Taylor (MS)	Turner	Weldon (PA)
Taylor (NC)	Udall (NM)	Weller
Terry	Upton	Weygand
Thomas	Visclosky	Whitfield
Thompson (CA)	Vitter	Wicker
Thornberry	Walden	Wilson
Thune	Walsh	Wise
Thurman	Wamp	Wolf
Tiahrt	Watkins	Wu
Toomey	Watts (OK)	Young (FL)
Traficant	Weldon (FL)	

NAYS—41

Abercrombie	Hilliard	Olver
Baldwin	Hinchey	Owens
Becerra	Hoeffel	Payne
Brady (PA)	Jackson (IL)	Rodriguez
Carson	Jones (OH)	Roybal-Allard
Clay	Kilpatrick	Rush
Clyburn	Kucinich	Schakowsky
Conyers	Lee	Scott
Davis (IL)	McKinney	Serrano
Dingell	Meek (FL)	Thompson (MS)
Engel	Meeks (NY)	Velazquez
Fattah	Menendez	Waters
Gutierrez	Mink	Wynn
Hastings (FL)	Napolitano	

ANSWERED ''PRESENT''—72

Ackerman	Hoyer	Pallone
Berman	Jackson-Lee	Pascrell
Bishop	(TX)	Pastor
Blumenauer	Johnson, E. B.	Peterson (MN)
Bonior	Kanjorski	Rahall
Borski	LaFalce	Reyes
Brown (FL)	Lantos	Rivers
Brown (OH)	Lewis (GA)	Sabo
Capuano	Lofgren	Sanchez
Clayton	Markey	Sanders
Coyne	Martinez	Sawyer
Crowley	McCarthy (MO)	Slaughter
DeFazio	McDermott	Snyder
DeGette	McGovern	Stabenow
Delahunt	Meehan	Stark
Deutsch	Millender-	Tauscher
Dixon	McDonald	Tierney
Eshoo	Miller, George	Udall (CO)
Farr	Moakley	Vento
Filner	Moran (VA)	Watt (NC)
Ford	Nadler	Waxman
Frank (MA)	Neal	Weiner
Gejdenson	Oberstar	Wexler
Gephardt	Obey	Woolsey
Hooley	Ortiz	

NOT VOTING—10

Berry	Pryce (OH)	Towns
Hinojosa	Rangel	Young (AK)
Jefferson	Rogan	
Pelosi	Sununu	

☐ 1314

Mr. SIMPSON and Mr. CUMMINGS changed their vote from ''nay'' to ''yea.''

Messrs. DIXON, ORTIZ and WEINER changed their vote from ''nay'' to ''present.''

Mr. FORD changed his vote from ''yea'' to ''present.''

So (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the concurrent resolution, as amended, was agreed to.

The result of the vote was announced as above recorded.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

Stated against:

Ms. PELOSI. Mr. Chairman, on the last vote, H. Con. Res. 180, I was detained in traffic while returning to the Capitol. Had I been present, I would have voted ''no.''

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

Mr. HINOJOSA. Mr. Speaker, on rollcall No. 398, I was unavoidable detained by heavy traffic. Had I been present, I would have voted ''Present.''

☐ 1315

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. WALSH. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and that I may include tabular and extraneous material of H.R. 2684.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. HANSEN). Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from New York?

There was no objection.

DEPARTMENTS OF VETERANS AFFAIRS AND HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT, AND INDEPENDENT AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2000

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to House Resolution 275 and rule XVIII, the Chair declares the House in the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union for the further consideration of the bill, H.R. 2684.

☐ 1316

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 further consideration of the bill (H.R. 2684) making appropriations for the Departments of Veterans Affairs and Housing and Urban Development, and for sundry independent agencies, boards, commissions, corporations, and offices for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2000, and for other purposes, with Mr. PEASE (Chairman pro tempore) in the chair.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The CHAIRMAN pro tempore. When the Committee of the Whole rose on Wednesday, September 8, 1999, the amendment offered by the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. GUTIERREZ) had been disposed of and the bill was open for amendment from page 74, line 17, through page 75, line 18.

Are there further amendments to this portion of the bill?

Mr. SMITH of Michigan. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk, and I ask unanimous consent that we be allowed to return to page 64 for consideration of this amendment.

The CHAIRMAN pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Michigan?

Mr. WALSH. Mr. Chairman, I object. The amendment of the gentleman is out of order. That portion of the bill has already been completed, and by regular order he would not be allowed to reenter the bill.

The CHAIRMAN pro tempore. Objection is heard.

The Clerk will read.

The Clerk read as follows:

RADIOLOGICAL EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS FUND

The aggregate charges assessed during fiscal year 2000, as authorized by Public Law 105–276, shall not be less than 100 percent of the amounts anticipated by FEMA necessary for its radiological emergency preparedness program for the next fiscal year. The methodology for assessment and collection of fees shall be fair and equitable; and shall reflect costs of providing such services, including administrative costs of collecting such fees. Fees received pursuant to this section shall be deposited in the Fund as offsetting collections and will become available for authorized purposes on October 1, 2000, and remain available until expended.

EMERGENCY FOOD AND SHELTER PROGRAM

To carry out an emergency food and shelter program pursuant to title III of Public Law 100–77, as amended, $110,000,000: *Provided*, That total administrative costs shall not exceed three and one-half percent of the total appropriation.

FLOOD MAP MODERNIZATION FUND

For necessary expenses pursuant to section 1360 of the National Flood Insurance Act of 1968, $5,000,000, and such additional sums as may be provided by State or local governments or other political subdivisions for cost shared mapping activities under section 1360(f)(2), to remain available until expended.

NATIONAL INSURANCE DEVELOPMENT FUND

Notwithstanding the provisions of 12 U.S.C. 1735d(b) and 12 U.S.C. 1749bbb–13(b)(6), any indebtedness of the Director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency resulting from the Director borrowing sums under such sections before the date of enactment of this Act to carry out title XII of the National Housing Act shall be canceled, and the Director shall not be obligated to repay such sums or any interest thereon, and no further interest shall accrue on such sums.

NATIONAL FLOOD INSURANCE FUND

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

For activities under the National Flood Insurance Act of 1968, the Flood Disaster Protection Act of 1973, as amended, not to exceed $24,333,000 for salaries and expenses associated with flood mitigation and flood insurance operations, and not to exceed $78,710,000 for flood mitigation, including up to $20,000,000 for expenses under section 1366 of the National Flood Insurance Act, which amount shall be available for transfer to the National Flood Mitigation Fund until September 30, 2001. In fiscal year 2000, no funds in excess of: (1) $47,000,000 for operating expenses; (2) $456,427,000 for agents' commissions and taxes; and (3) $50,000,000 for interest on Treasury borrowings shall be available from the National Flood Insurance Fund without prior notice to the Committees on Appropriations. For fiscal year 2000, flood insurance rates shall not exceed the level authorized by the National Flood Insurance Reform Act of 1994.

NATIONAL FLOOD MITIGATION FUND

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

Notwithstanding sections 1366(b)(3)(B)–(C) and 1366(f) of the National Flood Insurance Act of 1968, as amended, $20,000,000 to remain available until September 30, 2001, for activities designed to reduce the risk of flood damage to structures pursuant to such Act, of which $20,000,000 shall be derived from the National Flood Insurance Fund.

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION

CONSUMER INFORMATION CENTER FUND

For necessary expenses of the Consumer Information Center, including services authorized by 5 U.S.C. 3109, $2,622,000, to be deposited into the Consumer Information Center Fund: *Provided*, That the appropriations, revenues and collections deposited into the fund shall be available for necessary expenses of Consumer Information Center activities in the aggregate amount of $7,500,000. Appropriations, revenues, and collections accruing to this fund during fiscal year 2000 in

excess of $7,500,000 shall remain in the fund and shall not be available for expenditure except as authorized in appropriations Acts.

