

Mr. Speaker, we give thanks for the service of our veterans; and to those who served and paid the ultimate price, we give our deepest thanks.

PROVIDING FOR CONSIDERATION OF H.R. 2528, MILITARY QUALITY OF LIFE AND VETERANS AFFAIRS APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2006

Mr. GINGREY. Mr. Speaker, by direction of the Committee on Rules, I call up House Resolution 298 and ask for its immediate consideration.

The Clerk read the resolution, as follows:

H. RES. 298

Resolved, That at any time after the adoption of this resolution the Speaker may, pursuant to clause 2(b) of rule XVIII, declare the House resolved into the Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union for consideration of the bill (H.R. 2528) making appropriations for military quality of life functions of the Department of Defense, military construction, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2006, and for other purposes. The first reading of the bill shall be dispensed with. All points of order against consideration of the bill are waived. General debate shall be confined to the bill and shall not exceed one hour equally divided and controlled by the chairman and ranking minority member of the Committee on Appropriations. After general debate the bill shall be considered for amendment under the five-minute rule. Points of order against provisions in the bill for failure to comply with clause 2 of rule XXI are waived. During consideration of the bill for amendment, the Chairman of the Committee of the Whole may accord priority in recognition on the basis of whether the Member offering an amendment has caused it to be printed in the portion of the Congressional Record designated for that purpose in clause 8 of rule XVIII. Amendments so printed shall be considered as read. When the committee rises and reports the bill back to the House with a recommendation that the bill do pass, the previous question shall be considered as ordered on the bill and amendments thereto to final passage without intervening motion except one motion to recommit with or without instructions.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. LATHAM). The gentleman from Georgia (Mr. GINGREY) is recognized for 1 hour.

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

Mr. Speaker, H. Res. 298 is an open rule providing for consideration of H.R. 2528, the Military Quality of Life and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Act of 2006. The rule allows for 1 hour of general debate, equally divided and controlled by the chairman and ranking minority member of the Committee on Appropriations. It waives all points of order against consideration of the bill. It waives points of order against provisions in the bill for failure to comply with clause 2 of rule XXI, prohibiting unauthorized appropriations or legisla-

tive provisions in an appropriations bill.

It authorizes the Chair to accord priority and recognition to Members who have preprinted their amendments in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD, and it provides one motion to recommit with or without instructions. Under the rules of the House, the bill shall be read for amendment by paragraph.

Mr. Speaker, today I am proud to present for consideration the rule for the very first Military Quality of Life and Veterans Affairs Appropriation bill. This important subcommittee was formed to take an all-inclusive look at the programs related to the quality of life for the brave servicemen and -women who currently serve America in the Armed Forces, their families and those men and women who sacrificed so much for our freedom in the past.

I also believe the bill before us achieves this important goal in a fiscally responsible manner. The new subcommittee held 14 hearings this year covering a wide range of issues pertaining to their new jurisdiction, and I believe their product is a strong one.

The underlying bill totals \$121.8 billion of which \$85.2 billion is discretionary and \$36.6 billion is mandatory. The discretionary funding level represents a \$1 billion increase above the President's request and \$5.9 billion above last year's enacted level. The bill funds the Department of Veterans Affairs at \$68.1 billion, \$2.3 billion above the fiscal year 2005 enacted level, and \$635 million above the 2006 budget request.

Particularly important is the \$21 billion for veterans medical services, \$1.6 billion above the 2005 enacted level and a billion dollars more than the budget request. This is an 8.5 percent increase over last year's level, and an 18.2 percent increase in medical services from fiscal year 2004.

Perhaps most importantly, and what I heard the most about from the veterans back home in northwest Georgia, is that this bill does not contain any new fees for veterans medical services or prescription drugs. The bill restores funding for long-term care to the level it was in the fiscal year 2005 appropriation legislation, and the bill directs the Secretary to work with the National Association of State Veterans Homes to generate an agreeable policy to make the program function more effectively for the veterans and for the taxpayer.

Mr. Speaker, there are two State veterans homes in Georgia that are hugely important to many aging citizens and their families, and I am personally grateful for this measure.

Additionally, the bill includes language directing the Department to spend more than \$2.2 billion on specialty mental health care in fiscal year 2006, an important issue that many Members of Congress brought to the attention of the chairman. The subcommittee also included report language directing the VA to double the

funding available for mental health research.

For the Department of Defense, the bill provides a total of \$53.5 billion, and within this total is funding for military construction, for family housing construction and maintenance, basic allowance for housing payments, facilities maintenance, modernization, and environmental restoration.

Also included in this bill is \$20 billion for the Defense health program. This is an increase of \$1.8 billion above the fiscal year 2005 enacted level, and it is \$192.3 million above the 2006 Presidential budget request.

This amount will sufficiently allow for ongoing preparation of our brave soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines while caring also for their families at home.

□ 1030

Finally, the subcommittee has allowed for greatly enhanced interaction between the Department of Defense and the VA to explore joint ventures that can enhance a continuity of services provided between the two departments.

Mr. Speaker, in a tough budget year such as this, we have a responsibility to make sure that scarce resources are allocated in the most effective and efficient manner possible. This bill achieves that goal.

Mr. Speaker, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge Subcommittee Chairman WALSH, Ranking Subcommittee Member EDWARDS and, of course, Chairman LEWIS for their vision and hard work on this bill. I look forward to this debate, and I encourage my colleagues to support the rule and the underlying bill.

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

Mr. MCGOVERN. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Georgia for yielding me the customary 30 minutes, and I yield myself 5 minutes.

Mr. Speaker, this is the first year that the House will consider a military quality of life-VA appropriations bill. As a result of the subcommittee realignment adopted earlier this year by the Appropriations Committee, military construction, Defense Department health programs and all veterans' programs are now contained in this one appropriations bill.

I want to commend Chairman WALSH and Ranking Member EDWARDS for the bill that they have crafted. Both gentlemen are well known for their skill at reaching out and working in a bipartisan manner and this bill reflects that collaboration as well as their deep commitment to our uniformed men and women and their families, both those in current service and those who have honored our Nation with past service.

