patient: I think it is wrong for you, I don't think it works.

What is the wisdom of prohibiting? You are prejudging what the doctor would say. I think the doctor ought to be able to give whatever advice he or she wants to give.

I would yield to you, if the gentlelady would permit, where is it illegal under Federal law for a doctor to talk about medical marijuana or any other legal treatment?

Ms. TITUS. Mr. Chairman, I yield to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. CULBERSON).

Mr. CULBERSON. I would simply point out that a Federal employee who is paid with Federal tax dollars is obligated to follow Federal law.

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Right. Where is it in the Federal law that it is illegal?

Mr. CULBERSON. It is prohibited under Federal law.

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Where in Federal law? I haven't been able to find that. Where is it prohibited for a doctor to give advice to a patient for a treatment that is legal in their State, pro or con? Where is that illegal?

Mr. CULBERSON. My point is simply that a Federal employee drawing his paycheck from Federal tax dollars obviously is obligated to follow Federal law.

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Right. Where is that illegal under Federal law?

Mr. CULBERSON. Marijuana is prohibited under Federal law, and that is my point.

I urge Members to oppose the amendment for that reason.

Mr. BLUMENAUER. I would like to make the point that the gentleman is wrong. I am happy for him to show us where it is prohibited for a doctor to talk about a legal State treatment. There is no Federal prohibition that we have been able to find because, if I could find it, I would introduce legislation to repeal it.

But my point obtained, what if the advice of the doctor is don't use medical marijuana, which is legal, because it is not right for you, I am your primary physician, why would you prohibit that?

The Acting CHAIR (Mr. DUNCAN of Tennessee). The time of the gentlewoman has expired.

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

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

Mr. FLEMING. Mr. Chairman, today, in this very interesting discussion, I am talking on this subject coming from the perspective of a physician and a military veteran himself, someone who is very acquainted with addiction disorders, someone who has been a medical director for addiction centers, even involved with methadone treatment over the years.

I can tell you that we all honor our veterans. We love our veterans. We are so glad that they have sacrificed what they have and what they go through. We know about PTSD and traumatic brain syndrome and all of these things which are a big problem.

However, I would say to you, Mr. Chairman, that the last thing in the world we should be doing is giving medical marijuana to people with these disorders.

What have we learned just in recent days? This month, the American Heart Association came out and said that marijuana, through their studies, both in young adults and middle-aged adults, has been shown to be very damaging to the cardiovascular system, leading to heart disease and congestive heart failure. I have a study right here.

Also, in this month, Northwestern came out with a study where they found that there was profound changes in the brain just among young adults who were using only casual exposure to marijuana. We know, on a biochemical level, that addictive substances such as marijuana causes changes in the microscopic neurotransmitters. I wrote a book on that in 2007.

So I would say to you today that one of the last things we should do is to damage the brains and the hearts of our beloved veterans. Why should we be hurting them?

As far as the claim that there is medical use for marijuana, where is the proof of that? What disease or disorder can be treated by marijuana and nothing else just as well, if not better? There is no proof out there. Trust me, I have been looking for it.

There is a mention of treating seizures. Yes, the University of Mississippi is doing a study extracting the oil, not the THC, but the oil for the use for some seizure disorders. It is under experimentation. There is no proof that it does any good.

Is medicinal marijuana anything other than recreational marijuana? Well, we have more dispensaries in California and Colorado than we do Starbucks. Do we have that many sick people in these States? I don't think so.

So I come to you today as a physician telling you that, having treated veterans in VA hospitals, one of the last things in the world we should do is give addicting substances to people with PTSD and other brain disorders.

Any good physician would tell you that. We have other anxiety-reducing medications that are nonaddicting and work very well. Antidepressants do a very good job.

But we know that if we compound a brain disorder or disease with an addicting substance that alters the brain itself, we are just going to see even higher rates of disorders, especially suicides.

I would challenge you today that we back away from this. Fine, if we want to do some more studies, but medical marijuana—medicinal marijuana—in fact, we even have something called Marinol, which is prescribed sometimes under a physician's supervision—but medicinal marijuana is not under a physician's supervision.

There is a scrip written out, and somebody goes and gets high. The smoke from marijuana has more tar in it than cigarettes. Why do we want to have another epidemic of lung cancer and heart disease, for heaven's sake, especially among our veterans?

I would say to you today that you can argue about the law. I would say to the gentleman that, yes, it would be improper to recommend to a patient to break the law by using a schedule I drug. It is against the law to use that, at least the Federal law. I wouldn't advise a patient to go break the law. I don't think that would be proper for me as a physician to do that.

I would say to you today that we have a number of medical and health reasons that we don't want to hurt and damage the vital organs of our wonderful and beloved veterans.

Again, if somebody has a claim that marijuana helps people medically, if it is so necessary and better than any other drug that we have on the market, well, then come forward with the proof.

The fact that there are doctors out there who say: yeah, I prescribe it for my patients, fine. But we have doctors who do a lot of things that I don't advise and many other doctors don't advise. It doesn't make it right. It only makes it right if we have proof out there, scientific evidence, that supports its use and benefits.

I think this is a good debate to have. I know we are going to be talking about this more, but this does not belong in this bill. Let's protect our veterans, not damage them.

I yield back the balance of my time.

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

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

Mr. COHEN. Mr. Chairman, what the gentleman said was a one-size-fits-all answer.

The fact is, when I first spoke on a similar amendment about the DEA and marijuana, it was about a gentleman named Oral James Mitchell, Jr., a Navy SEAL who served this country in Vietnam and died in 1996 of pancreatic cancer.

He violated the law in 1996 in the State of Maryland because he used

marijuana to ease his nausea. Also, as his mother said:

It is the only thing that allows Oral to smile and to eat. He didn't like the Marinol. He said it didn't do as much good as smoking marijuana.

When we are talking about somebody who has cancer and wants to use marijuana to improve the condition they are in and suffering from the nausea—and there is a lot of evidence that it is better than Marinol—then we don't have to worry about the situations that the doctor mentioned about possibly causing somebody heart disease over a period of years, which we know tobacco does and it is sold all around and legal.

We are talking about saving people pain, and we are talking about a VA doctor being able to distinguish between allowing somebody who might be in the last months or years of life and alleviating their pain with one of the best agents known to man to do that, rather than a situation where somebody might be young.

We don't have that many veterans who are as young as the AMA study discussed and their ability to think. That was talking about kids who were teenagers. They are not veterans.

I would submit that there are times the doctor should have discretion. We are not talking about the doctor dispensing marijuana. We are talking about a directive from the Federal Government prohibiting the doctor from saying: I think like Dr. FLEMING, and I don't think that you should use marijuana. I don't think you should go to another physician if you could afford it outside the VA system and try to get him to give you a directive to where you can go and get marijuana.

This prohibits the VA doctor from allowing Dr. FLEMING, if he worked at the VA, to tell his patient not to do it. The VA doctor should be able to speak the truth.

This is censorship by our Federal Government—a directive—which I think most of the people on the other side of the aisle have certainly been against Federal Government influence in medical policies and have done all they can to stop the Federal Government from influencing medical decisions. Here is a situation where you are saying the doctor should be censored.

There is a lot of evidence that medical cannabis helps, but particularly with nausea. I know the Chair knows people in east Tennessee, as I know in Memphis, who have contacted me and asked me to allow them to be able to get medical marijuana.

They can't do it in Tennessee yet. They would like to do it in Tennessee at the veterans' hospitals, but where it is legal in the State, the doctor should not be muzzled and censored.

This Congress should be in favor of the freedom of speech and in favor of the doctor being able to use their best efforts to help their patients and exercise their Hippocratic oath to do what they think is best, which may be to say no.

I yield to Mr. BLUMENAUER to add to this discussion because he was exactly right. This doesn't say anything about dispensing marijuana. It doesn't say you are for marijuana. It simply says you allow the VA doctor to exercise their judgment.

Mr. BLUMENAUER. I appreciate it. It is hard to improve upon your eloquence because you are speaking in favor of Dr. FLEMING being able to advise a veteran, if he was back at the VA, to say don't use medical marijuana.

This directive would prohibit him from saying to his patient, no, don't do it, and reciting all the facts and figures. Why would we muzzle Dr. FLEMING from his professional responsibilities, one way or another, in terms of medical marijuana?

□ 1745

The literature is being built. I just visited with dozens of medical professionals who want to do more research, who want to deal with this in a clinical, thoughtful way. We have got stupid Federal policies that prohibit the research. I have met with parents who have children with violent epileptic seizures, and they are moving to States in which they can get medical marijuana, because they can get it. The physicians cannot get medical marijuana to study, but it is making a difference for these families.

We just ought not to confuse what we are talking about here. We are talking about VA hospital doctors being able to do something that is not prohibited under Federal law, which is talking about the pros and cons of treatment. That ought to be our objective, and that is why this amendment should be approved.

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

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

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

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Chairman, I demand a recorded vote.

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

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. RUNYAN

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

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

At the end of the bill (before the short title), add the following new section:

SEC. 417. None of the funds made available by this Act may be used to propose, plan for, or execute a new or additional Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) round.

The Acting CHAIR. The gentleman from New Jersey is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. RUNYAN. Mr. Chairman, this amendment, which is cosponsored by

Representative BARBER, states that none of the funds made available by this act may be used to propose, to plan for, or to execute a new or an additional round of BRAC.

There is no doubt that we recognize the defense budget pressures that we face today in this fiscal environment, and we should direct our limited dollars to addressing the current mission, infrastructure, and readiness needs in support of our warfighters. Based on the cost of previous Base Realignment and Closure, a new round of base closures will likely entail large up-front costs and will end up costing much more than originally estimated. For example, the GAO says that the last BRAC in 2005 had an actual cost of \$35.1 billion. That is an approximately 67 percent increase from the September 2005 BRAC Commission's original cost estimate of \$21 billion.