NATIONAL AERONAUTICS AND SPACE ADMINISTRATION

HUMAN SPACE FLIGHT

For necessary expenses, not otherwise provided for, in the conduct and support of human space flight research and development activities, including research, development, operations, and services; maintenance; construction of facilities including repair, rehabilitation, and modification of real and personal property, and acquisition or condemnation of real property, as authorized by law; space flight, spacecraft control and communications activities including operations, production, and services; and purchase, lease, charter, maintenance and operation of mission and administrative aircraft, $5,388,000,000, to remain available until September 30, 2001.

AMENDMENT NO. 1 OFFERED BY MR. LATOURETTE

Mr. LATOURETTE. Mr. Chairman, I offer an amendment.

The CHAIRMAN pro tempore. The Clerk will designate the amendment.

The text of the amendment is as follows:

Amendment No. 1 offered by Mr. LATOURETTE:

In the matter relating to ''NATIONAL AERONAUTICS AND SPACE ADMINISTRATION; HUMAN SPACE FLIGHT'', after the dollar amount, insert ''(reduced by $67,986,000)''.

In the matter relating to ''NATIONAL AERONAUTICS AND SPACE ADMINISTRATION; SCIENCE, AERONAUTICS AND TECHNOLOGY'', after the dollar amount, insert ''(increased by $67,986,000)''.

Mr. LATOURETTE. Mr. Chairman, I am offering this amendment with my good friend, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. KUCINICH) from the west side of Cleveland, and also I think we will hear from the gentlewoman from Ohio (Mrs. JONES of Ohio) of Cleveland.

I want to commend the gentleman from New York (Chairman WALSH) the VA–HUD subcommittee chairman, also the work of two great Ohioans on that committee, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. HOBSON) and the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. REGULA) for their hard work on this bill.

I understand and support the fiscally responsible attitude underlying the committee's recommendation, but I believe that the specific cuts disregard the public enthusiasm for NASA funding.

Much like the amendments offered yesterday by my colleague the gentleman from California (Mr. ROGAN), the purpose of this amendment is to restore funding to the NASA administration relating to science, aeronautics, and space administration.

This amendment, however, differs from the one that we voted on yesterday in that it recognizes the difficult tasks that our appropriators face working within current budget restraints and constraints and honors the overall funding level that they have provided NASA in the bill.

Our amendment's increase and offset are both provided for within NASA's funding, reflecting the importance of fully funding the aeronautics administration without affecting the money appropriators have directed to other agencies, including Veterans.

The work that is done, specifically in Northeastern Ohio at NASA Glenn Research Center, is important not only to the people of Northeastern Ohio but to the entire country as the world leader in the highly competitive aviation market.

NASA Glenn has been and is an international leader in avionics and jet engine research since 1941. The Glenn Research Center also has expertise in advanced space propulsion and space power systems including the electrical power solar rays for the International Space Station, combustion research, aircraft engine noise and emissions reduction, chemical and electric rocket propulsion, and advanced turbojet aircraft engines.

The Glenn Research Center has received 74 R&D 100 Awards, more than all other NASA centers combined. This proposed increase of $67,986,000 will help maintain core competency programs in aeronautics. Many NASA research programs have impacted and will impact the lives of all individual citizens.

For example, innovations in the ultra efficient engine technology seek to develop quieter airplanes in anticipation of increased airport congestion in many of our major cities in the United States.

A critical mass of talented people, Mr. Chairman, and scientific resources will be irrevocably damaged in Ohio and elsewhere if the downward swing for funding levels in aerospace programs continues.

The partnerships which emerged between industry and NASA have enabled American products to dominate leading-edge technologies. But funding for aeronautical research has received sharp decreases by almost 50 percent in the last decade.

Continued slashing of funding jeopardizes the development of vital technologies to thrust America forward in the world aviation market.

Mr. Chairman, at the conclusion of my remarks, and I think I will be joined on the floor by my colleagues from Ohio, I see the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. KUCINICH) will be here in a minute to take time on this his own behalf, I will be asking unanimous consent, if the subcommittee chairman is kind enough to yield me time, to withdraw this amendment and not have a vote on it.

I do want to emphasize, however, that the gentleman from Texas (Mr. DELAY), the majority whip, in published remarks has indicated that he intends when this matter moves forward to conference with the other body to fight hard to make sure that the funding levels of NASA are restored.

I want to thank the gentleman from New York (Chairman WALSH) for his patience. I know he has a lot to do on this bill. I fully appreciate the challenge that he and other members of the Committee on Appropriations are faced with as they try to do their work while honoring our commitment to fiscal responsibility.

I daresay that he and his colleagues on the committee have jobs quite unlike those of appropriators of years past. But I believe strongly in the need to fully fund NASA's Science, Aeronautics and Space Administration, as I know the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. KUCINICH) does.

As the amendments offered yesterday indicate, if my colleagues look at the amendment offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. ROGAN), 185 Members of this House joined the gentleman from California (Mr. ROGAN) with the need to increase funding for this level of program. His offsets came from the EPA environmental programs.

Again, we do not move money from account to account, but we would like this amendment to serve as a bookmark; and I urge the subcommittee chair, which I know he knows the importance of this funding to not only Northeastern Ohio but to the entire area.

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

(Mr. KUCINICH asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. KUCINICH. Mr. Chairman, I want to first of all thank the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. LATOURETTE) for his work and his support on the concerns which we have for the NASA Glenn Research Center in the Greater Cleveland area.

I want to say that people in that community certainly know that we have a bipartisan coalition working together on behalf of that Center.

The budget in the bill for NASA currently before the House represents about a $1 billion cut, or cut of 10 percent from current funding. The LaTourette amendment would effectively restore $68 million for important programs for NASA's science, aeronautics, and technology. This increased funding would benefit NASA research centers, projects, and American jobs.

NASA Administrator, Dan Goldin, has said that if the 10-percent cut in this legislation becomes a reality, then one or more NASA centers could be closed and significant layoffs in the existing workforce would be likely.

What a terrible loss to American business and consumers that these cuts closed centers like NASA Glenn Research. NASA Glenn is one of the most important sources of technological innovations and advancement.

For example, NASA Glenn has produced the de-icing system used on every small commercial aircraft, thus enhancing passenger safety. NASA Glenn has developed the coating for scratch resistant eyeglasses used by millions of people who wear glasses. NASA Glenn developed artificial hip joints. NASA Glenn developed fire-resistant fabrics. And NASA Glenn is

now developing aircraft engines that use less fuel, release fewer pollutants, and generate less noise.

Clearly, American consumers stand to benefit from continued NASA Glenn research and activity. So does American business.

For instance, NASA Glenn has helped a Cleveland electronic manufacturer demonstrate the capabilities of its antenna enabling it to win a contract with a German automobile manufacturer. NASA Glenn helped an American vacuum manufacturer improve its products by reducing noise associated with its fans by using sophisticated computer software that was developed for jet engines.

NASA Glenn helps the American satellite industry with developing cutting-edge communications electronics. NASA Glenn helps the aerospace industry with improved jet engines. And NASA Glenn has advanced important microgravity experiments.

The gentleman from Ohio (Mr. LATOURETTE) and I support increasing funding for NASA science, research, and technology that could be used for activities at various research centers nationwide, including NASA Glenn, where more than 2,000 employees work for a better present and a better future.

The funding for NASA's science, research, and technology promises to yield innovation and major advancements that will make possible a high-technology economy for a long-term future. We must focus on our long-term priorities. These priorities must include the future of American workers with advanced training who deserve high-paying jobs. They must include the future of the American economy.

Let us demonstrate our commitment to the advancement of science and technology. Let us demonstrate our commitment to American workers nationwide. Let us demonstrate our commitment to American consumers and businesses and an expanding economy. And let us demonstrate our commitment and appreciation of NASA.

I also want to thank the scientists the engineers and the support personnel at NASA Glenn for the work that they do, because they are truly serving our country and it is only right that their representatives stand in defense of their work and in appreciation of the work that they do every day for this country and for NASA Glenn.

□ 1330

Mr. WALSH. Mr. Chairman, I rise in opposition to the amendment.

Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the fact that both gentlemen from Ohio (Mr. KUCINICH) and (Mr. LATOURETTE) have offered this amendment. I understand their concerns. As we discussed yesterday, there were many very difficult decisions to be made, but I must reluctantly oppose the amendment.