Regrettably, while H.R. 2528 is a significant improvement over the President's shameful budget for veterans' health care, even this bill will not get the job done for the men and women who are depending on the Department

of Veterans Affairs to meet their health care needs. I appreciate that this bill is \$1 billion more than the President suggested for veterans' medical services, but a significant portion of that increase is offset by cutting the very personnel and equipment necessary for the VA to carry out its mission and provide timely, and quality, service to our veterans. Further, the increases in this bill are simply not enough to keep up with inflation and the rapidly growing number of veterans needing services from the VA.

Mr. Speaker, more than 20 percent of soldiers who have left active duty after service in Iraq or Afghanistan have sought health care services from the VA, and with no end of combat in sight, I am sure that that number will continue to rise. Recent studies show that the mental and psychological impact of war is taking its toll on our newest generation of veterans. Through February 11, 2005, according to a study performed by the VA, over 17,000 veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars have been diagnosed with mental disorders. The New England Journal of Medicine reported last July that nearly one in five soldiers is leaving the war with post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental health problems.

How can we ensure the successful treatment and rehabilitation of these veterans when we know that the system in place is already insufficient to meet current needs?

Mr. Speaker, this bill does not meet the needs of our veterans, old or new, because it simply does not provide the resources for the transition from soldier to veteran. It does not provide the resources needed to update and modernize crumbling facilities. It does not provide the funds to adequately staff and equip veterans' health care problems. You can spin it all you want, but those are the facts.

This is an important question of priorities, Mr. Speaker, and the Members of this House should have a chance to debate and vote on these priorities.

Last night in the Rules Committee, the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. OBEY) presented a very simple amendment to provide an additional \$2.6 billion for veterans' health care. To pay for this increase, the amendment proposed reducing the tax cut for people making over \$1 million this year in taxable income from \$140,000 to \$129,000.

But the Republicans on the Rules Committee said "no," Mr. Speaker. They voted not to allow the amendment to be debated on the floor today. They voted to deny every Member of this House from expressing what their priorities would be if given a chance to vote on the matter: a slightly smaller tax cut for millionaires? Or \$2.6 billion for our veterans? That is the choice. A smaller tax cut for millionaires, or to make sure our veterans get the health care that they need and that they deserve and have earned.

Mr. Speaker, it was even suggested in the Rules Committee last night that millionaires need this tax cut more than our veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan need the services provided by the veterans' health system. I could not disagree more. If this rule passes, the Members of this House will be denied their right to debate and vote on whether or not it is a priority for them to adequately fund the VA and health care for America's veterans.

At the end of this debate today, Mr. Speaker, I will call for a vote on the previous question. If the previous question is defeated, I will amend the rule so that we can consider and vote on the Obey amendment to increase funding for veterans' health services.

Last night, Mr. Speaker, the Republican majority on this floor voted to deny adequate health care to our National Guard and Reserves. It was shameful what happened on the floor last night. Today, they have a chance to redeem themselves by voting "no" on the previous question and allowing the Obey amendment to be voted on on this floor today.

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

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

In regard to the gentleman's comments about mental health care for our veterans, for the first time ever, the President proposed and Congress provided a dedicated pool of resources, actually \$2.2 billion, to provide specialty mental health care to veterans, particularly those who are returning from the combat area, as so many are now.

In order to better serve combat veterans, the Department of Veterans Affairs is directed to do a comprehensive study on post-traumatic stress disorder, focusing on improving mental health, mental health research, mental health care and access to information. In addition, in encouraging better cooperation and care of veterans and active military personnel, VA and the Department of Defense are directed to develop a plan to improve seamless transition on internal and external obstacles to transition and recommendations that would continue to enhance the continuity of care.

Mr. Speaker, in regard to total spending on VA medical care, let us just go back to 1999 and come forward to 2005 over the last 6 years. In 1999, VA medical care appropriations were \$17.8 billion. In fiscal year 2005, that number was \$29.9 billion. The increases over those 6 years:

1999 to 2000, 9.2 percent;
2000 to 2001, 11.3 percent;
2001 to 2002, a lean year, as we all know, because of the economy and 9/11; nevertheless, a 4.6 percent increase;
2002 to 2003, 11.9, an almost 12 percent increase;
2003 to 2004, another 11.4 percent increase;
2004 to 2005, a 6.2 percent increase.

The commitment is there. Absolutely the numbers show it. I do not see how anybody could refute that.

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

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

Let me just respond to the gentleman. He talks about how the Republican majority has increased the amount of money that we are spending on veterans' issues. But the bottom line is, we are at war and there are more and more veterans coming back. And so you can spin this all you want, but what you are providing in this bill is not nearly enough to take care of the needs of our veterans. That is a fact.

It is not just me saying it. The American Legion sent a letter to the Congress saying the same thing, that VA medical care is approximately \$2.5 billion short for fiscal year 2006. They write, As Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom veterans continue to seek timely access to the VA health care delivery system, older veterans should not be kicked to the curb to make room for the newest generation of wartime veterans.

The coalition of Amvets, Paralyzed Veterans of America, Disabled American Veterans and Veterans of Foreign Wars have endorsed the Obey amendment because, they wrote, the Obey amendment would provide the funding needed to meet fixed costs and to care for returning veterans as well as provide the resources the VA needs to meet shortfalls that are affecting veterans today.

We are asking you to support this amendment and to provide the dollars needed to care for servicemembers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as all veterans who rely upon the VA to provide their health care.

Almost every veterans organization in this country is saying that what we are doing here today is not enough. You can say that you have increased it a little bit, but the bottom line is that we are at war. We are in Afghanistan and we are in Iraq, and more and more veterans are coming back, and we do not have the resources in this bill to adequately take care of their needs.