I know many Members of this Chamber want Congress to continue to have the close oversight of our military installations and infrastructure. This bipartisan amendment ensures that we can do that. I urge my colleagues to support this amendment, which helps ensure that the funds in this bill address current needs, rather than to support a new round of BRAC.

I would like to thank my colleague, Representative BARBER, for offering this amendment with me, and I thank the chairman and the members of the subcommittee for working with me on this important issue.

I yield back the balance of my time.

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

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

Mr. BARBER. I want to thank my colleague for cosponsoring this important bipartisan amendment. Congressman RUNYAN understands very well, I think, that we have to have a commitment in order to make sure that we do the right thing by our military.

Mr. Chairman, we are in difficult times. There is no question we are in times when the budgets are constrained, but as we draw down our forces from war in Afghanistan and shift our strategic focus to the Pacific, reducing Active Duty personnel and equipment across the services, there is absolutely no doubt that we must re-evaluate where we are in terms of the Department of Defense's infrastructure. However, this does not mean that we should take on another round of Base Realignment and Closure, or BRAC.

Our military installations across the Nation have a profound impact on the families of the communities that support these installations. In my district, for example, we have two installations—the Davis-Monthan Air Force Base and Fort Huachuca. Both the communities of Tucson and Sierra Vista have storied histories that go back over eight decades in support of these installations. They have become

inextricably linked, with the bases and the cities growing and prospering together.

Mr. Chairman, while sequestration and the current fiscal outlook demand that we make prudent decisions about spending across the government, now is not the time for another costly round of BRAC. The 2005 round of BRAC cost our taxpayers money, and we have yet to see any savings from it. It doesn't seem prudent to start another one while we are still looking for savings. Our military communities, including those in southern Arizona, cannot afford the uncertainty of another round of BRAC.

Again, I want to thank Congressman RUNYAN for his leadership on this issue, and I urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to support this important amendment.

I yield back the balance of my time.

The Acting CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. RUNYAN).

The amendment was agreed to.

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

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

Mr. PERLMUTTER. Mr. Chairman, I rise today to talk about two issues of great importance to veterans in Colorado and throughout the Rocky Mountain West.

First, I want to talk about the new stand-alone hospital, the U.S. Department of VA's replacement medical center in Aurora, Colorado. This hospital has been one of my top priorities for 7 years, which is when I arrived in Congress. This hospital has been promised to our veterans for nearly 15 to almost 20 years. The project has gone through a number of iterations over the years under two Presidents and four Secretaries of the VA. Once completed, this medical facility will serve hundreds of thousands of veterans across the Rocky Mountain West. The 182-bed facility will include a full range of medical, laboratory, research, and counseling services, a 30-bed spinal cord injury unit, a 30-bed community living center, and a PTSD rehabilitation clinic.

The hospital is well underway, but, unfortunately, the VA is involved in an ongoing contract dispute with the prime contractor, putting the cost and schedule for completing this project in jeopardy. At the heart of the dispute is the cost of the final design, which is leading to hundreds of change orders submitted to the VA by the contractor with very few approved and paid. The original design called for an approximately \$1.1 billion state-of-the-art medical center, but Congress authorized and appropriated \$800 million for the acquisition of approximately 40 acres of land and several buildings as well as design and construction. The original design appears not to have significantly changed and, consequently, a funding gap exists between the authorized amount for the contract and

the overall cost of the project. This contract dispute will be heard next month by the U.S. Civilian Board of Contract Appeals.

I am working constantly with the VA and with other members of the Colorado congressional delegation to find solutions to improve the construction process of this medical center and finish the project. Unfortunately, it is becoming clear to me that the VA and Congress have underestimated the cost to build this facility, and in the coming months, our delegation will be asking for additional appropriations. I am not happy about this, but we have promised this hospital to our veterans for more than a decade, and we must finish the facility.

I want to thank Chairman CULBERSON and Ranking Member BISHOP for continuing a dialogue with our delegation and the VA to ensure we will have the resources necessary to finish this hospital as quickly as possible.

I also want to talk today about an important issue about our veterans who are returning home. During the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, we saw a dramatic increase in traumatic brain injuries among our veterans. One of the common neurological disorders due to TBI is the development of epilepsy. Data from prior wars indicate that as many as 50 percent of individuals experiencing penetrating brain trauma will develop epilepsy.

Because of this increase, I worked with Senator PATTY MURRAY and the Bush administration in 2008 to establish Epilepsy Centers of Excellence within the VA Health Administration. These centers have done an excellent job in dealing with people in our veterans' community who have developed seizure disorders. The VA currently has 16 centers across the country, creating a national network of facilities prepared to diagnose and treat veterans with epilepsy.

These centers need to be fully funded. I ask that the committee continue to work with the VA to make sure that the funding for those 16 centers continues unabated.

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

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

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

Mr. SCHWEIKERT. Mr. Chairman, I am doing this, actually, to try to be efficient because we are moving on a bit.

May I request that the gentleman from Texas enter into a quick colloquy with me.

Mr. CULBERSON. Certainly.

Mr. SCHWEIKERT. We attached the Rothfus amendment earlier, and I believe the amendment I was going to be offering in a couple of moments would have probably been a little duplicative, but I want to make a specific point.

We have had a series of amendments here and discussions in regards to bonuses for VA leadership. There are

frustrations and concerns particularly when we look at previous GAO reports which say the matrix—some of the data, some of the collection—on wait times and other things that substantially the bonuses are based on, as this GAO report says, may actually be very inaccurate.

If the performance bonuses continue to exist, Mr. Chairman, would you be willing to work with someone like me and my office to try to find a better way? My fear is that right now, in the way it is designed, we incentivize playing games with the wait times. The world works on incentives and disincentives.

Can we work together to come up with a better methodology of how we incentivize good acts so that we are all comfortable that we are moving towards, shall we say, a proper analysis of the outcomes, and, therefore, we reward those?

Mr. CULBERSON. Will the gentleman yield?

Mr. SCHWEIKERT. I yield to the gentleman from Texas.

Mr. CULBERSON. Absolutely. Of course. I look forward to working with you and your office.

Mr. SCHWEIKERT. That is all I wanted to accomplish here.

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

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. TAKANO

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

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

At the end of the bill (before the short title) insert the following:

SEC. ____ . None of the funds appropriated or otherwise made available in this Act for the All-Volunteer Force Educational Assistance Program under chapter 30 of title 38, United States Code, or the Post 9/11 Educational Assistance Program under chapter 33 of such title and provided to an institution of higher education (as defined in section 102 of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1002)) may be used for recruiting or marketing activities.

Mr. CULBERSON. Mr. Chairman, I reserve a point of order on the amendment.

The Acting CHAIR. A point of order is reserved.

The gentleman from California is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Chairman, my amendment would prevent Federal student aid for veterans, including post-9/11 GI Bill benefits, from being used by colleges for marketing and recruiting purposes.

A Senate Health Committee report showed that many for-profits used more than 22 percent of their revenue on marketing and recruiting but less than 18 percent on academic instruction. At the same time, many of these schools received more than 80 percent of their revenue from Federal student aid, including post-9/11 GI Bill benefits and other veterans' education benefits.

□ 1800

That's a lot of veteran's education assistance and taxpayer money going

to for-profit schools to market to and recruit students. It has been well documented that some of these schools use overly aggressive, deceptive, and fraudulent practices to get students to attend their schools. Thirty-eight State attorneys general, the CFPB, the SEC, FDIC, and DOJ are all investigating the practices of for-profit colleges. We need to address this abuse of student veterans' and taxpayer dollars. I urge you all to support my amendment.

I yield back the balance of my time.

POINT OF ORDER

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

The rules states in pertinent part that an amendment to a general appropriations bill shall not be in order if it changes existing law.

This amendment, Mr. Chairman, requires a new determination, and I would ask for a ruling from the Chair.

The Acting CHAIR. Does anyone else wish to speak on the point of order? If not, the Chair is prepared to rule.

In pertinent part, the amendment restricts funds for marketing activities.

Absent a showing of a statutory or regulatory definition of marketing activities, the amendment would require a Federal official to define what activities constitute marketing activities. Such a requirement constitutes a new duty in violation of clause 2 of rule XXI.

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

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. GOSAR

Mr. GOSAR. Mr. Chairman, I have my first amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

At the end of the bill (before the short title) insert the following:

SEC. ____ . None of the funds made available by this Act may be used to create or maintain any patient record-keeping system other than those currently approved by the Department of Veterans Affairs Central Office in Washington, D.C.

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

Mr. GOSAR. Mr. Chair, I rise to stand with veterans throughout the country and offer a simple amendment that seeks to prohibit funds in this bill from being used to create or maintain any unofficial recordkeeping system at the Department of Veterans Affairs.

As many of you know, numerous news reports have surfaced that assert that the Phoenix Veterans Affairs Health Care System has been using secondary, unofficial records of veterans' claims and appointment requests. These allegations claim that the reasoning behind these actions was to misrepresent the actual wait times the veterans faced as they sought health care.

A whistleblower has come forward and alleged the facility was taking the

vets' application information, transcribing that information to an unofficial shared document, and only putting veterans' information and requests into the real system when they knew that the veterans were likely to receive an appointment within a 2-week timeframe. If true, on paper, the VA central office here in Washington would be under the impression that the wait time goals for appointments were being met. According to reports, veterans were waiting for months and months on end.