I would like to support the additional funding for science, aeronautics and technology; but I cannot do so at the expense of the space station or the shuttle. We all recognize the important work that is done at the Glenn Research Center, and I pledge to do all that I can when we get to the conference on this bill to restore funding to ensure the center can continue its work.

The problems with funding for the Glenn Research Center should not be solved by creating other problems elsewhere for NASA. A reduction of this magnitude to either the shuttle program or the station program would cause significant problems. If the funding reduction were taken against the shuttle program, safety and reliability upgrades would have to be deferred. If the funding reduction were taken against the space station, NASA would have to defer development of the crew return vehicle or any one of the numerous other efforts under way to ensure timely completion of the station.

There are no easy choices in this bill, but I do pledge to work with the gentlemen from Ohio to address these concerns with regard to the Glenn Research Center, but I must oppose the amendment because it creates more problems than it solves.

Mr. LATOURETTE. Mr. Chairman, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. WALSH. I yield to the gentleman from Ohio.

Mr. LATOURETTE. Mr. Chairman, I thank the distinguished chairman, the gentleman from New York (Mr. WALSH), for yielding. I also appreciate very much his remarks; and as I indicated during my 5 minutes, the majority whip has also indicated his support, and I am sure that everybody on our side and the other side recognizes the difficulty that the chairman was placed under, and we accept the pledge that we are going to figure our way out of this in conference.

Mr. Chairman, I ask unanimous consent to withdraw the amendment.

The CHAIRMAN pro tempore (Mr. PEASE). Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Ohio?

Mr. KUCINICH. Mr. Chairman, reserving the right to object, I want to thank the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. LATOURETTE) and the chairman for their concern over this, and we really need support on this and we are going to do everything we can. I want the people to know we are going to do everything we can to try to resolve this.

Mr. WALSH. Mr. Chairman, if the gentleman will yield under his reservation, both gentlemen should know this is a major concern to the subcommittee also.

Mr. KUCINICH. Mr. Chairman, I withdraw my reservation of objection.

The CHAIRMAN pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Ohio?

There was no objection.

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

Mr. Chairman, I rise at this time to engage in a colloquy with the chairman, the gentleman from New York (Mr. WALSH), and also the ranking member, the gentleman from West Virginia (Mr. MOLLOHAN).

Mr. Chairman, at the full Committee on Appropriations markup, I spoke on the issue of NOx, although I did not offer an amendment on the subject. I addressed what I felt was an apparent inequity created by two separate and conflicting actions that occurred last May. One was EPA issuing a final rule implementing a consent decree under section 126 of the Clean Air Act that is triggered in essence by EPA not approving the NOx SIP Call provisions of 22 States and the District of Columbia by November 30, 1999. The other was by the United States Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit in issuing an order staying the requirement imposed in EPA's 1998 NOx SIP Call for these jurisdictions to submit the SIP revisions just mentioned for EPA approval.

Caught in the middle of these two events are electric utilities and industrial sources who fear that now the trigger will be sprung next November 30, even though the States are no longer required to make those SIP revisions because of the stay, and even though EPA will have nothing before it to approve or disapprove.

Prior to this, EPA maintained a close link between the NOx SIP Call and the section 126 rule, as evidenced by the consent decree.

My proposal was to apply a parallel stay. It would have simply prevented EPA from implementing the NOx regulations through the back-door until the litigation is complete.

I believe such a stay is needed, because even though EPA said only a few months ago that the principles of State discretion embodied in the Clean Air Act require that States first address any interstate ozone transport problems through State implementation plans submitted in response to the NOx SIP Call rule, I understand that EPA is now suggesting it may reverse its interpretation of this act, forcing businesses to comply with EPA's federal emission controls under section 126 without regard to NOx SIP Call rule and State input.

This proposed reversal is creating confusion for the businesses and States. Under EPA's proposed new position, businesses could incur substantial costs in meeting the EPA-imposed section 126 emission controls before allowing the States to use their discretion in the SIP process to address air quality problems, less stringent controls or through controls on other facilities altogether.

Indeed, the fact that these businesses almost certainly will have sunk significant costs into compliance with the EPA-imposed controls before States are required to submit their emission control plans in response to the NOx SIP Call rule would result in impermissible pressure on their States to forfeit their discretion and instead simply conform their State Implementation Plans or SIPs to EPA section 126 controls.

While I think such an amendment is needed, I recognize the concerns of my good friends and agree not to offer it. Nevertheless, I believe that if EPA proceeds on its present course, we will have an untenable situation that EPA could avoid if it has a mind to do so.

In summary, the two independent actions in May, EPA's issuance of a final rule implementing the consent decree and number two the court stay of the NOx rule, need to be addressed.

Therefore, I ask my distinguished colleagues if they would agree with me that EPA should find a reasonable way to avoid triggering the 126 process while the courts deliberate.

Mr. WALSH. Mr. Chairman, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. KNOLLENBERG. I yield to the gentleman from New York.

Mr. WALSH. Mr. Chairman, I thank the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. KNOLLENBERG), my friend, for yielding.

Mr. Chairman, I very much appreciate the gentleman bringing this to the House's attention, the apparent dilemma created by these two events both occurred in May. I recognize, of course, the concern for my State, New York, that this matter be resolved swiftly and real remedies be adopted. I would encourage and expect the EPA to, over the next several months, find a way that is fair to all sides and recognize that the States should be the one to control the air pollution problems and not have them addressed by the sources therein without State input through the SIP process.

I, therefore, will work with the gentleman to see that EPA is fully responsive to these legitimate problems.

Mr. KNOLLENBERG. Mr. Chairman, I thank the chairman for his comments.

Mr. MOLLOHAN. Mr. Chairman, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. KNOLLENBERG. I yield to the gentleman from West Virginia.

Mr. MOLLOHAN. Mr. Chairman, I thank the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. KNOLLENBERG) for yielding.

Mr. Chairman, as my friend, the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. KNOLLENBERG) knows, I share his concerns on this matter. I would agree that EPA's apparent decoupling of the section 126 petitions from the NOx SIP Call is causing major confusion to industry and State regulators alike, particularly in my State of West Virginia. I join him in his strong encouragement that EPA work with all parties involved in this situation to find a fair resolution, and I look forward to working with him and the chairman and EPA and the industries in this regard.

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Chairman, I move to strike the last word.

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

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Chairman, I would like to engage the distinguished subcommittee chairman, the gentleman from New York (Mr. WALSH), in a colloquy.

Mr. WALSH. Mr. Chairman, will the gentlewoman yield?

Ms. KAPTUR. I yield to the gentleman from New York.

Mr. WALSH. Mr. Chairman, I would be happy to join in that colloquy with the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR), a distinguished member of the Committee on Appropriations.

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Chairman, I thank the gentleman from New York (Mr. WALSH) for his cooperation on this matter.

Mr. Chairman, in the bill, we have granted some additional funding to the National Credit Union Administration for its revolving loan fund for low income credit unions, and I thank the chairman for his leadership and consideration.

The purpose of the revolving loan fund is to make low interest loans to credit unions that serve primarily low income populations, and the earnings from the fund are used for technical assistance grants to low income credit unions so we really can help people become bankable.

Mr. WALSH. The gentlewoman is correct.

Ms. KAPTUR. I would like to emphasize then that when such technical assistance is made available to credit unions, the National Credit Union Administration should make every effort to ensure that such assistance is provided in a manner that is sensitive to the particular needs of the given credit union and considers the technical sophistication and background of the credit union's board and management.

Specifically, the National Credit Union Administration should recognize the unique circumstances of community development credit unions as opposed to all other credit unions and assure that specific technical staff is designated and trained to provide appropriate assistance to community development credit unions which primarily serve low income communities which are a unique subset of all credit unions.

Mr. WALSH. The gentlewoman's suggestion is an excellent one, and it is clearly consistent with the intent of the subcommittee's action today.

Ms. KAPTUR. In addition to formal technical assistance funded by the interest earned on community development revolving loan fund loans, occasionally the National Credit Union Administration examiners will assist a small or a troubled credit union with some aspect of operations as part of the regular examination process.

I also want to urge the National Credit Union Administration, when providing such assistance, to ensure that staff take special care to act in ways that respect and honor the dedication of a credit union's board and managers.

