

President's budget released today allocates \$120 million for the hospital. In order to insure the swift completion of the Lake Nona hospital it is imperative that the VA receive full funding in this budget year.

Today, there are more than 26.5 million veterans living in the United States and Puerto Rico with more than 1.8 million of them residing in the State of Florida. That is the second highest total in America, second only to California. More than one-third of these live in the Central Florida area alone.

According to the VA, Central Florida is the number one destination for combat veterans 65 years of age or older. It is also the number one area for veterans who have 50 percent or more service connected disability and 18 percent of our veterans have Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

The Department of Veterans Affairs has estimated the cost to complete this hospital at \$597 million. This hospital is a top priority for the VA and is badly needed in central Florida. It is vital that the remaining \$537 million, to finish construction, is included in the Fiscal Year 2009 Military Construction appropriations bill.

I hope you will consider the inclusion of these funds as you work through the many important requests during the FY09 appropriations process.

Sincerely,

TOM FEENEY,
Member of Congress.

LETTER TO HIS HOLINESS BENE-
DICT XVI FROM REPRESENTA-
TIVE McCOTTER

HON. THADDEUS G. McCOTTER

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, July 29, 2008

Mr. McCOTTER. Madam Speaker, today I rise to place into the RECORD my letter to His Holiness Benedict XVI concerning the persecution of the Christian community in Iraq.

JULY 24, 2008.

His Holiness BENEICT XVI,
Apostolic Palace,
Vatican City State, Europe.

YOUR HOLINESS: It is with great respect that I write to you as both a Member of Congress and a Roman Catholic. Your witness to justice and advocacy of the plight of the persecuted is an instrument of hope.

Your Holiness has emphasized the importance to the Church of the well-being of the ancient Christian community of Iraq. It is now widely acknowledged to be an "endangered" community, with nearly half of its members forced to flee Iraq over the past five years. As the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Migration & Refugee Services reported last July: "Especially critical is the plight of Iraq's minority religious communities, including Christians and Mandaeans (or Sabaeans). These groups, whose home has been what is now Iraq for many centuries, are literally being obliterated—not because they are fleeing generalized violence but because they are being specifically and viciously victimized by Islamic extremists and, in some cases, common criminals."

As you meet with Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki tomorrow, please know that the United States is shifting its burden to the Iraqi government. It is imperative that he acknowledge and commit to the future well-being of Iraq's endangered religious minorities.

Concerned Americans, including the ChaldoAssyrian Christians in my Congres-

sional district, are anxious that the Maliki government address the following issues to ensure that the Iraqi Christians, who have made contributions to Iraqi society far beyond what their numbers suggest, and other smallest minorities are able to maintain their presence as part of the national fabric of that country: Security, including protection for their vulnerable clergy, development assistance, humanitarian aid for the large number of displaced among them, educational opportunities, full civic participation, including thorough measures to guarantee free and fair provincial elections later this year that would allow them just representation, and equal treatment under the constitution that would allow political autonomy in the Nineveh Plains.

Be assured that I will remain actively engaged with the ChaldoAssyrian Church and civic leaders in the United States and Iraq to protect the fundamental dignity of this oppressed ancient community of Iraq.

The psalmist seeking deliverance from his enemies remembers the great mercy of God. "Blessed be the Lord! For he has shown me the wonders of his love in a besieged city. . . . Be strong and let your heart take courage, all you who wait for the Lord" (Psalm 31: 21,24) The Christians of Iraq have suffered threats of violence, kidnappings, murder and being exiled from their ancient homeland. And yet, they are resilient in the face of what is certainly an existential threat. Their great faith and your advocacy on their behalf, give them hope.

I have the honor to profess myself with the most profound respect, your Holiness, sincerely yours,

THADDEUS G. McCOTTER,
Member of Congress.

EARMARK DECLARATION

HON. PETER T. KING

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, July 29, 2008

Mr. KING of New York. I submit the following:

Requesting Member: Congressman PETER T. KING

Bill Number: H.R. 6599.

Account: Military Construction, Air National Guard.

Legal Name of Requesting Entity: New York National Guard.

Address of Requesting Entity: 330 Old Niskayuna Road, Latham, NY 12110.

Description of Request: \$7.5 million will be used to construct Phase II of the Pararescue Facility. The use of taxpayer dollars is justified because The Francis Gabreski Air National Guard Base improves pararescue operations and survival equipment functions on Long Island.

INTRODUCING THE FOSTER
CHILDREN OPPORTUNITY ACT

HON. FORTNEY PETE STARK

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, July 29, 2008

Mr. STARK. Madam Speaker, I rise today with Representative XAVIER BECERRA to introduce legislation aimed at ensuring all foster children have a fighting chance to lead healthy and productive lives after they leave care.