Let us be clear. Let us not try to spin to the American people that somehow we are doing our job here. The Republican leadership has made a choice. They would rather spend the money to provide more tax cuts for millionaires and billionaires than adequately fund the VA budget. I think at a time of war that that is just absolutely wrong.

Mr. Speaker, I am happy to yield 3 minutes to my colleague on the committee, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. MATSUI).

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

Ms. MATSUI. Mr. Speaker, it is appropriate that the last bill we take up before recessing for the Memorial Day District Work Period is the military quality of life appropriations bill, the bill which includes funding for Veterans Affairs. Today, when we pass this

bill and fund veterans' programs, we are reaffirming the promise we made to each veteran when they agreed to serve and protect our Nation. Part of that promise, one of the most important promises, is to provide them with superior medical care.

While I do commend the committee for increasing funding for veterans' health care over the President's request, as the gentleman from Massachusetts mentioned, even leading veterans' groups state it does not increase funding enough. The funding does not keep pace with the rising population of veterans or the rising cost of health care.

Yesterday, as the gentleman from Massachusetts also mentioned, the Rules Committee had the opportunity to make in order an amendment by the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. OBEY) that would have increased funding for veterans' health care to the necessary levels. The Republican majority chose not to. This is truly, truly unfortunate.

Most Members, myself included, have already heard from veterans in their district that they have to wait far too long for medical care. In some instances, veterans face wait times of up to 6 months. Yet the bill before us does not provide the funding necessary to provide prompt access to health services. And with our ongoing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, the number of veterans needing medical service will only continue to rise.

I am truly thankful that those men and women honorably serving our Nation in the world's hot spots are likely to return home to their family and friends. With protective armor and the improving quality of medical treatment in the field, more of our servicemembers are surviving combat wounds and returning, though with an increased need for medical service. Many of these men and women are amputees who will need months of rehabilitation to learn to walk and use prosthetic limbs. Because of these injuries, the men and women of our Armed Forces will need continuous care for the rest of their lives.

At a time when American men and women are serving our Nation in hostile environments, we must demonstrate our intent to fulfill our promise and fund veterans' medical services at the highest possible level. We must provide them with the most efficient and highest quality medical care this country can offer.

I hope that on the floor today, we can make in order the gentleman from Wisconsin's amendment increasing our commitment to veterans.

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

In regard to the comment about the waiting time for our veterans to receive care, we had several years ago, and I want to respond, of course, to the gentlewoman from California about her concerns, but there was a waiting time of greater than 6 months for up to 350,000 veterans. I think most of those

were in Category, priority level, 7 and 8. But because of increased funding and policy change, that number was reduced to 36,000.

We do not want to have, Mr. Speaker, any of our veterans having to wait 6 months or more. But to cut that down from hundreds of thousands to 36,000, I think, is significant progress.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from California (Mr. CUNNINGHAM), a member of the subcommittee.

□ 1045

Mr. CUNNINGHAM. Mr. Speaker, the thing, I guess, that irks me the most, some of the Members on the other side come from the liberal left. They do not support the military. They vote against defense bills. They vote against defense supplementals, which protect our men and women and gives them the equipment and things they need to survive to do their job and come back alive. Many of these same Members give a cry for the veterans that we want to increase above budget, we want to increase that, because they know they vote. We want them to come back alive.

When the Democrats had control of this House, they cut the military COLAs. They cut veterans' COLAs. They increased Social Security tax. They increased the tax on the veterans and the military. And cut their health care, VFW and American Legion chastised the Democrats because they not only just level funded it or reduced it, they gutted it. And I still have the articles in my office about how the Democrats did not come up to speed on the health care for the veterans.

Since we took the majority over the last few years, we have increased health care over 60 percent. Subvention was my bill for the military, TRICARE for everybody.

Another thing last night where they said, well, the Republicans did not vote to take care of our National Guard, they sign a contract, Mr. Speaker. When one goes into the National Guard or Reserve, they are a citizen soldier. They sign up and they are working in a business and they get your health care through the business or they sign up with private insurance.

My colleagues on the other side want socialized medicine. They want single-payer, government controlled system. If the government gets involved in that, all of a sudden we are up around \$5-plus billion, and the private sector will not provide for it. And they tried to use it as a political pawn. It sickens me. I am military retired, and I have health care, and so do our veterans in an increasing manner.

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

Let me say just to the gentleman from California who referred to the vote we had yesterday to provide more health care benefits to our Guard and Reserves, he may not think that an important thing to do, but those of us on

this side do, especially when we are relying on them more and more to be the soldiers on the frontline in Iraq and Afghanistan.

And I also want to point out that currently about 50,000 of our veterans are waiting in line for at least 6 months for veterans health care, and that problem will only gets worse with the growing number of returning soldiers from Operation Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom. And as of May, 2005, the Department of Veterans Affairs had treated more than 85,000 of the 360,675 veterans from these deployments. In 2006 the Department expects to treat 5.2 million veterans, double the number in 1995. And overall, the medical care inflation rate for 2004 was close to double the inflation rate.

So, Mr. Speaker, again, the point here is if we are going to send our young men and women overseas to fight wars, then I think we have an obligation, a moral obligation, to make sure they have the health care and the support when they return home that they not only deserve but they have earned.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 6 minutes to the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. OBEY), ranking member on the Committee on Appropriations.

Mr. OBEY. Mr. Speaker, appropriation bills represent the legislation where we have a chance to put our money where our rhetoric is. On Veterans' Day, I would venture to say that virtually every Member of this House has gone home and spoken about how much we care for veterans, and I am sure on Memorial Day that many Members will be going home and they will put their hands over their hearts and say how much they respect veterans.

When wars start, we are very good at having the bands play. We are very good at having the crowds cheer. But all too often, when those veterans come home, they do not get the same treatment. They certainly did not during Vietnam. And I think the test of our concern for veterans is not the kind of speeches we give as we send them off to war. It is the kind of treatment we give them when they get home.