The House Veterans' Affairs Committee is conducting an investigation into the matter and so far has said as many as 40 veterans suffered and died while waiting for appointments through the Phoenix VA system. Their investigation is ongoing, and they fear there could be many more deaths as a result of this negligence.

I would like to thank the full committee chairman, Chairman MILLER, and Oversight and Investigation Subcommittee Chairman COFFMAN for their efforts on this front.

The inspector general's office at the VA is also conducting investigations into these allegations. It is my hope that we get to the full truth soon and that those responsible are held accountable. Depending on the findings, criminal charges may even be in order. In the meantime, my goal is to ensure that such recordkeeping practices are not allowed to take place.

I have said this before, it is sad that we have to legislate in this way. When government bureaucrats don't use good judgment and common sense, regulations and laws must be changed to prevent bad behavior. No matter what the investigation shows and no matter who was involved, this practice must be prevented in the future. My amendment seeks to do just that.

Only the official systems approved by the Veterans Administration's Central Office should be used. This way, we have oversight, accountability, and uniformity. It is my hope that one day we also have a little more efficiency in these processes.

Thank you for your consideration, and I urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to support the passage of my commonsense amendment.

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

The Acting CHAIR. Seeing no additional speakers, the question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. GOSAR).

The amendment was agreed to.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. GRAYSON

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

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

At the end of the bill (before the short title), add the following new section:

SEC. ____ . None of the funds made available by this Act may be used to enter into a contract with any offeror or any of its principals if the offeror certifies, as required by Federal

Acquisition Regulation, that the offeror or any of its principals:

(A) within a three-year period preceding this offer has been convicted of or had a civil judgment rendered against it for: commission of fraud or a criminal offense in connection with obtaining, attempting to obtain, or performing a public (Federal, State, or local) contract or subcontract; violation of Federal or State antitrust statutes relating to the submission of offers; or commission of embezzlement, theft, forgery, bribery, falsification or destruction of records, making false statements, tax evasion, violating Federal criminal tax laws, or receiving stolen property; or

(B) are presently indicted for, or otherwise criminally or civilly charged by a governmental entity with, commission of any of the offenses enumerated above in subsection (A); or

(C) within a three-year period preceding this offer, has been notified of any delinquent Federal taxes in an amount that exceeds \$3,000 for which the liability remains unsatisfied.

Mr. GRAYSON (during the reading). Mr. Chair, I ask unanimous consent that it be considered as read.

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

There was no objection.

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

Mr. GRAYSON. Mr. Chairman, this amendment is identical to language that was inserted by voice vote into this bill last year, as well as every other appropriations bill that was considered by an open rule.

This amendment would expand the list of wrongdoing parties with whom the Federal Government is prohibited from contracting. That list should contractors who have been convicted of fraud, who have violated Federal or State antitrust laws, who have been convicted of embezzlement, theft, forgery, bribery, violation of Federal tax laws and other items outlined in section 52.209-5 of title 48 of the Code of Federal Regulations.

These are all offenses which any contractor doing business with the Federal Government must disclose to the contracting officer in every offer. Oddly enough however, without this amendment, the contracting officer is then free to ignore these transgressions and award contracts to the offending offeror.

I commend the authors of this bill for their inclusion of sections 413 and 414, which are relevant to this issue. I submit, however, that we can improve this bill by prohibiting agencies from contracting with those entities who have engaged in the criminal and fraudulent activities that I have described.

It is my hope that this amendment will be noncontroversial, as it was last year, and again be passed unanimously by voice vote by the House.

I yield back the balance of my time.

The Acting CHAIR. Seeing no additional speakers, the question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Florida (Mr. GRAYSON).

The amendment was agreed to.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. GOSAR

Mr. GOSAR. Mr. Chair, I have my second amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

At the end of the bill (before the short title), insert the following:

SEC. ____ . The amounts otherwise provided by this Act are revised by reducing the amount made available for "Department of Veterans Affairs—Departmental Administration—General Administration", and increasing the amount made available for "Department of Veterans Affairs Departmental Administration—Information Technology Systems", by \$3,215,910.

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

Mr. GOSAR. Mr. Chair, I rise to offer an amendment that seeks to redirect funds that would otherwise be spent on Department of Veterans Affairs bureaucrats and administrative expenses and puts those monies towards timely service for our veterans.

Although this amendment is a dollar-for-dollar transfer within this bill, which will result in a neutral impact on the bill's budget authority, the amendment will actually decrease budget outlays for 2015 by \$1 million according to the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office.

The general administration account for the Department of Veterans Affairs is funded at \$321,591,000. Funds to this account can be spent on things that have nothing to do with administering critical services for our veterans. Examples include things like receptions, conferences, uniforms, and excessive travel for bureaucrats.

It is no secret that the VA, like other Federal agencies like the GSA and the IRS, has in recent years abused the trust of the American people by spending exorbitant amounts of money on conferences and travel expenses. I think we all know that the VA has had its share of problems in the past few years. Meanwhile, wait times for claims processing and appeals processing are horrendous.

The most recent report put forth by the VA indicates there are more than 600,000 veterans' claims pending with the VA. Even more troubling is the fact that 319,363 claims have been pending for more than 125 days.

Many of our veterans are simply giving up. They are either giving up on trying to obtain the benefits they deserve, or worse, some of them are giving up on life altogether. It is a travesty, and this appalling trend must be reversed.

It is disheartening to me that such wasteful spending occurs while veterans are crying out for help. It is distressing that it occurs while veterans are taking their own lives. It is truly disturbing that it occurs when we have veterans dying as they wait for care.

I appreciate the committee's hard work and its acknowledgment of the importance of reducing the backlog in this bill. Having said that, I think we

can do more and should focus on prioritizing funding for efforts that will lead to timelier care for our Nation's heroes as opposed to administrative expenses. That is why I proposed redirecting a mere 1 percent of the funds in the general administration account away from the funding for conference expenses and bureaucrats and shifting those funds towards reducing the VA backlog.

It is unfair to say that all VA employees and officials have abused the trust of the American people and the veterans that they are meant to serve. There are many within this Department who work tirelessly to get through their claims and streamline processes. To those people, I say "thank you."

Our veterans and the American taxpayers are not pleased with the overall production level at the VA. It is time to remember and act on the mission at hand: serving our veterans who have given so much for this Nation.

I urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to support the passage of my commonsense amendment.

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

The Acting CHAIR. Seeing no additional speakers, the question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. GOSAR).

The amendment was agreed to.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MS. JACKSON LEE

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Chair, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

At the end of the bill (before the short title), insert the following:

SEC. ____ None of the funds made available by this Act for benefits for homeless veterans and training and outreach programs may be used by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs in contravention of subchapter III of chapter 20 of title 38, United States Code.

The Acting CHAIR. The gentlewoman from Texas is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Chair, I want to thank Mr. CULBERSON and Mr. BISHOP for doing an outstanding job as they have done and make a bipartisan statement that as the first bill of the appropriations season comes forward we stand in solidarity against veterans waiting, against veterans' claims not being processed, and against veterans dying because they have not been treated.

I don't think any Member of Congress would adhere to that kind of abuse of our veterans, and I hope that we find solutions in a bipartisan way. I also believe the administration and the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, a military retiree himself, would stand in solidarity to stop this kind of treatment of our veterans.

One of the groups that we have a solidarity and commitment to are the Nation's homeless veterans. We know that there are over 100,000 homeless veterans and 1,000-plus homeless veterans in Houston, Texas.

My amendment reinforces and reaffirms our commitment in looking to ensure that funds are not cut in subchapter 3, dealing with homeless matters, enhancement of comprehensive services, in particular, hospital, nursing home, and domiciliary care, which used to be only for homeless veterans who were suffering from mental health issues, now access to all veterans. So the Jackson Lee amendment is here to ensure that reducing, eliminating homelessness among veterans is of paramount responsibility and commitment to those who risk their lives to protect our freedom.

My amendment will remind us of our obligation to provide our veterans the assistance needed to avoid homelessness, which includes adequately funding for programs, Veterans Administration's support of housing that provides case management services, adequate housing facilities, mental health support, and address other areas that contribute to veterans' homelessness, such as the homeless matters, enhancement of comprehensive services.

Mr. Chairman, our veterans deserve the best service available, and I believe that we could do much for them. I know that in this particular appropriations bill there has been a standard of excellence to put our veterans first. Many other veterans are considered homeless or at-risk because of their poverty, lack of support from family and friends, and dismal living conditions. So that means the number of 107,000 goes up.

Contrary to popular belief, ending homelessness among veterans remains a big challenge. My own city of Houston has its own share of homelessness.

Let me take note of the homeless centers in my community: Salvation Army, Joshua House for Men, Magnificent House, Modest Family Health Care, Open Door Mission, Salvation Army, Harbor Light—of which I participate in their Thanksgiving ceremonies or Thanksgiving dinner almost every year that I have served in the United States Congress—Star of Hope, Ultimate Changes, and my good friend Mr. Jones who is on Lyons Avenue who has a facility that opens its doors to anyone who will knock, a man who needs the resources that have been cut over the years.

My amendment is to reinforce that, as this bill is passed, we will ensure that the provisions given to us under title III, section 301 that emphasizes the utilization of facilities for veterans who happen to be homeless, all veterans, would not be diminished. That is at least our minimal responsibility—minimal responsibility.

But as we approach this Memorial Day where we honor those who lost their lives, let us not leave their fellow brothers and sisters along the highway of despair.

□ 1815

On a personal note, let me indicate that as a member of the local elected

government, for many years I used to participate in the standdown, where you got to talk and interact with our veterans. I can tell you firsthand the experience.