Each year, hundreds and perhaps thousands of abused and neglected children leave the child welfare system and become illegal immigrants through no fault of their own. Under current law, abused and neglected immigrant children in the child welfare system are eligible to become legal permanent residents under the Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) provisions of immigration law. In order to obtain SIJS, a court must find that the child is in long-term foster care with no opportunity for family reunification (either in the U.S. or in their home country). If a child also meets additional immigration criteria, such as not having a criminal record, they can become a Legal Permanent Resident. Once a child leaves the child welfare system, however, they are no longer eligible for SIJS. A series of articles in the Los Angeles Times and other reports have documented how children have aged-out of foster care or been adopted without obtaining SIJS. The result is that these abused and neglected children are forced into the underground economy, are extremely vulnerable to exploitation, and are under the constant threat of deportation back to a country that is unfamiliar to them and may be home to their abuser.

The Foster Children Opportunity Act aims to correct this terrible situation by requiring that all children in the foster care system be screened for SIJS eligibility and assisted through the legal process to obtain SIJS and eventually Legal Permanent Resident Status. The bill will provide technical assistance to help child welfare agencies better understand this problem and provide resources to train judges, attorneys, and other legal workers in a complex area of law.

This legislation will not change any aspect of current immigration law, nor will it result in any adults who have engaged in illegal behavior from gaining legal status. The bill simply aims to protect abused and neglected children by ensuring they have a fighting chance at leading healthy and productive lives when they exit foster care.

The Foster Children Opportunity Act will:

Require State plans for foster care and adoption assistance to document procedures to assist immigrant children in obtaining SIJS, Legal Permanent Residency, or other appropriate forms of immigration relief when doing so is in the child's best interest;

Require child welfare agencies to assist immigrant children, and document their efforts, in obtaining SIJS, Legal Permanent Residency, or other appropriate forms of relief under immigration law before the child exits foster care;

Require juvenile courts and child welfare agencies to determine whether filing petitions or appointing immigration counsel for a potentially SIJS eligible child is in that child's best interest;

Permit the Court Improvement Program to use funds to educate and train judges and lawyers to assist SIJS-eligible foster children;

Direct the Secretary of the Health and Human Services Agency, in consultation with the Secretary of Homeland Security, to provide technical assistance to child welfare agencies in carrying out the provisions of this bill.

Members on all sides of the immigration debate should put down our differences when it comes to protecting abused and neglected children. We should not let the poisonous politics of immigration interfere with helping foster

children become successful adults. I encourage all of my colleagues to join us in supporting this simple legislation that will improve the lives of thousands of our most vulnerable children.

EARMARK DECLARATION

HON. TERRY EVERETT

OF ALABAMA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, July 29, 2008

Mr. EVERETT. Madam Speaker, pursuant to the Republican Leadership standards on earmarks, I am submitting the following information for publication in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD regarding two earmarks I received as part of H.R. 6599, the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2009.

Request No. 1:

Requesting Member: Congressman TERRY EVERETT.

Bill Number: H.R. 6599, the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2009.

Account: Military Construction/U.S. Army.

Legal Name of Requesting Entity: U.S. Army/Congressman TERRY EVERETT.

Address of Requesting Entity: Office of Command, Fort Rucker, 453 Novosel Street, Fort Rucker, Alabama 36362-5105.

Description of Request: The Chapel Center at Fort Rucker earmark request is for \$6,800,000. The funding is for the construction of a standard-design chapel complex featuring a sanctuary (400 seat capacity) and an activity center that is capable of seating an additional 239 people in a separate or combined service. The sanctuary will include a raised pulpit area and a baptismal suite. The facility also will include 15 religious education classrooms, two multi-purpose rooms, a blessed sacrament room, sacristy/robing room, choir room, resource center, nursery, restrooms, kitchen, storage, and administrative space for two Chaplains, Education Director and Assistant.

Additionally, some of the funding will be used for connection to the energy monitoring and control system (EMCS) and interior communications/building information systems and supporting utilities and other expenses in building of the Chapel Center.

Request No. 2:

Requesting Member: Congressman TERRY EVERETT.

Bill Number: H.R. 6599, the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2009.

Account: Military Construction/ U.S. Air Force.

Legal Name of Requesting Entity: U.S. Air Force/Congressman TERRY EVERETT.

Address of Requesting Entity: Maxwell-Gunter Air Force Base, Montgomery, Alabama 36112-5000.

Description of Request: This funding will be used for the Air and Space Basic Course Combat Arms Training Facility at Maxwell-Gunter Air Force Base. The funding will be used to construct a 56-position, 50-meter small arms firing range with automated range target system, and a 639 SM support facility constructed with reinforced concrete foundation and floor slab, structural steel frame, masonry walls and sloped architecturally compat-

ible roof. The \$15,556,000 for this project was also included in the Administration's Fiscal Year 2009 budget.