Now, we can brag all we want about the fact that this bill is a billion dollars above the President's for veterans health care. Fine. I am glad it is. But the fact is that still does not keep up with the cost of inflation. The fact is there are still waiting lists and waiting lines. The fact is that VA facilities are still badly in need of repair. The fact is we still do not do enough prosthesis research.

Next year, the VA expects to handle twice as many veterans as they did in 1995, and medical care inflation is twice the rate of inflation in the regular economy.

The reason this bill is so squeezed is because the budget resolution, which this House passed about a month ago, has imposed tight limits on this Congress's ability to fund veterans

health care and a number of other areas because the number one priority in that budget bill was tax cuts and we wound up guaranteeing to everybody who makes \$1 million a year or more that they will take home a tax cut of \$140,000 on average this year.

The amendment that I wanted the Committee on Rules to make in order was very simple. We simply wanted this House to reconsider that tax package and to shave that \$140,000 average tax cut down to 129,000 bucks. I think every American would be very happy to settle for a \$129,000 tax cut this year. If we simply shaved it down to 129,000 bucks for people making over 1 million bucks a year, we would be able to put \$2.6 billion more into veterans health care.

In the past, this country has always thrived because it believed in the sense of shared sacrifice. How is the sacrifice being shared today? We are asking those who wear the uniform of the United States, whether they be regular forces or Guard or Reserves, we are asking them to bear the full burden of our effort in Iraq and Afghanistan. And what burden are we asking the folks to bear here at home? We are saying, "Oh, they have got to sacrifice by taking a tax cut." What we are asking is that we adjust that sense of shared sacrifice so that we shave the benefits for people who are already the most blessed in this society, we shave their tax benefits by just a little bit in order to make just a little bit more room for veterans health care. And I make no apology for trying to do that.

I believe that we need to remember Abraham Lincoln's admonition in the second inaugural address: "To care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and his orphan." This Congress has taken some initiatives to do that this year. But it is not enough. I plead fully guilty to wanting to have health care for every single American. I think it is a mortal sin that there are 45 million Americans who do not have health care coverage, but at the very least, we ought to see to it that every person who wears the uniform of the United States has whatever health care they need whenever they need it.

We do not worry about how much a war is going to cost when we start one or when we get into one. We pay the cost. We should also not worry about how much it is going to cost to provide adequate health care for people who fight that war. Whatever they need is what we ought to provide, and there is not a Member in this House who can demonstrate that this bill is fully adequate. Is it better than the President's budget? Of course. Anything would be. But it is not enough, and we have tried to show a way for us to provide more funding for veterans without doing serious damage to anybody else's interests in this country.

And I would hope we would turn down the previous question so that we have a chance to offer that amendment.

Mr. GINGREY. Mr. Speaker, I yield 30 seconds to the gentleman from California (Mr. CUNNINGHAM).

Mr. CUNNINGHAM. Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the gentleman from Massachusetts: Has he ever been in the Guard?

Mr. MCGOVERN. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. CUNNINGHAM. I yield to the gentleman from Massachusetts.

Mr. MCGOVERN. No, Mr. Speaker. But I am in awe of those who serve this country.

Mr. CUNNINGHAM. Mr. Speaker, has he ever been in the Reserves?

Mr. MCGOVERN. No, I have not.

Mr. CUNNINGHAM. Has he ever been in active duty military?

Mr. MCGOVERN. No, Mr. Speaker. But I support these men and women who are serving our country, and they deserve health care, which it is a disgrace what the Republican majority did.

Mr. CUNNINGHAM. Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time, I have. And I thought not.

Mr. MCGOVERN. Mr. Speaker, it was shameful what happened on the House floor, and they have an opportunity to redeem themselves today.

Mr. CUNNINGHAM. I thought not, Mr. Speaker.

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

I should say to the gentleman I respect his service as well. I just wish he would join with us in providing the adequate allocation for our veterans.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 5 minutes to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. EDWARDS).

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Speaker, just to follow up on the last comment of my colleague who has served our Nation so well in service in the military, let me just point out that Vice President CHENEY did not serve our country in the military. And I do not think any one of us in this room would have the right, based on that, to question his allegiance to our country or his commitment to our servicemen and -women.

I do not want to get into a partisan debate between Republicans and Democrats over military service. What I do want to do is raise one simple question: Should this House not have the right to vote on the Obey amendment, which would provide a \$2.6 billion increase for veterans health care, education, and other programs? Should we not have the right during a time of war to vote on that?

Now, the gentleman from Georgia said in his comments that this rule waives points of order against the bill. My follow-up question is if the House Committee on Rules waives points of order against the bill to pass the bill, would it not be fair to say why do we not waive one point of order against an amendment in order to help veterans receive better health care? This would not be the first time, if my Republican colleagues will check the record, that they would have waived a point of order to allow a tax measure to be part

of an appropriations bill. It has been done multiple times by this leadership in this House.

The point has been made that VA health care has been increased by, I believe, 40 percent over the last 5 years. And that is correct, and I think that has been a bipartisan effort. In fact, it has taken Congress a lot of increases over the President's requests over the last 5 years in order to get to that 40 percent increase. But what that fact does not paint a true picture of is that during that time period there has been an increase in the number of veterans needing VA health care of 31 percent.

So that means over the last 5 years, including during a time of war, we have only had a 9 percent increase in VA health care spending to cover all of the inflationary cost for that health care. And we all know health care budgets, whether they are within the VA or the private system, are going up at 5, 6, 7, 8 percent a year.

Let us look at the inflationary costs in the VA health care that, frankly, make the Obey amendment very critical in trying to improve health care for our veterans. First is just a mandated 2.3 percent salary increase, which is the minimum increase we probably will pass this year, will take \$247 million out of the VA health care budget. For prescription drugs, last year alone prescription drugs in the VA went up \$548 million. So that is nearly \$800 million we are talking about in inflationary costs.