Our veterans welcome our help and need our help, for they have helped this Nation.

Mr. Chair, Thank you for this opportunity to describe my amendment, which simply provides that: "None of the funds made available by this Act for the Department of Veteran Affairs—Benefits for Homeless Veterans and Training and Outreach Programs may be used in contravention of the title 38, Part II, Chapter 20, III of the U.S. Code.

This amendment will help ensure that the rate of homelessness among veterans in the United States does not increase.

I thank Subcommittee Chairman CULBERSON and Ranking Member BISHOP for their hard work in shepherding this important legislation to the floor.

I offer the Jackson Lee Amendment because I believe reducing and eliminating homelessness among veterans, those who risked their lives to protect our freedom, should also be one of the nation's highest priorities.

Homelessness among the American veteran population is on the rise in the United States and we must be proactive in giving back to those who have given so much to us.

My amendment will help remind us of our obligation to provide our veterans the assistance needed to avoid homelessness, which includes adequately funding for programs Veterans Administration Supportive Housing (VASH) that provide case-management services, adequate housing facilities, mental health support, and address other areas that contribute to veteran homelessness.

VASH is a jointly-administered permanent supportive housing program for disabled Veterans experiencing homelessness in which VA medical Centers provide referrals and case management while Public Housing Agencies (PHAs) administer the Section 8 housing vouchers.

Mr. Chair, our veterans deserve the best services available, and I believe that we could be doing much more for them.

Today, in our country, there are approximately 107,000 veterans (male and female) who are homeless on any given night. And perhaps twice as many (200,000) experience homelessness at some point during the course of a year.

Many other veterans are considered near homeless or at risk because of their poverty, lack of support from family and friends, and dismal living conditions in cheap hotels or in overcrowded or substandard housing.

Contrary to popular belief, ending homelessness among veterans remains a big challenge.

In my hometown of Houston for example, between the years 2010 and 2012, the number of homeless veterans increased from 771 to 1,162.

We must be vigilant and continue to fight for those who put on the uniform and fought for us.

Providing a home for veterans to come home to every night is the very least we can do.

Mr. Chair, you should know that programs like VASH have succeeded in changing lives. In 2012 alone, 35,905 veterans lived in the public housing provided by VASH.

I have seen the impact of such grants in my home state of Texas, and within my congressional district in Houston, and I am sure that this funding has positively impacted many communities across this country.

In Texas, there are committed groups in Houston, working to eradicate the issue of homelessness.

For example, the Michael E. DeBaKey VA Medical Center has been involved in changing veterans' lives in a mighty way by providing Veterans and their families with access to affordable housing and medical services that will help them get back on their feet.

Mr. Chair, we cannot let this issue of homelessness continue. I urge my colleagues to support the Jackson Lee Amendment and commit ourselves to the hard but necessary work of ending veteran homelessness in America.

NATIONAL COALITION
FOR HOMELESS VETERANS,
Washington, DC, August 7, 2012.

BILL TO REAUTHORIZE, IMPROVE CRITICAL HOMELESS VETERAN PROGRAMS SIGNED INTO LAW

WASHINGTON.—In mid-July 2012, the U.S. Senate unanimously passed H.R. 1627, the "Honoring America's Veterans and Caring for Camp Lejeune Families Act of 2012." As reported by NCHV, (http://nchv.org/index.php/news/headline_article/senate_unanimously_passes_bill_to_reauthorize_improve_critical_homeless_Vet/). This bill would reauthorize and improve several homeless veteran programs that are critical to the success of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)'s Five-Year Plan to End Veteran Homelessness. On July 31, the U.S. House of Representatives proceeded to pass H.R. 1627, and less than one week later, the bill was signed into law by President Barack Obama.

This bill represents a comprehensive agreement between both parties in both the House and the Senate. NCHV's most recent Congressional Leadership Award recipients (http://nchv.org/index.php/news/headline_article/highlights_from_the_2012_annual_conference/)—Rep. Jeff Miller (R-FL), Chairman of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, and Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA), Chairman of the Senate of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs—were at the center of this compromise.

Throughout the 112th Congress, NCHV has regularly advised the congressional committees of jurisdiction on the provisions in H.R. 1627 that would greatly impact homeless veteran assistance. Descriptions of these individual provisions are provided below.

For more information on H.R. 1627, visit the following links:

The full text of the bill can be downloaded here (<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/BILLS-112hr1627eas/pdf/BILLS-112hr1627eas.pdf>) (PDF).

The House Committee on Veterans' Affairs has set up a webpage with a title-by-title overview of the bill and supplementary information. This page can be accessed here (<http://veterans.house.gov/HR1627>).

H.R. 1627, "HONORING AMERICA'S VETERANS AND CARING FOR CAMP LEJEUNE FAMILIES ACT OF 2012"

Title II—Housing Matters

Sec. 211. Modification of authorities for enhanced-use leases of real property

Authority for VA's Enhanced-Use Lease (EUL) program expired on Dec. 31, 2011. This section provides a modified reauthorization for the program. The VA Secretary may now

enter into a EUL "only for the provision of supportive housing," which is defined in the bill as "housing that engages tenants in on-site and community-based support services for veterans or their families that are at risk of homelessness or are homeless."

Title III—Homeless Matters

Sec. 301. Enhancement of comprehensive service programs

This section would allow Grant and Per Diem (GPD) Program capital grants to be used for the new construction of facilities. Additionally, these applicants would be able to use funding from other private or public sources, so long as the applicant "demonstrates that a private nonprofit organization will provide oversight and site control for the project."

Within one year, VA must also "complete a study of all matters relating to" the GPD per diem payment method, as well as develop a more effective and efficient method for adequately reimbursing GPD capital grant recipients.

Sec. 302. Modification of authority for provision of treatment and rehabilitation to certain veterans to include provision of treatment and rehabilitation to homeless veterans who are not seriously mentally ill

This section expands VA's authority to provide "hospital, nursing home, and domiciliary care" (Title 38, section 1710, U.S. Code). Current law only allows homeless veterans who are suffering from serious mental illness to receive this care—H.R. 1627 will allow all homeless veterans to access these services.

Sec. 303. Modification of grant program for homeless veterans with special needs

This section expands the VA's Special Needs Grant Program to organizations that are eligible for GPD funds. Current law only allows existing GPD providers to receive Special Needs grants.

Additionally, male homeless veterans with minor dependents would become eligible for services through the Special Needs Grant Program. Current law restricts these services to women veterans with minor dependents. H.R. 1627 authorizes these dependents to directly receive services through the program.

Sec. 304. Collaboration in provision of case management services to homeless veterans in supported housing program

This section states that the VA Secretary "shall consider entering into contracts or agreements" with eligible organizations to help provide case management through the HUD-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) Program. Training and technical assistance may be provided to help facilitate these efforts.

Within a year and a half of H.R. 1627's enactment, VA must report to Congress on this collaboration.

Sec. 305. Extensions of previously fully funded authorities affecting homeless veterans

This section reauthorizes programs that are critical to the success of the Five-Year Plan to End Veteran Homelessness:

The Grant and Per Diem Program is reauthorized at \$250 million for FY 2013—the same level at which it is currently authorized.

The Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP), administered by the Department of Labor-Veterans' Employment and Training Service (DOL-VETS), is reauthorized at \$50 million for FY 2013—the same level at which it is currently authorized.

The Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) Program is reauthorized at \$300 million for FY 2013—\$200 million above the level at which it is currently authorized.

The Special Needs Grant Program is reauthorized at \$5 million for FY 2013—the same level at which it is currently authorized.

For more information on policy and legislative issues that affect homeless veteran service providers, visit <http://nchv.org/index.php/policy/> (<http://nchv.org/index.php/policy/>).

Ms. JACKSON LEE. I yield back the balance of my time.

The Acting CHAIR. Seeing no other speakers, the question is on the amendment offered by the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON LEE).

The amendment was agreed to.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. FARENTHOLD

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

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

At the end of the bill (before the short title), insert the following:

SEC. ____ None of the funds made available by this Act may be used to pay the salary of any officer or employee of the Federal Government with respect to whom the President of the Senate or the Speaker of the House of Representatives has certified a statement of facts to a United States attorney under section 104 of the Revised Statutes (2 U.S.C. 194).

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Mr. Chairman, I reserve a point of order.

The Acting CHAIR. A point of order is reserved.

The gentleman from Texas is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. This amendment actually implements what I have proposed in H.R. 4447, which is that any employee of the Federal Government—in this case, we are limiting it to the subject of this appropriations bill—not be paid if they have been held in contempt of Congress.

We have seen, unfortunately, that even though we have held Eric Holder in contempt of Congress, the Justice Department has failed to pursue that, and we are delayed on the civil contempt in the court system.

What I am trying to do here is put a little teeth into contempt of Congress, using the power of the purse.

The Constitution gives this body the power to decide how the Federal Government spends their money. And if somebody is in contempt of this body, they should not be paid. If you are in contempt of your employer in the private sector, most likely you are going to be unemployed and not get your paycheck.

I intend to offer this amendment for all the appropriations bills as a way to possibly get it through the Senate, where nothing is happening.

It is critically important that we do this in the Veterans Affairs appropriations bill because as we begin to investigate the horrifying allegations of secret waiting lists and folks dying because they are not getting timely treatment in the VA, it is certain there is going to be a congressional investigation. We need all the tools we have in our tool chest to get to the bottom of this and make sure people cooperate and make sure people testify.

We have seen time and time again where various investigations, be it Lois Lerner, whatever, that we are not getting cooperation from this administration. The contempt power and putting some teeth into it is one way we can do that.