TRIBUTE TO IRENE NELSON

HON. JAMES P. McGOVERN

OF MASSACHUSETTS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, July 29, 2008

Mr. MCGOVERN. Madam Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to Irene Norman Nelson on the occasion of her 90th birthday.

Irene Nelson is one of the most extraordinary people I have ever met. She has been a longtime and treasured friend to my family and me. She is a woman of impeccable class, grace and integrity. She has a love and appreciation of life that is inspiring. And she has a wonderful sense of humor.

I cherish my memories of being with Irene at family events, vacations and trips to the theater. I enjoy our conversations. I admire her commitment to the arts and all things beautiful.

Madam Speaker, as a U.S. Congressman, I am privileged to meet many fascinating and incredible people. Irene, without a doubt, is at the top of that list.

I ask that my colleagues join me in wishing Irene Nelson a happy and healthy birthday.

STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF H.R. 5170, H.R. 5983, H.R. 5531, H.R. 2490, H.R. 6193, H.R. 4806, H.R. 3815, and H.R. 6098

HON. DONNA M. CHRISTENSEN

OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, July 29, 2008

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of these Homeland Security bipartisan measures. I would like to commend Chairman THOMPSON and Ranking Member KING for their efforts to bring these bills to the floor today. I would also like to congratulate the authors of these bills Congresswoman HARMAN and Congressmen CARNEY, LANGEVIN, KING, BILIRAKIS, REICHERT, and PERLMUTTER.

Individually, the bills presented today improve operations within the Department of Homeland Security, including issues related to privacy, information sharing and enhanced security. Collectively, they improve on the provisions of H.R. 1, the Implementing 9/11 Commission Recommendations Act.

Protecting the privacy of our citizens is an important but very difficult issue to balance in our Nation's war against terrorism. Under H.R. 1570, the presence of a full-time Component Privacy Officer would ensure that privacy considerations remain at the forefront and are integrated into the decisionmaking process at all of the DHS Components.

Through our oversight work, it is clear that DHS's information systems have been penetrated and remain vulnerable to cyber attacks. H.R. 5983, the Homeland Security Network Defense and Accountability Act of 2008, represents a critical step toward improving the cybersecurity network at DHS by ensuring a robust defense of its information systems, and

holding individuals at all levels accountable for mitigating vulnerabilities.

While protecting DHS information systems is critical to our Nation's security, we also need to be mindful of the importance and need for information sharing. H.R. 6193, H.R. 4806 and H.R. 3815 address the need for information sharing in a secure manner. H.R. 6193—Improving Public Access to Documents Act of 2008— dovetails with H.R. 4086's effort to remove obstacles to more and better information sharing in the unclassified category.

Our offshore territories are the first point of entry to the U.S. for many foreigners and our shores are extremely vulnerable to illegal and possibly terrorist activities. I am pleased that H.R. 5531 will put in motion a plan to deploy next-generation radiological detection technology at our ports of entry to more effectively and more efficiently scan persons and cargo as they enter the United States. I fully support the "Biometric Identification At Sea Pilot Project" which has allowed the Coast Guard to collect biometrics from individuals interdicted in the Caribbean to run them against terrorist and criminal databases. H.R. 5531 and H.R. 2490 address the vulnerabilities of our Caribbean shores.

Madam Speaker, the implementation of these bills would not be possible without our State, local and tribal entities. Fusion Centers provide much needed support to these entities in the implementation of Homeland Security programs. H.R. 6098 requires DHS to allow State and local governments to use Homeland Security grant funding to hire and keep analysts in fusion centers—for however long State and local officials see fit.

I urge my colleagues to support these bills and their passage.

HOUSING AND ECONOMIC RECOVERY ACT OF 2008

SPEECH OF

HON. CAROLYN MCCARTHY

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, July 23, 2008

Mrs. MCCARTHY of New York. Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank Chairman FRANK for his hard work on this housing package.

What began with a housing bubble, predatory and subprime lending, and loose regulatory enforcement has resulted in a record number of foreclosures across the country, the failure of financial institutions, a reduction in tax revenue for states and local government, a credit crunch, and a lack of confidence in our market that is affecting millions of individuals and families both directly and indirectly.

Families reliant on the continuously increasing housing market entered into loans they could never afford or adjustable-rate mortgages with the assumption they could refinance at a later date.

Loose regulatory enforcement allowed mortgage lenders and originators to engage in predatory lending practices and the housing bubble provided an incentive for lenders to reduce underwriting standards to encourage the creation of new loans.

Furthermore, the failure on the part of the regulators allowed financial institutions to package and sell these risky new loans on the secondary market with the highest ratings from the rating agencies.