The fact is that this year, according to the Bush administration, we will expect a net increase of 300,000 veterans needing VA health care services. Many of those, tens of thousands of those, would be veterans of the Iraqi and Afghanistan war. Using the administration's own numbers, a little over \$6,400 per veteran per year for VA health care times 300,000 veterans, that alone would require a \$1.94 billion increase in VA health care funding for fiscal year 2006 just to meet inflationary costs and the increase in the number of veterans needing that care.

□ 1100

The fact is, and I think we all know this, we can talk statistics and percentages, that VA hospitals today all over the country are using capital equipment and other equipment budgets just to keep the lights on and to pay salaries. We all know, as Members of Congress who visit our VA hospitals back home, they are underfunded and are having to cut corners, which should not have to be cut, especially during a time of war.

Through all this debate we might forget what the Obey amendment does. It prevents a \$500 million cut in medical administration for VA care. It prevents a \$417 million cut in dollars needed to keep the lights on and run our VA hospitals. It prevents a cut in VA health care research dollars. That is what this amendment is all about, not a partisan debate.

Let us vote against this rule, vote against the previous question, and allow the veterans of America during a time of war to have the right for Congress to vote on increasing our commitment to quality care for our veterans.

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

Mr. MCGOVERN. Mr. Speaker, I yield 4 minutes to the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. BLUMENAUER).

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the gentleman's courtesy in permitting me to speak on this rule.

I, too, am pleased with the establishment of the Subcommittee on Military Quality of Life and Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies. This is an important new development to be able to look holistically at the needs of our military.

I also appreciate the great leadership that this subcommittee has with the gentleman from New York (Chairman Walsh) and the ranking member, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. EDWARDS). These are people who have proven their commitments to our veterans and who understand the intricacies of the appropriations process, are willing to get into the details and work hard. I commend their leadership, and look forward to ultimately supporting this bill today.

I certainly support the open rule that has been granted, as is customary for an appropriations bill, particularly because it will allow for the first time in at least 10 years, and perhaps longer, for us to have a specific vote on the opportunity to have money dedicated to the cleanup of unexploded ordnance and military pollution.

Mr. Speaker, this is one of the great hidden issues surrounding military quality of life. Unexploded ordnance and military toxins pollute an area we anticipate is larger than the States of Maryland and Massachusetts combined. Let me repeat that. We face military pollution of over 200 years of military activity in this country that is suspected to pollute an area larger than the combined States of Maryland and Massachusetts.

This is an area that is taking billions of dollars, we do not know how much, frankly, and we are on a path, given the current patterns of expenditure, that it will take not dozens of years, not decades, but it could take centuries to clean up.

Now, military quality of life is threatened by exposure to unexploded ordnance and military toxins. My good friend from Massachusetts knows well the problem with the Massachusetts Military Reservation, where groundwater contamination is threatening the water supply of Martha's Vineyard, and there were 8,000 shells that have been discovered already, some within half a mile of an elementary school. We have the opportunity under this bill to be able to dedicate funds to meaningfully accelerate the cleanup.

I am shocked as a Member of Congress that we are talking about the

fifth round of base closures, the fifth round of base closures, threatening upset for communities across the country and job loss, and we have not yet cleaned up bases that were closed in the 1988 round.

I will be offering amendments to remedy this situation and deal with the unexploded ordnance and the military toxins. I would suggest that this is an opportunity that will not only protect the people in these communities that lost military facilities and were not cleaned up, but it will accelerate the development of technology that will save lives for our military around the world. Because the sooner we can figure out whether it is a hubcap or a shell that is buried, it is not just going to make a difference in Massachusetts or in Georgia, where you have unexploded ordnance, or in my State, but it will make a difference in Iraq, Afghanistan and for innocent people that are dying in former battlefields every day around the world.

Mr. GINGREY. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Florida (Mr. FOLEY), a Member of the Committee on Ways and Means.

Mr. FOLEY. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding me time.

Mr. Speaker, let me support strongly this bill which supports our veterans who have served this country so incredibly well. We are a nation of freedom because of the hard work and sacrifice of veterans everywhere, and every day of my life I think of my father and others who have served this great country with distinction.

We are a free nation, and we are winning the battles because of the bravery of our active duty Reservists. But it is the veteran who has brought honor to the flag behind the Speaker's well, and it is the veteran who has made it possible for us to be the free and proud Nation we are.

Today, at 12:45, I will go to the Board of Veterans Appeals on a case that is vitally important to a person in my district, and that is Almon Scott. I have never personally gone to the Board of Appeals level for any veteran personally. My staff has worked tirelessly, Diana Robins in my district, fighting for veterans. But this is a unique case.

Almon Scott served this Nation during Vietnam. He was asked to guard a base where we believe there were potential radioactive materials. Almon Scott is dying now of cancer, a cancer largely linked with radioactive material.

Almon Scott has been shunted aside, if you will, by a system that suggests somehow his ailments are not related to his tour of duty. Unfortunately, he is not entitled to his records, they have been sealed, so Mr. Scott cannot even prove his case, which is why I have taken this extraordinary opportunity to testify on his behalf. He is in Stuart, Florida, today and cannot travel because of his illness. His illness is serious, and it is possibly close, from what I understand, to the end of his life.

What we are hoping to do today is to give Al Scott justice. We are hoping that they recognize his valiant efforts at service, and that the final measure of devotion to this Nation is, he did what he was told. Now they will not tell him what he was guarding.

Subsequent facts have indicated there may have been nuclear or other kinds of biological-type weaponry stored at the site he was requested to guard. At the end of his tour of duty he was told to go home and remain silent about what he did at that time. He honored that contract with America. Now I am hoping today, as I approach the Board of Veterans Appeal not as a lawyer, not as a Congressman, but as a fellow American, that Almon Scott's plea for justice will be heard, and that those hearing his appeal will look at his case specifically and recognize that the right thing to do for this veteran, this proud American, this Marine, is to stand by that same commitment he gave this Nation, that same devotion and that same dedication.