So I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting this commonsense amendment that doesn't pay people who don't cooperate with Congress. We have the power of the purse. We need to use it. We very possibly may need to use it for the Department of Veterans Affairs as a result of some of the things that they appear to be up to.

I yield back the balance of my time.

POINT OF ORDER

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

The rule states, in pertinent part:

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

The amendment imposes additional duties or requires a new determination.

Mr. Chairman, I ask for a ruling from the Chair.

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

Mr. FARENTHOLD. I would like to address the point of order.

The Acting CHAIR. The gentleman from Texas is recognized.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. Mr. Chair, it is my belief that this puts no other duty on anyone. Someone being found in contempt of Congress is something that is widely publicized. And as all people are charged with knowing what the law is, it seems common sense that the Department of Veterans Affairs, if it had a member subject to contempt, would know that that person is in contempt.

We are not asking anybody to do anything else, other than not pay somebody who is in contempt of Congress.

The Acting CHAIR. The Chair is prepared to rule.

The Chair finds that this amendment imposes new duties on the Department of Veterans Affairs to track the status of certain certifications.

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

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

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. PETERS OF MICHIGAN

Mr. PETERS of Michigan. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

At the end of the bill (before the short title), insert the following:

SEC. ____ . None of the funds made available by this Act may be used for a contract that includes first-class travel by the contractor.

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

Mr. PETERS of Michigan. Mr. Chairman, as of Monday, there were 596,061 veterans waiting for their claims to be processed by the Veterans Administration. More than half of these claims have been pending for more than 125 days.

This is outrageous and simply unacceptable. We are failing our veterans who have put their lives on the line for this Nation and rely on services at the VA for their health care and other benefits upon retirement.

As a former lieutenant commander in the U.S. Navy Reserve, I am extremely disappointed with the inability to eliminate the paperwork backlog at the Veterans Administration. The men and women who have served our country honorably, and their families, deserve so much better.

In my home State of Michigan at the Detroit Regional Veterans Administration Office almost 49 percent of claims have been pending for more than 125 days. While this number may seem high, it is actually lower than the combined national average, where 53 percent of claims have been pending for more than 125 days.

It is unacceptable that, as hundreds and thousands of veterans wait months to have these essential benefits processed, government contractors are able to use taxpayer dollars to purchase first-class travel. There is no way to justify spending on luxury travel for contractors while the VA is dealing with months-long backlogs. It just doesn't make sense.

Mr. Chairman, this is why I am putting forward a simple amendment barring the use of funds in this bill to be spent on first-class travel for government contractors.

I believe this amendment sends an important message that Congress, the administration, and contractors are accountable to American taxpayers. This amendment is about making efficient use of taxpayer dollars and reducing wasteful government spending. Federal contractors simply should not be using Federal tax dollars on first-class flights.

I ask my colleagues to stand with me and support this commonsense amendment. Let us send a strong message to our veterans and other constituents about our priorities as we work on behalf of them here in Washington.

Please support this amendment which will bring further accountability and fiscal sensibility to our government.

I yield back the balance of my time.

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

The amendment was agreed to.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. NUNES

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

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

At the end of the bill (before the short title), insert the following:

SEC. ____ . None of the funds made available by this Act may be used for the closure or abandonment of any facility located at Lajes Field, Azores, Portugal.

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

Mr. NUNES. Mr. Chairman, first, I would like to thank the chairman and ranking member for their support of this amendment. And I will be very quick here.

This base is a very important location for us in the middle of the Atlantic. Over the last decade, we have invested about \$150 million into the infrastructure there.

Now the Air Force is talking about actually tearing down facilities there. It is starting to spend money to tear it down.

This doesn't make a lot of sense to me, nor does it to the Congress, because last Congress, both in the NDAA and in the Defense Appropriations bills, the Congress said very specifically that this was a facility that needed to be used. The military needed to figure out a use for it. They were not to draw down the forces there.

Instead, the Air Force continues to ignore the Congress, so much so that now they want to use funds to tear down facilities.

This is a complete rejection of, I think, Congress' prerogative and Congress' intent of the laws from last year. So now we have to go into the Military Construction Appropriations bill to make sure that we hold people accountable.

I would say that this is, I think, just a placeholder. Because when you start to look at the money that has been spent over the last 10 years—as I said, \$150 million—if this is something the Air Force didn't want, then I think it is time for to ask for the GAO to come in and really study who it was that did the planning to spend the \$150 million in first place, and possibly even an IG investigation.

I look forward to working with the chairman and the ranking member, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The Acting CHAIR. Seeing no additional speakers, the question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. NUNES).

The amendment was agreed to.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MRS. WALORSKI

Mrs. WALORSKI. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

At the end of the bill (before the short title), insert the following:

SEC. ____ . None of the funds made available by this Act may be used by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to implement sole source contracting at the national level for the selection of devices and test strips for the self-monitoring of blood glucose.

The Acting CHAIR. The gentlewoman from Indiana is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mrs. WALORSKI. Thank you, Chairman CULBERSON and Ranking Member

BISHOP, for your assistance with this amendment.

I rise to offer an amendment that will protect veterans with diabetes.

Specifically, this amendment will ensure the VA continues to offer diabetes patients a variety of glucose monitoring supplies through the competitive bid process.

Mr. Chairman, almost 25 percent of veterans in the VA health care system have diabetes, compared to about 8.3 percent of the general public. As a result, diabetes care places a significant cost burden on the VA's budget, accounting for almost 4 percent of the overall VA health care budget and costing almost \$1.5 billion annually.

Presently, each of the 21 Veterans Integrated Service Networks, or VISNs, competitively bid for monitoring devices and test strips. This competition is good for the patient, and it is good for the marketplace, allowing the VA to utilize significant purchasing power. Because of this competition and the competition in the non-VA market, vendors are pushed to reduce costs and to innovate.

VA physicians rely upon the patient to be a partner in disease management and treatment. Therefore, it is critical for patients and caregivers to be comfortable with the devices they use so they can best monitor the disease, resulting in better health outcomes.

As a member of the VA Committee, I learned recently the Department of Veterans Affairs is actively considering a national contract with a single provider for diabetic supplies. While this may sound like a good idea initially, both the House and the Senate, under the leadership of both Democrats and Republicans, have consistently agreed this is not prudent.

Sole sourcing could dramatically increase costs and deny patients the ability to use devices they are most comfortable with. The cost to reeducate and retrain patients and caregivers throughout the VA population would be significant.

Finally, because of the size of the VA diabetes population, a sole-source contract would likely reduce the number of vendors for future competitive contracts and also reduce innovation.

I urge my colleagues to support passage of this commonsense amendment, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The Acting CHAIR (Mr. COLLINS of Georgia). The question is on the amendment offered by the gentlewoman from Indiana (Mrs. WALORSKI).

The amendment was agreed to.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MRS. NOEM

Mrs. NOEM. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

At the end of the bill (before the short title), insert the following:

SEC. ____ . None of the funds made available by this Act may be used to prepare an environmental impact statement in accordance

with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.) with respect to a health care facility of the Department of Veterans Affairs that is—

- (1) designated as a National Historic Landmark by the National Park Service; and
- (2) located in a highly rural area.

The Acting CHAIR. The gentlewoman from South Dakota is recognized for 5 minutes.

□ 1830

Mrs. NOEM. Mr. Chairman, as you may know, the Department of Veterans Affairs manages thousands of historically significant parties, and according to a recently released study and report by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the VA has a track record for neglecting these national treasures.

By neglecting these properties, veterans in South Dakota and across the country have suffered by creating obstacles, so veterans can't gain access to health care. Many of them have to travel many, many hours for just a simple checkup.

My amendment is very simple and straightforward. It protects rural veterans access to health care by ensuring that no funds will go towards closing rural hospitals in high-need areas that are designated as national historic landmarks.

Reports have shown that the VA needs to pay more attention to these national landmarks it is entrusted with and focus on the veterans that these facilities serve. I urge my colleagues to support this commonsense amendment.

I want to thank the chairman, ranking member, and the committee staff for helping me offer it today, and I ask for your support.

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

The Acting CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentlewoman from South Dakota (Mrs. NOEM).

The amendment was agreed to.

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to clause 6 of rule XVIII, proceedings will now resume on those amendments on which further proceedings were postponed in the following order:

Amendment No. 5 by Mr. MORAN of Virginia.

An amendment by Mr. BLUMENAUER of Oregon.

The Chair will reduce to 2 minutes the time for any electronic vote after the first vote in this series.

AMENDMENT NO. 5 OFFERED BY MR. MORAN

The Acting CHAIR. The unfinished business is the demand for a recorded vote on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. MORAN) on which further proceedings were postponed and on which the noes prevailed by voice vote.

The Clerk will redesignate the amendment.

The Clerk redesignated the amendment.

RECORDED VOTE

The Acting CHAIR. A recorded vote has been demanded.

A recorded vote was ordered.