Mr. WALSH. Once again, the gentlewoman from Ohio makes an excellent point, and I would urge the NCUA to heed her advice.

Ms. KAPTUR. I want to thank again the chairman for all of his work on this bill, which is not an easy bill to move through this Chamber with all the respective departments and agencies, and for his special consideration on this particular subset of credit unions, largely serving communities where all other financial institutions have moved out.

Mr. WALSH. I thank the gentlewoman for her comments and for her dedication to the committee and to this issue of credit unions, where she has been a leader.

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

Mr. Chairman, I rise to enter into a colloquy with the chairman of the Subcommittee on VA, HUD and Independent Agencies concerning the current level of funding for veterans medical care on H.R. 2684.

Mr. Chairman, I am most thankful for the good work of the Members of the House Committee on Appropriations for bringing to the floor a bill with a $1.7 billion increase in spending for veterans medical care. This is the largest increase ever and would not have been possible without the hard work of the chairman of the Subcommittee on VA, HUD and Independent Agencies chairman, my good friend, the gentleman from New York (Mr. WALSH).

Unfortunately, despite this increase, lower New York and northern New Jersey could receive $40 million less than last year. According to the VISN 3 director, our network faces an estimated $125 million deficit due to inflation, VA's funding methodology and an increased demand for services, especially hepatitis C treatment.

The staff in VISN 3 have worked hard to identify cost savings and efficiencies, reduced its workforce and streamlined operations to work within the funding levels dictated by VA's methodology. Now, after squeezing every available dollar from the system, the VISN 3 director tells us we are at the point where veteran medical care, quality and access is at risk if he is forced to make any additional cuts in fiscal year 2000.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to get assurances that the Subcommittee on VA, HUD and Independent Agencies chairman will examine the distribution of funds to ensure that all regions of the country have the resources to provide quality health care for all of our Nation's veterans.

Mr. WALSH. Mr. Chairman, will the gentlewoman yield?

Mrs. KELLY. I yield to the gentleman from New York.

Mr. WALSH. Mr. Chairman, I thank the gentlewoman for bringing these important points to the committee's attention today, and I also would like to congratulate her and thank her for the leadership that she has provided on veterans issues. Veterans issues are constantly before her attention, and she makes very solid arguments in defense of and in support of veterans health.

I, too, as a member of the New York delegation am well aware of the problems in VISN 3. Under this funding level, we have opportunities to address those issues.

Mr. GILMAN. Mr. Chairman, will the gentlewoman yield?

Mrs. KELLY. I yield to the gentleman from New York.

Mr. GILMAN. Mr. Chairman, I thank the gentlewoman from New York (Mrs. KELLY) for yielding.

Mr. Chairman, I rise today to join my colleague, the gentlewoman from New York (Mrs. KELLY), in entering into a colloquy with the Subcommittee on VA, HUD and Independent Agencies chairman, the gentleman from New York (Mr. WALSH), concerning the current level of funding for veterans health care in H.R. 2684; and I want to commend the chairman and the other Members of the House Committee on Appropriations for their significant efforts to secure an additional $1.7 billion over the President's request for veterans medical care.

Regrettably, this historic increase in funding will do nothing to help meet the needs of our veterans in lower New York and northern New Jersey. The implementation of the Veterans Equity Resource Allocation system, known as VERA, some 3 years ago has led to over $120 million being taken away from the operating budget of our area, VISN 3.

To date, the VISN director and his staff have worked hard to trim the fat in their budget while assuring our offices they would notify us when further cuts would negatively impact care.

VISN 3 has now reached that point. Since 1997, the VA hospitals in my district at Castle Point and Montrose have had their budgets cut by $7.3 million. Since 1995, these hospitals have lost some 549 employees, a decrease of some 25 percent, the equivalent of an entire hospital.

At the same time, medical inflation has raised pharmacy costs for the VISN by 16 percent. The gentlewoman from New York (Mrs. KELLY) has noted the financial shortfall facing VISN 3. This shortfall will have a very real impact, a severe impact, on the quality of care being delivered to a veterans population that is older, less mobile, and in more need of specialized care than its counterparts in other VISNs.

Accordingly, I respectfully request the subcommittee chairman, the gentleman from New York (Mr. WALSH), to carefully review the distribution of medical care funds to ensure that the veterans of VISN 3 are not going to be denied the quality of care that their service to their Nation has earned for them.

Mr. WALSH. I thank my colleague from New York for his dedication to this issue, as he has provided leadership on this issue and so many others.

I assure him I will keep a close watch on the funding challenges for VISN 3.

Mr. LAZIO. Mr. Chairman, will the gentlewoman yield?

Mrs. KELLY. I yield to the gentleman from New York.

Mr. LAZIO. Mr. Chairman, I want to thank the gentlewoman from New York (Mrs. KELLY) for yielding.

Mr. Chairman, I want to begin by complimenting the chairman of the Subcommittee on VA, HUD and Independent Agencies for his outstanding work on housing and a number of different issues that we work closely on. As the chairman knows, we have and I have had a particular concern about the overall level of funding for veterans programs, and veterans health programs in particular, throughout this appropriations process.

As submitted by the President, the funding level for this account in the President's budget would have resulted in dramatic reductions.

The CHAIRMAN. The time of the gentlewoman from New York (Mrs. KELLY) has expired.

(By unanimous consent, Mrs. KELLY was allowed to proceed for 2 additional minutes.)

Mr. LAZIO. The President's budget, as we all know, would have resulted in dramatic reductions in health care services for many parts of the country.

I have met with constituents in many different areas of New York State who rely on this for their primary health care. I have heard the struggles that they have had in times of declining resources.

I appreciate, perhaps as much as anybody in this House, the leadership that the chairman has shown in crafting the bill that now contains the largest increase in veterans medical care in 20 years.

I am concerned, however, to learn that the veterans in my district may not share in this historic increase. Of the $1.7 billion increase, veterans in my region may receive as little as $6 million over FY 1999.

The North Port Medical Center, which supports veterans from my district and throughout Long Island, may still have a shortfall of millions of dollars. This shortfall would be the third consecutive year for reductions to this VISN, compounding the health care concerns of my constituents who have already experienced it with an increasing demand on services like treatment for hepatitis C and long-term health care.

Mr. Chairman, I believe this bill was intended to provide sufficient funding for all regions of the country to avoid cuts in services to veterans. I would like to get the assurances of the Subcommittee on VA, HUD and Independent Agencies chairman, my distinguished friend, that in the face of this historic increase in funding all VISNs will have sufficient resources to provide quality health care, and in particular the North Port facility in Long Island.

Mr. WALSH. Mr. Chairman, will the gentlewoman yield?

Mrs. KELLY. I yield to the gentleman from New York.

Mr. WALSH. I thank the gentleman for his comments regarding our efforts on the bills in general, and I would like to commend him for the leadership that he has provided and the dedication he has shown to veterans and his congressional district and all over New York State.

I appreciate the efforts of all of my colleagues in New York and northern New Jersey in increasing the amount of funding available for veterans health care, and will continue to work with the gentleman and our colleagues in the Senate and the administration to ensure VISN 3 will have the resources to ensure that the level of services and care for veterans in New York and New Jersey are not reduced as a result of this bill, including distribution of reserve funds.

Mrs. KELLY. Mr. Chairman, we all appreciate the committee's efforts on that and look forward to continuing our work, Mr. Chairman. We would like to have the chairman's assurances that he will continue in the future to work with us on this allocation.

The CHAIRMAN. The time of the gentlewoman from New York (Mrs. KELLY) has expired.

(On request of Mr. WALSH, and by unanimous consent, Mrs. KELLY was allowed to proceed for 1 additional minute.)

Mr. WALSH. Mr. Chairman, I stand ready to work with all Members to assure that each VISN receives sufficient funding.

Mrs. KELLY. I want to thank the chairman, the gentleman from New York (Mr. WALSH), and the committee for their continued efforts on behalf of our veterans and look forward to working with them to ensure the proper medical care for all veterans in the Nation. We thank the gentleman so much for his hard work.