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

Mr. Speaker, this bill is inadequate to meet the health care needs of our veterans, plain and simple. Every veterans group in America has recognized that fact. They have all written to all of us. So we can spin this all we want, that somehow this is this incredible bill that is going to take care of all the health care needs of our veterans, but the bottom line is, it is better than what the President requested, but it is not enough. And we have an opportunity to fix it.

To the gentleman from California who earlier questioned my patriotism and pointed out I did not serve in the military, let me say to him that I am in awe of those men and women who have served in our military. I am grateful for what they have done.

I have two children, and there is not a day that I do not wake up and thank God they live in the freest country in the world. And it is precisely because of the veterans who have served our country over the years that they have that privilege. And it is precisely because of my gratitude to the men and women who serve in our military that I feel so passionately about making sure that we do the right thing here today and we adequately fund our veterans' health care budget.

That is what this debate is all about, and that is whether you are a Republican or Democrat, liberal or conservative. I would like to think we could come together on this one issue and make sure that the veterans get what they deserve and have earned. We are at war, and yet, as the gentleman from Texas (Mr. EDWARDS) pointed out earlier and as the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. OBEY) pointed out, we are not making any sacrifices.

What the Obey amendment would do is simply shave a little bit off of the tax cuts that millionaires are getting and put it towards the veterans budget to make sure we get what we need.

Mr. Speaker, I will be asking Members to vote "no" on the previous question. If the previous question is defeated, I will amend the rule so we can consider the Obey amendment that was rejected in the Committee on Rules last night on a straight party line vote.

Mr. Speaker, the Obey amendment would add an additional \$2.6 billion for VA health care and pay for it by slightly reducing the size of the tax cut for those persons who make more than \$1 million a year. Instead of receiving a tax cut of \$140,000, they would get \$129,000, a reduction of \$11,000 for millionaires. I will tell you that I cannot believe anybody in this country would object to that. I think if you did a poll right now, overwhelmingly the American people would say, that makes sense in this time of war. I am sure that the Donald Trumps and the Bill Gates of this country could afford to reduce their tax cut by \$11,000 so that our troops can have the best health care possible when they return from Iraq and Afghanistan.

This amendment will correct one of most serious shortfalls in this bill, quality health care for our Nation's veterans. It is absolutely critical that this funding be increased to meet the growing needs of our country's veterans.

This Nation made a promise to those serving in the military that they would receive quality health care in return for their valiant service to this country, and now that wounded soldiers are returning to their homes, they deserve the best medical treatment and care available.

We can fix this today. We can fix this today if we allow the Obey amendment to be considered on the floor. But the only way that will happen is if we defeat the previous question.

I want to assure my colleagues that a "no" vote will not prevent us from considering the military quality of life-VA appropriations bill under an open rule, but a "no" vote will allow Members to vote on the Obey amendment. However, a "yes" vote will block consideration of this amendment to help our Nation's soldiers and our veterans.

Mr. Speaker, as I said, I am in awe of our Nation's veterans. A few hours from now, Members of this body will get on planes and go to their districts and prepare to attend various Memorial Day events throughout the country, and I know all of us will pay tribute to our veterans. We will thank them, we will pay tribute by using the most wonderful words that we can express to be able to say "thank you" adequately.

But, Mr. Speaker, words are not enough. We have enough words in this House. They are not enough. Yesterday, the Republican majority turned their backs on so many veterans by defeating the motion by the gentleman from Mississippi (Mr. TAYLOR) to provide more health care benefits to our members of the Guard and Reserve. It was shameful. But today you have a

chance to redeem yourself. Today, you have a chance to stand up and do the right thing.

Mr. Speaker, we need to support our veterans. We need to make sure they have what they need. We need to support them not just with words, but with action.

Mr. Speaker, at this point, I ask unanimous consent to insert the text of the amendment immediately prior to the vote on the previous question.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. LATHAM). Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Massachusetts?

There was no objection.

□ 1115

Mr. GINGREY. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time.

Mr. Speaker, I rise again in support of this rule and in recognition of its importance to the men and women who have and who continue to serve and protect America.

Mr. Speaker, our service men and women sacrifice so much for the safety and security of this Nation, and we have the responsibility to ensure that they have everything that they need, not only to succeed in their duties, but also to enjoy the quality of life that they deserve.

This bill represents the culmination of a lot of hard work and a lot of cooperation to not only completely support our service men and women but to also do so in the most helpful and fiscally responsible way. With a total amount of \$121.8 billion, this bill includes an overall increase of \$5.8 billion in discretionary spending from last year. Specifically, the Department of Veterans Affairs will receive \$2.3 billion more than the previous year. The VA medical care increase from 2005 to 2006, I gave the number earlier for the previous 5 years, another 8.5 percent increase. They will receive, they the VA medical services, an increase of \$1.6 billion. And again, I emphasize that there will be no new fees for either veterans medical services or for prescription drugs.

Today represent a victory for our service men and women in all stages of service from recruitment to retirement. And I appreciate all of my colleagues who have spoken on behalf of the rule and in support of the underlying bill.

Mr. Speaker, I would again like to thank the subcommittee chairman, the gentleman from New York (Mr. WALSH); the ranking member, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. EDWARDS); and the chairman, the gentleman from California (Mr. LEWIS), for leading the way and ensuring the necessary funds to provide for the quality of life of our service men and women.

I want to encourage my colleagues to support both this rule and the underlying bill for the sake of those who spend their lives defending ours.

Mr. LARSON of Connecticut. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in opposition to the previous ques-

tion on H. Res. 298, the rule providing for the Military Quality of Life Appropriations Bill for FY06.

Memorial Day will soon be here, and members of this body will head home to join Americans all across the country in celebrating those who serve, and have served, our Nation. These brave men and women undeniably deserve our praise and enduring gratitude for all they have done to defend our nation and secure our freedom. While grateful words and thoughtful recognition is right and necessary, it is incumbent on us in this Congress to ensure that words are met with action.

Over 1 million of our active-duty and reserve soldiers have served to date in Iraq and Afghanistan. These men and women—like their predecessors before them—were promised a life time of health care in return for their service to our country. However, as these young soldiers return home, they find that this promise has not been kept by this Congress or the current Administration.