The vote was taken by electronic device, and there were—ayes 168, noes 249, not voting 14, as follows:

[Roll No. 185]

AYES—168

Amash	Frankel (FL)	Nadler
Bass	Fudge	Napolitano
Beatty	Gabbard	Neal
Becerra	Garamendi	Nolan
Bera (CA)	Gibson	O'Rourke
Bishop (GA)	Grayson	Pallone
Bishop (NY)	Green, Al	Pascarell
Blumenauer	Hahn	Pastor (AZ)
Bonamici	Hanabusa	Payne
Brady (PA)	Hastings (FL)	Pelosi
Braley (IA)	Heck (WA)	Perlmutter
Brown (FL)	Higgins	Peters (CA)
Bustos	Himes	Pingree (ME)
Butterfield	Holt	Pocan
Capps	Honda	Polis
Capuano	Horsford	Price (NC)
Cárdenas	Hoyer	Quigley
Carney	Huffman	Rangel
Carson (IN)	Israel	Roybal-Allard
Cartwright	Jackson Lee	Rush
Castor (FL)	Jeffries	Ryan (OH)
Castro (TX)	Johnson (GA)	Sánchez, Linda T.
Chu	Johnson, E. B.	Sanford
Ciçilline	Kaptur	Sarbanes
Clark (MA)	Keating	Schakowsky
Clarke (NY)	Kelly (IL)	Schiff
Clay	Kennedy	Schneider
Cleaver	Kildee	Schrader
Clyburn	Kilmer	Scott (VA)
Cohen	Kind	Serrano
Connolly	Kuster	Sherman
Conyers	Langevin	Sires
Cooper	Larsen (WA)	Slaughter
Costa	Larson (CT)	Smith (WA)
Courtney	Lee (CA)	Speier
Crowley	Levin	Swalwell (CA)
Cummings	Loebsock	Takano
Davis (CA)	Lofgren	Thompson (CA)
Davis, Danny	Lowenthal	Thompson (MS)
DeFazio	Lowe	Tierney
DeGette	Lujan Grisham (NM)	Titus
Delaney	Luján, Ben Ray (NM)	Tonko
DeLauro	Lynch	Tsongas
DelBene	Maloney,	Van Hollen
Deutch	Carolyn	Vargas
Dingell	Matsui	Veasey
Doggett	McCarthy (NY)	Velázquez
Doyle	McColum	Vislosky
Duckworth	McDermott	Walz
Duncan (TN)	McGovern	Wasserman
Edwards	Meeks	Schultz
Ellison	Meng	Waters
Engel	Michaud	Waxman
Eshoo	Miller, George	Welch
Esty	Moore	Wilson (FL)
Farr	Moran	Yarmuth
Fattah		
Foster		

NOES—249

Aderholt	Chabot	Forbes
Amodei	Chaffetz	Fortenberry
Bachus	Coble	Fox
Barber	Coffman	Franks (AZ)
Barletta	Cole	Frelinghuysen
Barr	Collins (GA)	Gallego
Barrow (GA)	Collins (NY)	Garcia
Barton	Conaway	Gardner
Benishek	Cook	Garrett
Bentivolio	Cotton	Gerlach
Bilirakis	Cramer	Gibbs
Bishop (UT)	Crawford	Gingrey (GA)
Black	Crenshaw	Gohmert
Blackburn	Cuellar	Goodlatte
Boustany	Culberson	Gosar
Bridenstine	Daines	Gowdy
Brooks (AL)	Davis, Rodney	Granger
Brooks (IN)	Denham	Graves (GA)
Broun (GA)	Dent	Graves (MO)
Brownley (CA)	DeSantis	Griffith (VA)
Buchanan	DesJarlais	Grijalva
Bucshon	Diaz-Balart	Grimm
Burgess	Duffy	Guthrie
Byrne	Duncan (SC)	Hall
Calvert	Ellmers	Hanna
Camp	Farenthold	Harris
Campbell	Fincher	Hartzler
Cantor	Fitzpatrick	Hastings (WA)
Capito	Fleischmann	Heck (NV)
Carter	Fleming	Hensarling
Cassidy	Flores	Herrera Beutler

Holding	Meehan	Ryan (WI)
Hudson	Messer	Salmon
Huelskamp	Mica	Sanchez, Loretta
Huizenga (MI)	Miller (FL)	Scalise
Hultgren	Miller (MI)	Schock
Hunter	Miller, Gary	Schweikert
Hurt	Mullin	Scott, Austin
Issa	Mulvaney	Scott, David
Jenkins	Murphy (FL)	Sensenbrenner
Johnson (OH)	Murphy (PA)	Sessions
Johnson, Sam	Negrete McLeod	Sewell (AL)
Jolly	Neugebauer	Shea-Porter
Jones	Noem	Shimkus
Jordan	Nugent	Shuster
Joyce	Nunes	Simpson
Kelly (PA)	Olson	Sinema
King (IA)	Owens	Smith (MO)
King (NY)	Palazzo	Smith (NE)
Kingston	Paulsen	Smith (NJ)
Kinzinger (IL)	Pearce	Smith (TX)
Kirkpatrick	Perry	Southland
Kline	Peters (MI)	Stewart
Labrador	Peterson	Stivers
LaMalfa	Petri	Stutzman
Lamborn	Pittenger	Terry
Lance	Pitts	Thompson (PA)
Lankford	Poe (TX)	Thornberry
Latham	Pompeo	Tiberi
Latta	Posey	Tipton
Lipinski	Price (GA)	Rahall
LoBiondo	Rahall	Turner
Long	Reed	Upton
Lucas	Reichert	Valadao
Luetkemeyer	Renacci	Vela
Lummis	Ribble	Wagner
Maffei	Rice (SC)	Walberg
Maloney, Sean	Rigell	Walden
Marchant	Roby	Walorski
Marino	Roe (TN)	Weber (TX)
Massie	Rogers (AL)	Webster (FL)
Matheson	Rogers (KY)	Wenstrup
McAllister	Rogers (MI)	Westmoreland
McCarthy (CA)	Rohrabacher	Williams
McCaul	Rokita	Wilson (SC)
McClintock	Rooney	Wittman
McHenry	Ros-Lehtinen	Wolf
McIntyre	Roskam	Womack
McKeon	Ross	Woodall
McKinley	Rothfus	Yoder
McMorris	Royce	Yoho
Rodgers	Ruiz	Young (AK)
McNerney	Runyan	Young (IN)
Meadows	Ruppersberger	

NOT VOTING—14

Bachmann	Gutiérrez	Richmond
Brady (TX)	Harper	Schwartz
Enyart	Hinojosa	Stockman
Green, Gene	Lewis	Whitfield
Griffin (AR)	Nunnelee	

□ 1901

Messrs. RUPPERSBERGER, BRIDENSTINE, COBLE, COFFMAN, RIGELL, AMODEI, and Mrs. CAPITO changed their vote from “aye” to “no.”

Mr. ISRAEL changed his vote from “no” to “aye.”

So the amendment was rejected.

The result of the vote was announced as above recorded.

Stated for:

Mr. GENE GREEN of Texas. Mr. Chair, on rollcall No. 185, had I been present, I would have voted “yes.”

(By unanimous consent, Mr. CRAWFORD was allowed to speak out of order.)

MOMENT OF SILENCE TO HONOR THE VICTIMS OF THE DEVASTATING STORMS

Mr. CRAWFORD. Mr. Speaker, I am honored to be joined here by my colleagues from Arkansas, Mississippi, Oklahoma, Alabama, and the States that have been impacted by the devastating storms that occurred earlier this week.

While we had hoped that the entire Mississippi and Arkansas delegations could join us, Representatives GREGG HARPER and ALAN NUNNELEE from Mis-

issippi, and Representative TIM GRIFFIN from Arkansas are back home today coordinating with Federal, State, and local officials who are organizing disaster assistance efforts. Tomorrow, Representative GRIFFIN will be touring the devastation in Arkansas’ Second District with Secretary Johnson from the Department of Homeland Security.

All these delegations have spent hours keeping in close contact with one another and with officials in Arkansas, in particular, regarding the tornado that ripped through Vilonia, Mayflower, El Paso, and Paron, leaving a path of destruction in central Arkansas. And the same is true for other affected States.

The destruction we have witnessed is heartbreaking, and our prayers go out to all those affected by all these devastating storms, especially those who lost loved ones.

Our delegations would like to thank the first responders, volunteers, and neighboring communities for all of their assistance, donations, prayers, and tireless efforts during this difficult time. Their hard work and dedication has saved lives.

We also urge those who can to continue to help in any way they can to assist in the recovery and rebuilding of the neighborhoods and communities that were impacted by these storms.

We also honor and remember those we lost, and Representative GRIFFIN asked that I share a story of one of his constituents, U.S. Air Force Master Sergeant Daniel Wassom, who served as a loadmaster instructor with the 189th Airlift Wing at Little Rock Air Force Base.

Master Sergeant Wassom lived in Vilonia, Arkansas, with his wife, Suzanne, and his two young daughters. According to reports, Master Sergeant Wassom sacrificed his own life to shield his 5-year-old daughter from falling debris. His example of selflessness and bravery during this disaster is one all Americans and Arkansans can admire.

I now ask for a moment of silent prayer to honor all the victims of those recent tragic events.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. BLUMENAUER

The Acting CHAIR. Without objection, 2-minute voting will continue.

There was no objection.

The Acting CHAIR. The unfinished business is the demand for a recorded vote on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. BLUMENAUER) on which further proceedings were postponed and on which the noes prevailed by voice vote.

The Clerk will redesignate the amendment.

The Clerk redesignated the amendment.

RECORDED VOTE

The Acting CHAIR. A recorded vote has been demanded.

A recorded vote was ordered.

The Acting CHAIR. This is a 2-minute vote.