Ms. McCARTHY of Missouri. Mr. Chairman, I move to strike the last word.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to engage the gentleman from New York (Mr. WALSH), the chairman of the subcommittee, in a colloquy.

Mr. WALSH. I would be happy to join the gentlewoman in a colloquy.

Ms. McCARTHY of Missouri. Mr. Chairman, I thank the gentlemen from New York (Mr. WALSH) for his leadership efforts on this most important effort.

As we have been made aware, I have some concerns about the bill. First and foremost among those concerns is the omission of the funding for the new surgical suite and post-anesthesia care unit in the Kansas City Veterans Affairs Medical Center in my district.

This medical center serves a growing population of almost 200,000 veterans in the Kansas City area, as well as referrals from 15 other medical centers from the four-state region. Those veterans are currently being served by an underfunded and undersized and deteriorating 50-year-old surgical facility, where corridors are used to store equipment; operating rooms are used for preoperative care; and backlogs extend as long as 24 weeks.

In these appalling conditions, veterans are wheeled down crowded corridors from surgical room to holding areas to post-operative care in plain view of their loving families. Veterans are waiting between 2 and 6 months for critical medical procedures ranging from hip replacement to neurosurgery.

In my letter to the chairman dated August 30, I explained that the new 31,000 square foot medical facility will eliminate these flaws by imposing both the quality and the access to medical attention. The project will reduce operating room turnover time from 45 minutes to 15 minutes, thus allowing 325 more cases to be performed each year.

□ 1345

The addition of holding rooms will also reduce scheduling backlogs, thus enabling 200 additional procedures per year.

This facility was listed by the Department of Veterans Affairs as the single most important construction project in the entire country. To disregard that judgment contradicts their unique expertise and effectively shuts our eyes and ears to the health care needs of this country's proud veterans. I think I can speak for the entire region when I say we must provide quality medical care for our veterans, and more than that, we must be guided by our veterans as we do so.

Every Member of this Chamber is painfully aware of funding limitations, but I would request of them that every effort be made in the conference committee to restore funding to this vitally important provision.

Mr. WALSH. Mr. Chairman, I thank the gentlewoman for her comments and for her concern and her advocacy for this important project. We faced some extremely difficult decisions when working with our allocation. We agree that the surgical suite project at Kansas City Veterans Affairs Medical Center is a meritorious project worthy of funding. Unfortunately, money was tight. We chose two projects that already had prior year funding to complete them.

As we move to conference, I assure my colleague from Missouri (Ms. MCCARTHY) that we will make every effort to fund this important project.

Ms. MCCARTHY of Missouri. Mr. Chairman, I thank the gentleman from New York (Mr. WALSH) for his leadership.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MS. JACKSON-LEE OF TEXAS

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Chairman, I offer an amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

Amendment offered by Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas:

Page 79, line 5, insert ''(increased by $250,000,000)'' after the dollar amount.

Page 79, line 19, insert ''(increased by $449,000,000)'' after the dollar amount.

Page 80, line 14, insert ''(increased by $225,600,000)'' after the dollar amount.

Mr. WALSH. Mr. Chairman, I reserve a point of order on the gentlewoman's amendment.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Chairman, I offer this amendment along with my colleagues, the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. GORDON), the gentleman from Texas (Mr. GREEN) and the gentleman from Texas (Mr. LAMPSON).

After yesterday's debate on the floor of the House specifically relating to the funding of NASA, a number of amendments that have been offered by my colleagues, both Republicans and Democrats, to add more dollars to the massive funding and most of whom or all of which failed, I offer this amendment, Mr. Chairman, to in fact restore the full funding to 924,600,000, the amount of moneys, almost a billion dollars, that was cut from NASA. This is with the understanding and appreciation of the leadership of the chairman, the gentleman from New York (Mr. WALSH), and the kind words that they have already said to me along with the gentleman from West Virginia (Mr. MOLLOHAN) on their viewpoints about NASA and the efforts along with some of the other concerns colleagues have expressed as we move toward conference. But I thought that the reduction of almost a billion dollars was so devastating that it was simply important to make the record for the American people that this basically halts, if my colleagues will, the American space program of which I believe over the years we have gleaned and garnered the commitment, the support, and the appreciation of the American people.

If I take, for example, the Johnson Space Center in Houston which provides work for over 15,000 people, a work force consisting of 3,000 NASA Federal service employees and 12,000 contractor employees, NASA predicted the effects of the cuts on the Johnson Space Center, and that picture is not pleasant. NASA predicts that an estimated 100 contractors would have to be laid off, contractors composed of many employees and workers. Clinic operations, would be reduced. Public affairs, community outreach would be drastically reduced. Also NASA would likely institute a 21-day furlough to offset the effects of the cuts.

I just recently met with and visited with some of those who are members of the Machinists Union, individuals who work and saw the nuts and bolts of what is going on at NASA Johnson. They would be drastically impacted. The hundred million dollar reduction in the International Space Station would be attributed to the space center and would cause reductions in the crew return vehicle program. This would result in a 1- to 2-year production slip and would require America to completely rely upon Russia for crew returns.

This is not only a Johnson Space Center issue. NASA Goddard Space Flight Center would maybe cut over 2,500 jobs. Such layoffs would affect both Maryland and Virginia. The hundred million dollar reduction in NASA's research and development would result in an immediate reduction in the work force of 1,100 employees for FY 2001. This would also require a hiring freeze, and NASA would not be able to maintain the necessary skills to implement future NASA missions.

Mr. Chairman, we have seen some of the exciting efforts that NASA has engaged in over the past months. The journey of John Glenn that tested and did research on the aging process, the leadership of Eileen Collins who commanded one of the recent shuttles, the docking of the Discovery with Russian Mir, and we also realized that Russian Mir is to be retired and the International Space Station is to be the leader of research in space that will deal with strokes, and high blood pressure, diabetes, HIV/AIDS.

This $924 million cut, almost a billion dollars, warrants this extreme measure that I am offering today which is to restore those funds. It calls upon this Congress and this House and this subcommittee to waive the point of order and to allow us to proceed and restore NASA to where it was. This is not a request for additional funds. This is not a request to in any way put NASA above some of the other concerns of Members. It is a request to, if my colleagues will, keep our commitment to NASA where we indicated there would be even funding for the last 5 years of the 13 approximately point 5 billion dollars.

What we are saying is that this cut of almost a billion dollars literally stops NASA in its tracks. It literally says, ''If you're building a bridge, you have stopped the building of that bridge, and you've caused everyone traveling on that bridge to fall off into the deep waters.'' I would ask my colleagues to realize as well that NASA has been one of the leanest, and I will not say meanest, agencies who has offered to cut itself willingly. In fact, it has cut itself $35 billion, and that has resulted in $35 billion in savings.

As I close, Mr. Chairman, let me simply ask that we have an opportunity to vote on this amendment and restore full funding to NASA for this budget year.

Mr. Chairman, I rise to offer an amendment with my colleagues, Representatives BART GORDON, GENE GREEN and NICK LAMPSON to satisfy the NASA appropriations request, raising the Appropriations Committee's recommendation by $924,600,000.

I have not offered any offsets because this bill is so flawed, we cannot provide offsets without impinging upon other vitally important budget items. It is my hope that my colleagues will realize that it is necessary to waive any point of order so we can fund this very significant agency. We must remain united against this poorly drafted bill.

Recently, the movie ''October Sky'' captured our imaginations. This movie, based upon the autobiographical book written by Homer Hickam, tells the tale of a young boy who dreams of building rockets. Hickam grew up in a blue-collar town in West Virginia, yet, he believed in his abilities. He believed that he could build rockets that would torch the sky. And ladies and gentlemen, he succeeded. His

rockets won him national acclaim, and he eventually became a NASA engineer.

This bill would take such a dream and crush it beneath the weight of political posturing. This bill would tell our children, ''Forget about space. You will never reach it.''

And our children's dreams are not the only casualties. Jobs are at stake. As a Representative for the City of Houston, I cannot stand by and watch my Houstonians lose their jobs because of these cuts. The Johnson Space Center in Houston provides work for over 15,000 people. The workforce consists of approximately 3,000 NASA Federal civil service employees. In addition to these employees are over 12,000 contractor employees.