Today, more than 50,000 veterans are waiting in line for at least 6 months for veterans' health care—and that problem will only get worse with the growing numbers of returning soldiers from Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom. As of May 2005, VA had treated only about 85,000 of the 360,675 veterans from these deployments. In 2006, the Department expects to treat 5.2 million veterans—double the number in 1995. And the overall medical care inflation rate for 2003 was close to double the inflation rate.

It is telling that major veteran service organizations call this bill "totally inadequate" and tantamount to veterans being "kicked to the curb." The current proposal before us is no less than \$2.6 billion below the amount needed to maintain current V A services.

The majority is nothing if not consistent, and has once again blocked attempts to fully fund the VA. The Obey amendment, blocked from even being considered on the floor today, would have increased spending on veterans health services by a total of \$2.6 billion over H.R. 2528 This amendment means real improvements to medical services to meet increased demand for mental health services, prosthetics and amputee care, and for priority 8 veterans. It adds \$300 million to upgrade and improve accessibility to VA medical facilities, restoring most of the \$400 million cut in the bill. And it does so by reducing the tax cuts for millionaires by about 8 percent—so instead of a \$140,000 tax cut, the millionaire filer would get \$129,000 tax cut. When compared to all our veterans have fought for and sacrificed, this seems like the least that we can do.

When Americans serve their nation in the military, whether it is the Second World War or the current war in Iraq, this government makes the promise of a lifetime of guaranteed healthcare. It is outrageous that after all the lip service and rhetoric paid to American veterans, the Republican Majority then turns around and reduces funding for their healthcare. It is long past time that Congress match rhetoric with real action to ensure veterans receive the level of service they were promised.

As my good friend Mr. TAYLOR of Mississippi said last night on this floor, our soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines have been there for us. Now it is our turn to be there for them. I urge my colleagues to defeat the previous

question and finally give our veterans the health care system they deserve.

The material previously referred to by Mr. MCGOVERN is as follows:

PREVIOUS QUESTION STATEMENT ON H. RES. 298—RULE FOR H.R. 2528 FY06 MILITARY QUALITY OF LIFE—VA APPROPRIATIONS

At the end of the resolution, add the following new sections:

SEC. 2. Notwithstanding any other provision of this resolution, the amendment printed in section 3 shall be in order without intervention of any point of order and before any other amendment if offered by Representative Obey of Wisconsin or a designee. The amendment is not subject to amendment except for pro forma amendments or to a demand for a division of the question in the committee of the whole or in the House.

SEC. 3. The amendment referred to in section 2 is as follows:

AMENDMENT TO MILITARY QUALITY OF LIFE, VA, APPROPRIATIONS BILL OFFERED BY MR. OBEY OF WISCONSIN

Page 31, line 1, relating to VA compensation and pensions, insert after the dollar amount the following: “(increased by \$26,000,000)”.

Page 34, line 21, relating to VA medical services, insert after the dollar amount the following: “(increased by \$1,500,000,000)”.

Page 36, line 9, relating to VA medical administration, insert after the dollar amount the following: “(increased by \$500,000,000)”.

Page 37, line 1, relating to VA medical facilities, insert after the dollar amount the following: “(increased by \$300,000,000)”.

Page 37, line 8, relating to VA medical and prosthetic research, insert after the dollar amount the following: “(increased by \$67,000,000)”.

Page 37, line 20, relating to VA general operating expense, insert after the dollar amount the following: “(increased by \$11,000,000)”.

Page 39, line 16, relating to major construction projects, insert after the dollar amount the following: “(increased by \$150,000,000)”.

Page 41, line 11, relating to minor construction projects, insert after the dollar amount the following: “(increased by \$51,000,000)”.

At the end of the bill (before the short title) add the following new section:

SEC. 409. In the case of taxpayers with an adjusted gross income in excess of \$1,000,000 for taxable year 2006, the amount of tax reduction resulting from the enactment of the Economic Growth and Tax Relief Reconciliation Act of 2001 (Public Law 107-16) and the Jobs and Growth Tax Relief Reconciliation Act of 2003 (Public Law 108-27) shall be reduced by 8.125 percent.

Mr. GINGREY. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time, and I move the previous question on the resolution.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. LATHAM). The question is on ordering the previous question.

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

Mr. MCGOVERN. Mr. Speaker, I object to the vote on the ground that a quorum is not present and make the point of order that a quorum is not present.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Evidently a quorum is not present.

The Sergeant at Arms will notify absent Members.

Pursuant to clause 9 of rule XX, the Chair will reduce to 5 minutes the min-

imum time for electronic voting, if ordered, on the question of adoption of the resolution.

The vote was taken by electronic device, and there were—yeas 223, nays 194, not voting 16, as follows:

[Roll No. 223]