The vote was taken by electronic device, and there were—ayes 195, noes 222, not voting 14, as follows:

[Roll No. 186]

AYES—195

Amash	Grayson	O’Rourke
Beatty	Green, Al	Owens
Becerra	Grijalva	Pallone
Benishek	Hahn	Pascrell
Bera (CA)	Hanabusa	Pastor (AZ)
Bishop (GA)	Hanna	Payne
Bishop (NY)	Hastings (FL)	Pelosi
Blumenauer	Heck (NV)	Perlmutter
Bonamici	Heck (WA)	Peters (CA)
Brady (PA)	Higgins	Peters (MI)
Braley (IA)	Himes	Pingree (ME)
Brooks (AL)	Holt	Pocan
Broun (GA)	Honda	Polis
Brown (FL)	Horsford	Price (NC)
Brownley (CA)	Hoyer	Quigley
Bustos	Huffman	Rangel
Butterfield	Hunter	Reed
Capps	Israel	Rigell
Capuano	Jackson Lee	Rohrabacher
Cárdenas	Jeffries	Roybal-Allard
Carney	Johnson (GA)	Ruiz
Carson (IN)	Johnson, E. B.	Ruppersberger
Cartwright	Jones	Rush
Castor (FL)	Kaptur	Ryan (OH)
Castro (TX)	Kelly (IL)	Sánchez, Linda
Chu	Kildee	T.
Ciçilline	Kilmer	Sanchez, Loretta
Clark (MA)	Kind	Sanford
Clarke (NY)	Kuster	Sarbanes
Clay	Langevin	Schakowsky
Cleaver	Larson (CT)	Schiff
Clyburn	Lee (CA)	Schneider
Cohen	LoBiondo	Schroder
Collins (NY)	Loebsock	Schweikert
Connolly	Lofgren	Scott (VA)
Conyers	Lowenthal	Serrano
Cooper	Lowe	Shea-Porter
Costa	Lujan Grisham	Sherman
Courtney	(NM)	Sinema
Crowley	Luján, Ben Ray	Sires
Cummings	(NM)	Slaughter
Daines	Lynch	Smith (WA)
Davis (CA)	Maffei	Speier
Davis, Danny	Maloney,	Stivers
DeFazio	Carolyn	Swalwell (CA)
DeGette	Maloney, Sean	Takano
Delaney	Massie	Thompson (CA)
DeLauro	Matsui	Thompson (MS)
DelBene	McCarthy (NY)	Tierney
Deutch	McClintock	Titus
Dingell	McCollum	Tonko
Doggett	McDermott	Tsongas
Doyle	McGovern	Upton
Duckworth	McNerney	Van Hollen
Edwards	Meeks	Vargas
Ellison	Meng	Veasey
Engel	Michaud	Velázquez
Eshoo	Miller, George	Vislosky
Esty	Moore	Walz
Farr	Moran	Waters
Fattah	Mulvaney	Waxman
Foster	Murphy (FL)	Welch
Frankel (FL)	Nadler	Wilson (FL)
Fudge	Napolitano	Yarmuth
Gabbard	Neal	Young (AK)
Garamendi	Negrete McLeod	
García	Nolan	

NOES—222

Aderholt	Campbell	DesJarlais
Amodei	Cantor	Diaz-Balart
Bachmann	Capito	Duffy
Bachus	Carter	Duncan (SC)
Barber	Cassidy	Duncan (TN)
Barletta	Chabot	Ellmers
Barr	Chaffetz	Farenthold
Barrow (GA)	Coble	Fincher
Barton	Coffman	Fitzpatrick
Bentivolio	Cole	Fleischmann
Bilirakis	Collins (GA)	Fleming
Bishop (UT)	Conaway	Flores
Black	Cook	Forbes
Blackburn	Cotton	Fortenberry
Boustany	Cramer	Fox
Bridenstine	Crawford	Franks (AZ)
Brooks (IN)	Crenshaw	Frelinghuysen
Buchanan	Cuellar	Galleo
Bucshon	Culberson	Gardner
Burgess	Davis, Rodney	Garrett
Byrne	Denham	Gerlach
Calvert	Dent	Gibbs
Camp	DeSantis	Gibson

Gingrey (GA) Lummis Roskam
 Gohmert Marchant Ross
 Goodlatte Marino Rothfus
 Gosar Matheson Royce
 Gowdy McAllister Runyan
 Granger McCarthy (CA) Ryan (WI)
 Graves (GA) McCaul Salmon
 Graves (MO) McHenry Scalise
 Griffith (VA) McIntyre Schock
 Grimm McKeon Scott, Austin
 Guthrie McKinley Scott, David
 Hall McMorris Sensenbrenner
 Harris Rodgers Sessions
 Hartzler Meadows Sewell (AL)
 Hastings (WA) Meehan Shimkus
 Hensarling Messer Shuster
 Herrera Beutler Mica Simpson
 Holding Miller (FL) Smith (MO)
 Hudson Miller (MI) Smith (NE)
 Huelskamp Miller, Gary Smith (NJ)
 Huizenga (MI) Mullin Smith (TX)
 Hultgren Murphy (PA) Southerland
 Hurt Neugebauer Stewart
 Issa Noem Stutzman
 Jenkins Nugent Terry
 Johnson (OH) Nunes Thompson (PA)
 Johnson, Sam Olson Thornberry
 Jolly Palazzo Tiberi
 Jordan Paulsen Tipton
 Joyce Pearce Turner
 Keating Perry Valadao
 Kelly (PA) Peterson Vela
 Kennedy Petri Wagner
 King (IA) Pittenger Walberg
 King (NY) Pitts Walden
 Kingston Poe (TX) Walorski
 Kinzinger (IL) Pompeo Wasserman
 Kirkpatrick Posey Schultz
 Kline Price (GA) Weber (TX)
 Labrador Rahall Webster (FL)
 LaMalfa Reichert Wenstrup
 Lamborn Renacci Westmoreland
 Lance Ribble Williams
 Lankford Rice (SC) Wilson (SC)
 Larsen (WA) Roby Wittman
 Latham Roe (TN) Wolf
 Latta Rogers (AL) Womack
 Levin Rogers (KY) Woodall
 Lipinski Rogers (MI) Yoder
 Long Rokita Yoho
 Lucas Rooney Yoho
 Luetkemeyer Ros-Lehtinen Young (IN)

NOT VOTING—14

Bass Gutiérrez Richmond
 Brady (TX) Harper Schwartz
 Enyart Hinojosa Stockman
 Green, Gene Lewis Whitfield
 Griffin (AR) Nunnelee

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE ACTING CHAIR

The Acting CHAIR (during the vote). There is 1 minute remaining.

□ 1912

So the amendment was rejected.

The result of the vote was announced as above recorded.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will read the remainder of the bill.

The Clerk read as follows:

This Act may be cited as the “Military Construction and Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2015”.

Mr. CULBERSON. Mr. Chairman, I move that the Committee do now rise and report the bill back to the House with sundry amendments, and with the recommendation that the amendments be agreed to and that the bill, as amended, do pass.

The motion was agreed to.

Accordingly, the Committee rose; and the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. HOLDING) having assumed the chair, Mr. COLLINS of Georgia, Acting Chair of the Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union, reported that that Committee, having had under consideration the bill (H.R. 4486) making appropriations for military construction, the Department of Veterans Af-

fairs, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2015, and for other purposes, directed him to report the bill back to the House with sundry amendments adopted in the Committee of the Whole, with the recommendation that the amendments be agreed to and that the bill, as amended, do pass.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under House Resolution 557, the previous question is ordered.

Is a separate vote demanded on any amendment reported from the Committee of the Whole? If not, the Chair will put them en gros.

The amendments were agreed to.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the engrossment and third reading of the bill.

The bill was ordered to be engrossed and read a third time, and was read the third time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the passage of the bill.

Under clause 10 of rule XX, the yeas and nays are ordered.

This is a 5-minute vote.

The vote was taken by electronic device, and there were—yeas 416, nays 1, not voting 14, as follows:

[Roll No. 187]

YEAS—416

Aderholt Cicilline Fattah
 Amash Clark (MA) Fincher
 Amodei Clarke (NY) Fitzpatrick
 Bachmann Clay Fleischmann
 Bachus Cleaver Fleming
 Barber Clyburn Flores
 Barletta Coble Forbes
 Barr Coffman Fortenberry
 Barrow (GA) Cohen Foster
 Barton Cole Fox
 Bass Collins (GA) Frankel (FL)
 Beatty Collins (NY) Franks (AZ)
 Becerra Conaway Frelinghuysen
 Benishek Connolly Fudge
 Bentivolio Conyers Gabbard
 Bera (CA) Cook Gallego
 Bilirakis Cooper Garamendi
 Bishop (GA) Costa Garcia
 Bishop (NY) Cotton Gardner
 Bishop (UT) Courtney Garrett
 Black Cramer Gerlach
 Blackburn Crawford Gibbs
 Blumenauer Crenshaw Gibson
 Bonamici Crowley Gohmert
 Boustany Cuellar Goodlatte
 Brady (PA) Culberson Gosar
 Brady (TX) Cummings Gowdy
 Bridenstine Daines Granger
 Brooks (AL) Davis (CA) Graves (GA)
 Brooks (IN) Davis, Danny Graves (MO)
 Broun (GA) Davis, Rodney Grayson
 Brown (FL) DeFazio Green, Al
 Brownley (CA) DeGette Green, Gene
 Buchanan Delaney Griffith (VA)
 Bucshon DeLauro Grijalva
 Burgess DelBene Grimm
 Bustos Denham Guthrie
 Butterfield Dent Hahn
 Byrne DeSantis Hall
 Calvert DesJarlais Hanabusa
 Camp Deutch Hanna
 Campbell Diaz-Balart Harris
 Cantor Dingell Hartzler
 Capito Doggett Hastings (FL)
 Capps Doyle Hastings (WA)
 Capuano Duckworth Heck (NV)
 Cárdenas Duffy Heck (WA)
 Carney Duncan (SC) Hensarling
 Carson (IN) Duncan (TN) Herrera Beutler
 Carter Edwards Higgins
 Cartwright Ellison Himes
 Cassidy Ellmers Holding
 Castor (FL) Engel Holt
 Castro (TX) Eshoo Honda
 Chabot Esty Horsford
 Chaffetz Farenthold Hoyer
 Chu Farr Hudon