NASA has predicted the effects of the cuts on the Johnson Space Center, and the picture is not pleasant. NASA predicts that an estimated 100 contractors would have to be laid off, contractors composed of many employees and workers; clinic operations would be reduced; and public affairs, particularly community outreach, would be drastically reduced. Also, NASA would likely institute a 21 day furlough to offset the effects of the cuts, and this furlough will place many families in dire straits. Also, the Johnson Space Center would have to eliminate its employee Safety and Total Health program.

The entire $100 million reduction in the International Space Station would be attributed to the space center and would cause reductions in the Crew Return Vehicle program. This would result in a 1 to 2 year production slip and would require America to completely rely upon Russia for crew returns. This is a humiliating situation! We pride ourselves in being the world leader in space exploration, yet, what does it tell our international neighbors when we do not even have enough funding to bring our astronauts home?

The cuts would not only affect Houston; they would affect the rest of the country. NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center would need to cut over 2,500 jobs. Such layoffs would affect both Maryland and Virginia.

The $100 million reduction in NASA's research and development would result in an immediate reduction in the workforce of 1,100 employees for FY 2001. This would also require a hiring freeze, and NASA would not be able to maintain the necessary skills to implement future NASA missions.

Negative effects will also occur across our Nation. Clearly, States such as Texas, Florida, and Alabama will see substantial cuts to the workforce, but given today's widespread interstate commerce, it is easy to imagine that these cuts to the NASA program will hit home throughout America. And NASA warns that the country may not see the total effects of this devastation to our country's future scientists and engineers for many years.

NASA contractors and employees represent both big and small businesses, and their very livelihoods are at stake—especially those in small business. They can ill afford the flood of layoffs that would certainly result from this bill.

Dan Goldin, head of NASA, has already anticipated the devastating effects of the NASA cuts. He predicts a 3 week furlough for all NASA employees. This would create program interruptions and would result in greater costs. Ladies and gentlemen, we are falling, if not tumbling, down a slippery slope. This bill would reduce jobs for engineers and would increase NASA's costs, a result that will only result in more layoffs as costs exceed NASA's fiscal abilities.

We are at a dangerous crossroads. This bill gives our engineers and our science academics a vote of no confidence. It tells them that we will not reward Americans who spend their lifetimes studying and researching on behalf of space exploration. I urge my colleagues to join me in my effort to stop the bleeding.

Over the past six years, NASA has led the Federal Government in streamlining the Agency's budget and institution, resulting in approximately $35 billion in budget savings relative to earlier outyear estimates. During the same period, NASA reinvented itself, reducing personnel by almost ⅓, while continuing to increase productivity. The massive cuts recommended by the Committee would destroy the balance in the civil space program that has been achieved between science and human space flight in recent years.

In particular, the Committee's recommendation falls $250 million short of NASA's request for its Human Space Flight department. This greatly concerns me because this budget item provides for human space flight activities, including the development of the international space station and the operation of the space shuttle.

I firmly believe that a viable, cost-effective International Space Station has been devised. We already have many of the space station's components in orbit. Already the space station is 77-feet long and weighs over 77,000 pounds. We have tangible results from the money we have spent on this program.

Just this past summer, we had a historic docking of the space shuttle Discovery with the International Space Station. The entire world rejoiced as Mission Commander Kent Rominger guided the Discovery as the shuttle connected with our international outpost for the first time. The shuttle crew attached a crane and transferred over two tons of supplies to the space station.

History has been made, yet, we seek to withdraw funding for the two vital components, the space station and the space shuttle, that made this moment possible. We cannot lose sight of the big picture. With another 45 space missions necessary to complete the space station, it would be a grave error of judgment to impede on the progress of this significant step toward further space exploration.

Given NASA's recognition of a need for increased funding for Shuttle safety upgrades, it is NASA's assessment that the impact of a $150 million cut in shuttle funding would be a reduction in shuttle flight rate, specifically impacting ISS assembly. Slowing the progress of the ISS assembly would defer full research capabilities and would result in cost increases.

Both the International Space Station and the space shuttle have a long, glorious history of international relations. We can recall the images of our space shuttle docking with the Russian Mir space station. Our nations have made such a connection nine times in recent years. This connection transcended scientific discovery: it signified the true end of the Cold War and represented an important step toward international harmony.

The International Space Station, designed and built by 16 nations from across the globe, also represents a great international endeavor. Astronauts have already delivered the American-made Unity chamber and have connected it to the Russian-built Zarya control module. Countless people from various countries have spent their time and efforts on the space station.

To under-fund this project is to turn our backs on our international neighbors. Space exploration and scientific discovery is universal, and it is imperative that we continue to move forward.

I also denounce the cuts made by the Appropriations Committee to NASA's science, aeronautics, and technology. This bill cuts funding for this program $678 million below the 1999 level.

By cutting this portion of the NASA budget, we will be unable to develop new methodologies, better observing instruments, and improved techniques for translating raw data into useful end products. It also cancels our ''Pathfinder'' generation of earth probes.

Reducing funding for NASA's science, aeronautics, and technology hinders the work of our space sciences, our earth sciences, our academic programs, and many other vitally important programs. By under-funding this item by $449 million, the Appropriations Committee will severely impede upon the progress of these NASA projects.

The CHAIRMAN. Does the gentleman from New York (Mr. WALSH) insist on his point of order?

Mr. WALSH. Mr. Chairman, I continue to reserve a point of order.

Mr. GREEN of Texas. Mr. Chairman, I move to strike the last word.

Mr. Chairman, I appreciate my colleague from Houston, Texas (Ms. JACKSON-LEE) bringing her amendment. Service on the Committee on Science, I think points out the need for this.

I have a district in Houston. It does not come close to the Johnson Space Center, but I also know the benefits that we all receive, even if we do not represent that particular area from both NASA and the science investment that NASA is doing and also the International Space Station. I appreciate the Committee on Appropriations adding the 400 additional million for NASA, however it still falls about a billion dollars short of what NASA needs to be an effective agency and to continue to be literally the world leader in preeminent space program. U.S. space program is the envy of the world, and I know a lot of Members get to visit with other countries, and oftentimes that will be sometimes the first issue they will talk about is the space program. The continued success of programs like the Mars Lander or the Hubble Telescope should not be halted because of shortsighted funds.

□ 1400

We are just beginning to understand this great huge universe that we have, and missions to search for water on the moon or to find life on Mars is what is keeping our Nation's technology and academic advancements going.

For the past few years I have had the opportunity, though, to have astronauts visit in the schools in my district. They will come in to our middle schools and talk about what they do and their job to encourage students to continue efforts or have an interest in math and science.

So we are not just talking about dollars and cents when we are talking about the NASA budget. We are talking about the impact of having an astronaut or a contractor who works with NASA come to our schools and make our students realize how important it is to have math and science. Maybe we would have more math and science majors than lawyers, Mr. Chairman. Since I am a lawyer and was not good in math and science, maybe I needed an astronaut when I was in the seventh or eighth grade to convince me of that.

The proposed cuts would eliminate a host of technology and research programs, and particularly at the Johnson Space Center in Houston in their research in astro materials such as extraterrestrial water that was trapped in crystals from outer space that just recently landed in West Texas, a meteor.

The proposed cuts would scuttle any progress on the Mars exploration. Even though the Mars exploration is being done literally on the cheap right now, this would make it even worse.

Space exploration is important and plays a critical role in our Nation's future, and I would hope that we would be able to, if not in this amendment today, then through the conference committee, restore the funding to NASA, because they have adopted a pretty good lean machine the last 3 or 4 years under Dan Goldin, and I think we ought to continue that success.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Chairman, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. GREEN of Texas. I yield to the gentlewoman from Texas.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Chairman, I want to thank the gentleman for his support in joining me in offering this amendment. One of the things I think Americans understand is when you tighten your belt yourself, and you just mentioned NASA has done that. But what we lose as well, and I know it impacts the gentleman's district, is an enormous number of jobs.

I do not know if the gentleman wants to further comment on that, but we already know there will be furloughs. We know that working men and women, people who are just blue collar workers, will lose their jobs, as well as our scientists and researchers.