YEAS—223

Aderholt	Gibbons	Northup
Akin	Gilchrest	Nunes
Alexander	Gillmor	Nussle
Bachus	Gingrey	Osborne
Baker	Gohmert	Otter
Barrett (SC)	Goode	Oxley
Bartlett (MD)	Goodlatte	Paul
Barton (TX)	Granger	Pearce
Bass	Graves	Pence
Beauprez	Green (WI)	Peterson (PA)
Biggett	Gutknecht	Petri
Bilirakis	Hall	Pickering
Bishop (UT)	Harris	Pitts
Blackburn	Hart	Platts
Blunt	Hayes	Poe
Boehlert	Hayworth	Pombo
Boehner	Hefley	Porter
Bonilla	Hensarling	Price (GA)
Bonner	Herger	Pryce (OH)
Bono	Hobson	Putnam
Boozman	Hoekstra	Radanovich
Boustany	Hostettler	Ramstad
Bradley (NH)	Hulshof	Regula
Brady (TX)	Hunter	Rehberg
Brown (SC)	Inglis (SC)	Reichert
Brown-Waite,	Issa	Renzi
Ginny	Istook	Reynolds
Burgess	Jenkins	Rogers (AL)
Burton (IN)	Jindal	Rogers (KY)
Buyer	Johnson (CT)	Rogers (MI)
Calvert	Johnson (IL)	Rohrabacher
Camp	Johnson, Sam	Ros-Lehtinen
Cannon	Jones (NC)	Royce
Cantor	Keller	Ryan (WI)
Capito	Kelly	Ryun (KS)
Carter	Kennedy (MN)	Saxton
Castle	King (IA)	Schwarz (MI)
Chabot	King (NY)	Sensenbrenner
Chocola	Kingston	Sessions
Coble	Kirk	Shadegg
Cole (OK)	Kline	Shaw
Conaway	Knollenberg	Shays
Cox	Kolbe	Sherwood
Crenshaw	Kuhl (NY)	Shimkus
Cubin	LaHood	Shuster
Culberson	Latham	Simmons
Cunningham	LaTourette	Simpson
Davis (KY)	Leach	Smith (NJ)
Davis, Jo Ann	Lewis (CA)	Smith (TX)
Davis, Tom	Lewis (KY)	Sodrel
Deal (GA)	Linder	Souder
DeLay	LoBiondo	Stearns
Dent	Lucas	Sullivan
Diaz-Balart, L.	Lungren, Daniel	Tancredo
E.		Taylor (NC)
Doolittle	Mack	Terry
Drake	Manzullo	Thomas
Dreier	Marchant	Thornberry
Duncan	McCaul (TX)	Tiahrt
Ehlers	McCotter	Tiberi
English (PA)	McCrery	Turner
Everett	McHenry	Upton
Feeney	McHugh	Walden (OR)
Ferguson	McKeon	Walsh
Fitzpatrick (PA)	McMorris	Wamp
Flake	Mica	Weldon (FL)
Foley	Miller (FL)	Weldon (PA)
Forbes	Miller (MI)	Weller
Fortenberry	Miller, Gary	Westmoreland
Fossella	Moran (KS)	Whitfield
Fox	Murphy	Wicker
Franks (AZ)	Musgrave	Wilson (NM)
Galleghy	Myrick	Wilson (SC)
Garrett (NJ)	Neugebauer	Wolf
Gerlach	Ney	Young (AK)

NAYS—194

Abercrombie	Berman	Brown, Corrine
Ackerman	Berry	Butterfield
Allen	Bishop (GA)	Capps
Andrews	Bishop (NY)	Capuano
Baca	Blumenauer	Cardin
Baird	Boren	Cardoza
Baldwin	Boswell	Carnahan
Barrow	Boucher	Carson
Bean	Boyd	Case
Becerra	Brady (PA)	Chandler
Berkley	Brown (OH)	Clay

Cleaver	Kaptur	Rahall
Clyburn	Kennedy (RI)	Rangel
Conyers	Kildee	Reyes
Cooper	Kilpatrick (MI)	Ross
Costa	Kind	Rothman
Costello	Kucinich	Roybal-Allard
Cramer	Langevin	Ruppersberger
Crowley	Lantos	Rush
Cuellar	Larsen (WA)	Ryan (OH)
Cummings	Larson (CT)	Sabo
Davis (AL)	Lee	Salazar
Davis (CA)	Levin	Sanchez, Linda
Davis (FL)	Lewis (GA)	T.
Davis (IL)	Lipinski	Sanchez, Loretta
Davis (TN)	Lofgren, Zoe	Sanders
DeFazio	Lowey	Schakowsky
DeGette	Lynch	Schiff
Delahunt	Maloney	Schwartz (PA)
DeLauro	Markey	Scott (GA)
Dicks	Marshall	Scott (VA)
Dingell	Matheson	Serrano
Doggett	Matsui	Sherman
Edwards	McCarthy	Skelton
Emanuel	McCollum (MN)	Slaughter
Engel	McDermott	Smith (WA)
Eshoo	McGovern	Snyder
Etheridge	McIntyre	Solis
Evans	McNulty	Spratt
Farr	Meehan	Stark
Fattah	Meek (FL)	Strickland
Ford	Meeks (NY)	Stupak
Frank (MA)	Melancon	Tanner
Gonzalez	Michaud	Tauscher
Gordon	Miller (NC)	Taylor (MS)
Green, Al	Miller, George	Thompson (CA)
Green, Gene	Mollohan	Thompson (MS)
Grijalva	Moore (KS)	Tierney
Gutierrez	Moore (WI)	Towns
Harman	Moran (VA)	Udall (CO)
Hastings (FL)	Nadler	Udall (NM)
Higgins	Napolitano	Van Hollen
Hinches	Neal (MA)	Velázquez
Hinojosa	Oberstar	Vislosky
Holden	Obey	Wasserman
Holt	Olver	Schultz
Honda	Ortiz	Waters
Hooley	Owens	Watson
Hoyer	Pallone	Watt
Inslee	Pascrell	Waxman
Israel	Pastor	Weiner
Jackson (IL)	Payne	Wexler
Jackson-Lee	Pelosi	Woolsey
(TX)	Peterson (MN)	Wu
Jefferson	Pomeroy	Wynn
Kanjorski	Price (NC)	

NOT VOTING—16

Doyle	Hyde	Millender-
Emerson	Johnson, E. B.	McDonald
Filner	Jones (OH)	Murtha
Frelinghuysen	McKinney	Norwood
Hastings (WA)	Menendez	Sweeney
Herseth		Young (FL)

□ 1143

Messrs. SERRANO, CHANDLER and POMEROY changed their vote from “yea” to “nay.”

Mr. TURNER changed his vote from “nay” to “yea.”

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

Stated against: Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, on rollcall No. 223, on H. Res. 298, I was in my Congressional District on official business. Had I been present, I would have voted “nay.”

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

The resolution was agreed to. A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

□ 1145

REMOVAL OF NAME OF MEMBER AS COSPONSOR OF H.R. 1449

Mr. BUTTERFIELD. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to have my