

generous and considerate human beings. I will sorely miss her.

CONFERENCE REPORT ON H.R. 2099,
DEPARTMENTS OF VETERANS
AFFAIRS AND HOUSING AND
URBAN DEVELOPMENT, AND
INDEPENDENT AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 1996

SPEECH OF

HON. Y. TIM HUTCHINSON

OF ARKANSAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, November 29, 1995

Mr. HUTCHINSON. Mr. Speaker, as a staunch defender of both veterans and the balanced budget, I want to set the record straight on how veterans are being treated under the GOP's 7-year plan.

Under the conference agreement for VA/ HUD appropriations, VA Medical Care is increased by \$400 million over last year's level. Medical Research is increased by \$5 million over last year's level and the Minor Construction Program is increased by \$37 million over last year's level. Through responsible deficit reduction measures, we seek to preserve the dignity of veterans and the standard of living for future generations.

The VA/ HUD Appropriations Act is very generous to veterans' programs. In fact, the VA/ HUD act reflects cuts in nearly every other agency program or account except VA's Medical Care Account. This increase comes at a time of a declining population and declining utilization of VA hospitals. It might interest you to know that on any given day between 23 percent and 50 percent of all beds in VA hospitals lie vacant. The money used to staff, and heat empty beds could be better used in the actual delivery of services to veterans.

According to GAO, if the VA were to analyze the President's budget using the same assumptions the Department used when it analyzed the budget approved by the Congress, the VA would find that veterans are better off under the congressional budget than under the President's own plan. When the Secretary of Veterans Affairs was asked if veterans would suffer more under the Clinton administration's plan he said, "that's absolutely right."

The Republican plan will preserve and fund VA health care at a level that ensures the quality that veterans have come to expect. But it also tasks the system to become more efficient and deliver care in a more cost-effective manner. VA spends more than \$5,000 per patient per year. This is \$1,800 more than Medicare and a whopping \$3,800 more than the private sector. Looking at these numbers, there must be ways for the VA to become more efficient.

Health care is changing rapidly and VA must be part of that change.

We need to question the need for more buildings and instead look for ways to provide more care. VA has historically been an institutionally based system that now is forced to support an aging network of 173 hospitals, 376 outpatient clinics, 133 nursing homes, and 39 domiciliaries. We need to seriously examine what, where, and if VA needs to build in order to better serve veterans. The approach taken by this conference bill is a step in the right di-

rection by asking the VA to assemble a long-term plan for its infrastructure and construction needs. The VA, must begin to plan strategically like the private sector, taking into consideration such factors as an increasingly constrained budgetary environment, a declining veteran population, shifting demographics, and the rapidly changing health care market. Today, when 9 out of 10 veterans have access to private health insurance, and 10 percent of current VA users are leaving the VA system to use Medicare, we seriously have to question the need for more facilities. The major construction level of \$136 million and the minor construction level of \$190 million reverse the historical trend of anchoring the VA in bricks and mortar. Today's health care is becoming less and less institutional. The VA must be part of that trend. It must have the flexibility to go to the veterans instead of requiring the veteran to travel long distances to procure health care in often aging and obsolete facilities.

I believe that veterans and taxpayers will be better served by a VA that is more efficient and provides more accountability to those who provide the basis of its support. This bill is pro-veteran. It shows that Republicans are committed to putting veterans first.

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SPEECH OF

HON. CORRINE BROWN

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, November 29, 1995

Ms. BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I rise in opposition to the conference report on the VA-HUD appropriations bill. President Clinton has announced his intention to veto this bill because it funds veterans programs at \$900 million less than what he requested in his budget.

Right now, nearly 2 million veterans live in Florida, nearly 60,000 in my district alone. More veterans live in Florida than in any other State except one. And 100 veterans move to Florida every day. These men and women are growing older and need medical care.

Mr. Speaker, this bill is a slap in the face to Florida's veterans. The President requested \$154 million for the Brevard County Hospital which would serve Florida's veterans in and around my district. But the Republicans in Congress took away that money. That hospital so desperately needed by veterans will not be built.

Where do sick veterans in Florida go for hospital care? For the last few years, hundreds of Florida veterans who have developed psychological problems are shipped out of State. That is right. They get shipped off to Mississippi and Alabama for their care. Two beautiful States, indeed, but far away from their loved ones in Florida. I think this is wrong. To me, there is nothing more compelling than the need to care for veterans who suffer the effects of fighting our wars. That is why Florida needs the Brevard County Hospital.

According to the Department of Veterans Affairs, with this bill, almost all renovation and construction of veteran's health facilities will terminate. A funding freeze would lead to a sharp reduction in the number of employees who counsel veterans and decide claims for benefits. The VA's award-winning medical and prosthetic research program would be cut in every year under the freeze.

Mr. Speaker, balancing the budget is a top priority. And I am committed to doing just that. The President is also committed to a balanced budget. But in balancing the budget, a shared sacrifice is necessary. And I share the President's view that we must not balance the budget on the backs of our Nation's most fragile citizens—seniors, veterans, poor women, children, and the disabled.

Our Nation's veterans earned their benefits through service and sacrifice. It should be America's highest priority to honor our commitment with our veterans. I believe it is wrong to abandon our veterans who have gone in harm's way to serve our country. We need to take care of our U.S. servicemen and women—when they are fighting our wars, and when, as veterans, they need health care. I urge my colleagues to vote against this bill.

AMOS F. LONGORIA POST OFFICE
BUILDING

HON. FRANK TEJEDA

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, November 30, 1995

Mr. TEJEDA. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce to the House that I have introduced legislation today to designate the United States Post Office building located at 7980 FM 327 in Elmendorf, TX as the "Amos F. Longoria Post Office Building."

During the August district work period, the citizens of Elmendorf presented me with a petition requesting that their new postal building, opening in December 1995, be named in honor of Pvt. Amos F. Longoria.

Amos Longoria was born in Elmendorf, TX on September 12, 1924. He was the son of humble parents, Bonaficio and Juanita F. Longoria. He had four sisters and two brothers: Pauline Longoria, Marie Longoria Welch, George Longoria, William Longoria, Tommie Longoria Lynch, and Bonnie Longoria de Leon.

Amos F. Longoria also had many close friends who grew up with him and shared love and caring during his short life. Amos is remembered as a happy person. He had many friends, and was kind and considerate to all. He enjoyed hunting, fishing, and many other sporting activities. He enjoyed music, played the guitar and sang. He is said to have had a good sense of humor, liked to laugh and make others laugh.

During his last year of school at Elmendorf, Amos F. Longoria was drafted into the U.S. Army in April of 1943. World War II was raging. Amos, though only 18 years old, was excited to report for basic training at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, TX. He was then sent to Camp Wheeler in Georgia.

Amos F. Longoria volunteered to serve overseas in the European theater. He had hopes of being near his older brother, George, who was serving in the 36th Infantry Division.