Huelskamp Meehan Sanchez, Loretta
 Huffman Meeks Sanford
 Huizenga (MI) Meng Sarbanes
 Hultgren Messer Scalise
 Hunter Mica Schakowsky
 Hurt Michaud Schiff
 Israel Miller (FL) Schneider
 Issa Miller (MI) Schock
 Jackson Lee Miller, Gary Schrader
 Jeffries Miller, George Schweikert
 Jenkins Moore Scott (VA)
 Johnson (GA) Moran Scott, Austin
 Johnson (OH) Mullin Scott, David
 Johnson, E. B. Mulvaney Sensenbrenner
 Johnson, Sam Murphy (FL)
 Jolly Murphy (PA) Serrano
 Jones Nadler Sessions
 Jordan Napolitano Sewell (AL)
 Joyce Neal Shea-Porter
 Kaptur Negrete McLeod Sherman
 Keating Neugebauer Shimkus
 Kelly (IL) Noem Shuster
 Kelly (PA) Nolan Simpson
 Kennedy Nugent Sinema
 Kildee Nunes Sires
 Kilmer O'Rourke Slaughter
 Kind Olson Smith (MO)
 King (IA) Owens Smith (NE)
 King (NY) Palazzo Smith (NJ)
 Kingston Pallone Smith (TX)
 Kinzinger (IL) Pascrell Smith (WA)
 Kirkpatrick Pastor (AZ) Southerland
 Kline Paulsen Speier
 Kuster Kuster Stewart
 LaMalfa Payne Stivers
 Lamborn Pearce Stutzman
 Lance Pelosi Swalwell (CA)
 Langevin Perlmutter Takano
 Lankford Perry Terry
 Lankford Peters (CA) Thompson (CA)
 Larsen (WA) Peters (MI) Thompson (MS)
 Latham Peterson Thompson (PA)
 Latta Petri Thornberry
 Lee (CA) Pingree (ME) Tiberi
 Levin Pittenger Tierney
 Lipinski Pitts Tipton
 LoBiondo Pocan Titus
 Loeb sack Poe (TX) Tonko
 Lofgren Polis Tsongas
 Long Pompeo Turner
 Lowenthal Posey Upton
 Lowey Price (GA) Valadao
 Lucas Price (NC) Van Hollen
 Luetkemeyer Quigley Vargas
 Lujan Grisham Rahall Veasey
 (NM) Rangel Vela
 Luján, Ben Ray Reed Velázquez
 (NM) Reichert Visclosky
 Lummis Renacci Wagner
 Lynch Ribble Walberg
 Maffei Rice (SC) Walden
 Maloney, Carolyn Rigell Walorski
 Carolyn Roby Walz
 Maloney, Sean Roe (TN) Wasserman
 Marchant Rogers (AL) Schultz
 Maro Marino Rogers (KY) Waters
 Massie Rogers (MI) Waxman
 Matheson Rohrabacher Weber (TX)
 Matsui Rokita Webster (FL)
 Gosar Rooney Welch
 McAllister Ros-Lehtinen Westmoreland
 McCarthy (CA) McCarthy (NY) Roskam
 McCarthy (NY) McCaul Rothfus
 McClintock McCollum Roybal-Allard
 McCollum McDermott Royce
 McDermott McGovern Ruiz
 McGovern McHenry Runyan
 McHenry McIntyre Ruppertsberger
 McIntyre Grimm Rush
 McKeon Guthrie Ryan (OH)
 McKinley Hahn Ryan (WI)
 McMorris Hall Salmon
 Rodgers Hahn Sánchez, Linda
 McNerney McNeary T. Young (AK)
 Meadows Meadows Young (IN)

NAYS—1

Labrador

NOT VOTING—14

Braley (IA) Harper Richmond
 Enyart Hinojosa Schwartz
 Gingrey (GA) Larson (CT) Stockman
 Griffin (AR) Lewis Whitfield
 Gutiérrez Nunnelee

□ 1921

So the bill was passed.

The result of the vote was announced as above recorded.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

HOUR OF MEETING ON TOMORROW

Mr. CULBERSON. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that when the House adjourns today, it adjourn to meet at 9 a.m. tomorrow.

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

There was no objection.

APPROVE KEYSTONE XL PIPELINE

(Mr. DAINES asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. DAINES. Mr. Speaker, our friends in the Senate are once again playing games with the future of our country.

Senate Majority Leader HARRY REID has kindly offered to allow Senators to vote on a nonbinding resolution expressing support for building the Keystone XL pipeline. That is right, a nonbinding expression that requires no action and no real solutions.

Well, grand gestures and words alone don't create jobs. The American people deserve real action. Senate Democrats who claim to support approving the Keystone XL pipeline need to stand up and demand that HARRY REID allow a real vote to approve the Keystone XL pipeline, a vote that actually puts words into action and rhetoric into results.

The American people have waited long enough. Montanans are tired of the political games, the endless delays, and politicians who refuse to put job creation ahead of partisanship. The House has acted. It is time for the Senate to step up and do the same.

NATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER

(Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, tomorrow marks the 63rd annual National Day of Prayer. On this day, we praise God for the many blessings bestowed upon us. During times of great adversity and in times of great prosperity, Americans of all walks of life seek God's guidance.

Today, we face many great challenges, including brave men and women serving in harm's way and an economy that must grow faster and lift more Americans, especially those in need, to greater security. We pray that the families of this Nation may find renewed strength and belief in God's word and grace.

We also seek the Lord as we pray for those who serve in our military. We ask for God to protect them and watch over them.

Mr. Speaker, let us seek God's guidance and pray he will grant us the wisdom to overcome the many trials and tests before our Nation and its people.

On the National Day of Prayer, may God bless this great Nation and all its citizens.

TWELVE DOLLARS

(Mr. POE of Texas asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. POE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, \$12. In Nigeria, \$12 is the cost of a bride slave. Recently, around 200 girls went to school and never came home. They were kidnapped and, for \$12 apiece, sold to the Islamic militant terrorist group Boko Haram. They were forced into marriage and raped—modern sex slavery.

This inhuman human trafficking crime is a world problem that needs action. Today, the United States took a huge step forward in the battle against this scourge. The Judiciary Committee passed three bills fighting this growing problem here in America.

The Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act that I sponsored, along with CAROLYN MALONEY of New York, was passed and supports and protects victims of this horrible crime. It punishes the sex trafficker and now punishes the buyer, the child rapist. It helps rescue child victims and treats them as victims, rather than child prostitutes.

No life deserves to be stolen and sold for \$12. Children should not be for sale anywhere, at any time, for any reason.

And that's just the way it is.

AMERICA'S CREDIBILITY AROUND THE WORLD

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. DAINES). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2013, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. GOHMERT) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. GOHMERT. Mr. Speaker, there is a lot going on in the world right now, and America seems to continue to lose credibility around the world when we travel abroad, and we have leaders from other countries, especially moderate Muslim allies and friends, who wonder why we are not helping in the war against terrorism, the war against radical Islam.

□ 1930

Moderate Muslims realize what it is. It is radical Islam. It is exactly what the wonderful people of Egypt rose up and rebelled against by the millions. In fact, there were more millions of Egyptians that signed a petition in support of removing Morsi than even he ever claimed voted for him.

The Muslim Brotherhood responded, and they have burned churches, and they have persecuted Christians and Jews. The Coptic Christian Pope has

told us of his concern about his support for radical Islam because the United States and even a couple of Republican Senators down the hall had supported, seemed to support, went over and said: let's release Morsi. They seemed to want Muslim Brotherhood back in charge.

So it was shocking for this administration to say we are not going to supply the military equipment to those who are against radical Islam that we had agreed to provide to those who represent radical Islam—the Muslim Brotherhood.

Yes, their party—their political party in Egypt is called the Freedom and Justice Party because, under their definition, freedom means the freedom to worship only Allah and justice means only justice that comes from shari'a law, so they have a little different definition of freedom and justice.

In their less than 100-year history as an entity, the Muslim Brotherhood has killed so many innocent children, women, and men who had no grievance or gripe with Islam, but it should also be noted that one of the reasons that moderate Muslims are so supportive of our effort to stop radical Islam is because, whenever a moderate Muslim stands up to radical Islam, they immediately go to the front of the line to be killed or persecuted by radical Islamists, so we share that.

That is why the enemy of our enemy can be somebody with whom we just may be able to cooperate.

That is what happened in Afghanistan, when President Bush committed to go after the Taliban in October, November, December of 2001. We put in less than 500 Americans—special operations, Special Forces, intelligence—we gave them air support, we gave them some weapons, and we had to negotiate.

The Bush administration did a phenomenal job of negotiating with Northern Alliance tribal leaders because they knew, to be successful about the Taliban, they were going to have to work together, so we were able to pull that off. There may have been some cash that actually was utilized to grease the skids to make it work, and it worked.

Within 4 months or so, the Taliban was defeated. The legendary General Dostum that this administration wants to classify as a war criminal defeated the Taliban for us as the leader of the Northern Alliance tribes.

In a meeting with him, along with DANA ROHRBACHER, STEVE KING, and a few others were meeting with some of the Northern Alliance leaders, since we knew about that last final battle where the Northern Alliance went after the last stronghold of the Taliban elevated high up a hill or mountain, General Dostum, through an interpreter, explained he knew that, if they sent people on foot, they would never get there.

There would be too many bullets and rocket-propelled grenades. They would