Mr. GREEN of Texas. Mr. Chairman, reclaiming my time, my colleague is correct, although Mr. Chairman, I have to be honest, when somebody in my district that is a blue collar worker gets a job at Johnson Space Center, they move to the district of the gentleman from Texas (Mr. LAMPSON) or the district of the gentleman from Texas (Mr. DELAY) or the district of the gentleman from Texas (Mr. BENTSEN). They do not stay typically in my district in the inner-city. But it is important to those blue collar workers. That is why, Mr. Chairman, I hope when we do go to conference committee, that that funding will be restored.

POINT OF ORDER

The CHAIRMAN pro tempore (Mr. LATOURETTE). Does the gentleman from New York (Mr. WALSH) insist on his point of order?

Mr. WALSH. Mr. Speaker, I do insist on my point of order.

Mr. Speaker, I make the point of order against the amendment because it violates the rules of the House since it calls for an en bloc consideration of two different paragraphs of the bill. Precedents of the House are clear on this matter. Amendments to a paragraph or section are not in order until such paragraph or section has been read.

The CHAIRMAN pro tempore. Does the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON-LEE) wish to be heard on the point of order?

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. I would appreciate it very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, can I inquire whether or not I can yield to the distinguished gentleman from Texas (Mr. HALL) on the point of order, or can he be heard on the point of order, the ranking member?

Mr. WALSH. Mr. Chairman, I ask unanimous consent that the gentleman from Texas (Mr. HALL) be heard.

The CHAIRMAN pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from New York?

There was no objection.

The point of order is reserved.

Mr. HALL of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I move to strike the last word.

Mr. Chairman, I will be brief. I just want to point out the great need and the devastation that will occur if this is not carried. I want to point out some of the background.

Back in the early nineties there was a great effort made at the time when we had projected continued deficits that we would have cutbacks, and they called on all of the committees to cut back anywhere from 5 to 10 to 15 percent.

Well, space particularly and the NASA program, it is hard to cut back when you do not really know the effect of what you are doing. So with the help of the then ranking minority Member, the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. SENSENBRENNER), I as chairman of the Subcommittee on Space and Aeronautics called in Mr. Goldin and told him what our problem was.

We said, You can cut it with a surgeon's knife or we will cut the budget with a baseball bat, and it makes more sense to do it by someone like you, because when we cut the budget, we are always frightful we are going to cause loss of life or cut it in some life-threatening area.

Well, the thing I want to report to you is in the early nineties the projected spending for NASA was some $18 billion, and the reorganization and streamlining that took place at that time reduced it some 30 percent. So we have already taken hard licks in the NASA budget, hard licks in the space program, and really and truly by keeping the faith now we really do suffer from the cut that is proposed at this time.

I urge a reconsideration of this. I totally support the gentlewoman from Houston and those from other parts that support NASA. I do not doubt that you on that side support NASA and want the best for the program. I just urge you to reconsider and to give us some help somewhere along the line, whether it is at the level of the House and Senate conference committee or wherever it might be, to reconsider this.

POINT OF ORDER

The CHAIRMAN pro tempore. Does the gentleman from New York (Mr. WALSH) insist on his point of order for the reasons stated?

Mr. WALSH. Mr. Chairman, I do insist on the point of order. I would offer to the gentleman and gentlewoman that spoke the comments I made throughout the debate on this bill, that we understand your concerns. We have those same concerns. The difficult choices made while producing this bill caused us to make these rather difficult cuts.

As I have said, I will continue to work with all who have an interest in supporting this terribly important program, that as we work through the process and get to conference, we will try to fill those gaps as we go down the road.

Mr. HALL of Texas. Mr. Chairman, I thank the gentleman for that. I would like to point out that today the real dollar funding has gone down from the $14.4 billion to the $13.6 billion. At a time when they are projecting a $1 trillion savings in the next 10 years, this is no time to cut down our opportunity to really move ahead in the field of science.

The CHAIRMAN pro tempore. Does the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON-LEE) wish to be heard on the point of order?

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Chairman, I thank my colleagues who have come to the floor. I said yesterday that this is a hard question of choices, and I realize I asked originally for the point of order to be waived.

At this time, Mr. Chairman, with the representation of the chairman and the good work of the ranking member, I would simply ask at this time, Mr. Chairman, that the amendment be withdrawn and that I would offer to work with the chairman of the subcommittee and the ranking member of the full committee, the chairman of the full committee and the ranking member of the subcommittee on this very vital issue, not only to Texas, this is not a selfish position, but to the Nation. I wanted to call this America's space program, and I hope we will get NASA back to full funding soon, to save American jobs and to save America's space program.

Mr. Chairman, I ask unanimous consent to withdraw my amendment.

The CHAIRMAN pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from Texas?

There was no objection.

The CHAIRMAN pro tempore. The Clerk will read.

The Clerk read as follows:

SCIENCE, AERONAUTICS AND TECHNOLOGY

For necessary expenses, not otherwise provided for, in the conduct and support of science, aeronautics and technology research and development activities, including research, development, operations, and services; maintenance; construction of facilities including repair, rehabilitation, and modification of real and personal property, and acquisition or condemnation of real property, as authorized by law; space flight, spacecraft control and communications activities including operations, production, and services; and purchase, lease, charter, maintenance and operation of mission and administrative aircraft, $4,975,700,000, to remain available until September 30, 2001.

MISSION SUPPORT

For necessary expenses, not otherwise provided for, in carrying out mission support for human space flight programs and science, aeronautical, and technology programs, including research operations and support; space communications activities including operations, production and services; maintenance; construction of facilities including repair, rehabilitation, and modification of facilities, minor construction of new facilities and additions to existing facilities, facility planning and design, environmental compliance and restoration, and acquisition or condemnation of real property, as authorized by law; program management; personnel and related costs, including uniforms or allowances therefor, as authorized by 5 U.S.C. 5901–5902; travel expenses; purchase, lease, charter, maintenance, and operation of mission and administrative aircraft; not to exceed $35,000 for official reception and representation expenses; and purchase (not to exceed 33 for replacement only) and hire of passenger motor vehicles, $2,269,300,000, to remain available until September 30, 2001.

OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

For necessary expenses of the Office of Inspector General in carrying out the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended, $20,800,000.

ADMINISTRATIVE PROVISIONS

Notwithstanding the limitation on the availability of funds appropriated for ''Human space flight'', ''Science, aeronautics and technology'', or ''Mission support'' by this appropriations Act, when any activity has been initiated by the incurrence of obligations for construction of facilities as authorized by law, such amount available for such activity shall remain available until expended. This provision does not apply to the amounts appropriated in ''Mission support'' pursuant to the authorization for repair, rehabilitation and modification of facilities, minor construction of new facilities and additions to existing facilities, and facility planning and design.

Notwithstanding the limitation on the availability of funds appropriated for ''Human space flight'', ''Science, aeronautics and technology'', or ''Mission support'' by this appropriations Act, the amounts appropriated for construction of facilities shall remain available until September 30, 2002.

Notwithstanding the limitation on the availability of funds appropriated for ''Mission support'' and ''Office of Inspector General'', amounts made available by this Act for personnel and related costs and travel expenses of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration shall remain available until September 30, 2000 and may be used to enter into contracts for training, investigations, costs associated with personnel relocation, and for other services, to be provided during the next fiscal year.

NASA shall develop a revised appropriation account structure for submission in the fiscal year 2001 budget request consisting of the ''Human Space Flight'' account; the ''Science, Aeronautics, and Technology'' account; and the ''Office of Inspector General'' account. The accounts shall each include the planned full costs (direct and indirect costs) of NASA's related activities and allow NASA to shift civil service salaries, benefits and support among accounts, as required, for the safe, timely, and successful accomplishment of NASA missions.

NATIONAL CREDIT UNION ADMINISTRATION

CENTRAL LIQUIDITY FACILITY

During fiscal year 2000, administrative expenses of the Central Liquidity Facility shall not exceed $257,000: *Provided*, That $1,000,000, together with amounts of principal and interest on loans repaid, to be available until expended, is available for loans to community development credit unions.

NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION

RESEARCH AND RELATED ACTIVITIES

For necessary expenses in carrying out the National Science Foundation Act of 1950, as amended (42 U.S.C. 1861–1875), and the Act to establish a National Medal of Science (42 U.S.C. 1880–1881); services as authorized by 5 U.S.C. 3109; maintenance and operation of aircraft and purchase of flight services for research support; acquisition of aircraft, award-related travel, $2,778,500,000, of which not to exceed $245,600,000 shall remain available until expended for Polar research and operations support, and for reimbursement to other Federal agencies for operational and science support and logistical and other related activities for the United States Antarctic program; the balance to remain available until September 30, 2001: *Provided*, That receipts for scientific support services and materials furnished by the National Research Centers and other National Science Foundation supported research facilities may be credited to this appropriation: *Provided further*, That to the extent that the amount appropriated is less than the total amount authorized to be appropriated for included program activities, all amounts, including floors and ceilings, specified in the authorizing Act for those program activities or their subactivities shall be reduced proportionally.

MAJOR RESEARCH EQUIPMENT

For necessary expenses of major construction projects pursuant to the National Science Foundation Act of 1950, as amended, including award-related travel, $56,500,000, to remain available until expended.

EDUCATION AND HUMAN RESOURCES

For necessary expenses in carrying out science and engineering education and human resources programs and activities pursuant to the National Science Foundation Act of 1950, as amended (42 U.S.C. 1861–1875), including services as authorized by 5 U.S.C. 3109, award-related travel, and rental of conference rooms in the District of Columbia, $660,000,000, to remain available until September 30, 2001: *Provided*, That to the extent that the amount of this appropriation is less than the total amount authorized to be appropriated for included program activities, all amounts, including floors and ceilings, specified in the authorizing Act for those program activities or their subactivities shall be reduced proportionally.

SALARIES AND EXPENSES

For salaries and expenses necessary in carrying out the National Science Foundation Act of 1950, as amended (42 U.S.C. 1861–1875); services authorized by 5 U.S.C. 3109; hire of passenger motor vehicles; not to exceed $9,000 for official reception and representation expenses; uniforms or allowances therefor, as authorized by 5 U.S.C. 5901–5902; rental of conference rooms in the District of Columbia; reimbursement of the General Services Administration for security guard services; $146,500,000: *Provided*, That contracts may be entered into under ''Salaries and expenses'' in fiscal year 2000 for maintenance and operation of facilities, and for other services, to be provided during the next fiscal year.

OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

For necessary expenses of the Office of Inspector General as authorized by the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended, $5,325,000, to remain available until September 30, 2001.

NEIGHBORHOOD REINVESTMENT CORPORATION

PAYMENT TO THE NEIGHBORHOOD REINVESTMENT CORPORATION

For payment to the Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation for use in neighborhood reinvestment activities, as authorized by the Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation Act (42 U.S.C. 8101–8107), $80,000,000.

SELECTIVE SERVICE SYSTEM

SALARIES AND EXPENSES

To carry out the orderly termination of the programs and activities authorized by 5 U.S.C. 4101–4118, $7,000,000.

TITLE IV—GENERAL PROVISIONS

SEC. 401. Where appropriations in titles I, II, and III of this Act are expendable for travel expenses and no specific limitation has been placed thereon, the expenditures for such travel expenses may not exceed the amounts set forth therefore in the budget estimates submitted for the appropriations: *Provided*, That this provision does not apply to accounts that do not contain an object classification for travel: *Provided further*, That this section shall not apply to travel performed by uncompensated officials of local boards and appeal boards of the Selective Service System; to travel performed directly in connection with care and treatment of medical beneficiaries of the Department of Veterans Affairs; to travel performed in connection with major disasters or emergencies declared or determined by the President under the provisions of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act; to travel performed by the Offices of Inspector General in connection with audits and investigations; or to payments to interagency motor pools where separately set forth in the budget schedules: *Provided further*, That if appropriations in titles I, II, and III exceed the amounts set forth in budget estimates initially submitted for such appropriations, the expenditures for travel may correspondingly exceed the amounts therefore set forth in the estimates in the same proportion.

SEC. 402. Appropriations and funds available for the administrative expenses of the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Selective Service System shall be available in the current fiscal year for purchase of uniforms, or allowances therefor, as authorized by 5 U.S.C. 5901–5902; hire of passenger motor vehicles; and services as authorized by 5 U.S.C. 3109.

SEC. 403. Funds of the Department of Housing and Urban Development subject to the Government Corporation Control Act or section 402 of the Housing Act of 1950 shall be available, without regard to the limitations on administrative expenses, for legal services on a contract or fee basis, and for utilizing and making payment for services and

facilities of Federal National Mortgage Association, Government National Mortgage Association, Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corporation, Federal Financing Bank, Federal Reserve banks or any member thereof, Federal Home Loan banks, and any insured bank within the meaning of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation Act, as amended (12 U.S.C. 1811–1831).

SEC. 404. 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. 405. No funds appropriated by this Act may be expended—

(1) pursuant to a certification of an officer or employee of the United States unless—

(A) such certification is accompanied by, or is part of, a voucher or abstract which describes the payee or payees and the items or services for which such expenditure is being made; or

(B) the expenditure of funds pursuant to such certification, and without such a voucher or abstract, is specifically authorized by law; and

(2) unless such expenditure is subject to audit by the General Accounting Office or is specifically exempt by law from such audit.

SEC. 406. None of the funds provided in this Act to any department or agency may be expended for the transportation of any officer or employee of such department or agency between their domicile and their place of employment, with the exception of any officer or employee authorized such transportation under 31 U.S.C. 1344 or 5 U.S.C. 7905.

SEC. 407. None of the funds provided in this Act may be used for payment, through grants or contracts, to recipients that do not share in the cost of conducting research resulting from proposals not specifically solicited by the Government: *Provided*, That the extent of cost sharing by the recipient shall reflect the mutuality of interest of the grantee or contractor and the Government in the research.

SEC. 408. None of the funds in this Act may be used, directly or through grants, to pay or to provide reimbursement for payment of the salary of a consultant (whether retained by the Federal Government or a grantee) at more than the daily equivalent of the rate paid for level IV of the Executive Schedule, unless specifically authorized by law.

SEC. 409. None of the funds provided in this Act shall be used to pay the expenses of, or otherwise compensate, non-Federal parties intervening in regulatory or adjudicatory proceedings. Nothing herein affects the authority of the Consumer Product Safety Commission pursuant to section 7 of the Consumer Product Safety Act (15 U.S.C. 2056 et seq.).

SEC. 410. Except as otherwise provided under existing law, or under an existing Executive Order issued pursuant to an existing law, the obligation or expenditure of any appropriation under this Act for contracts for any consulting service shall be limited to contracts which are: (1) a matter of public record and available for public inspection; and (2) thereafter included in a publicly available list of all contracts entered into within twenty-four months prior to the date on which the list is made available to the public and of all contracts on which performance has not been completed by such date. The list required by the preceding sentence shall be updated quarterly and shall include a narrative description of the work to be performed under each such contract.

SEC. 411. Except as otherwise provided by law, no part of any appropriation contained in this Act shall be obligated or expended by any executive agency, as referred to in the Office of Federal Procurement Policy Act (41 U.S.C. 401 et seq.), for a contract for services unless such executive agency: (1) has awarded and entered into such contract in full compliance with such Act and the regulations promulgated thereunder; and (2) requires any report prepared pursuant to such contract, including plans, evaluations, studies, analyses and manuals, and any report prepared by the agency which is substantially derived from or substantially includes any report prepared pursuant to such contract, to contain information concerning: (A) the contract pursuant to which the report was prepared; and (B) the contractor who prepared the report pursuant to such contract.

SEC. 412. Except as otherwise provided in section 406, none of the funds provided in this Act to any department or agency shall be obligated or expended to provide a personal cook, chauffeur, or other personal servants to any officer or employee of such department or agency.

SEC. 413. None of the funds provided in this Act to any department or agency shall be obligated or expended to procure passenger automobiles as defined in 15 U.S.C. 2001 with an EPA estimated miles per gallon average of less than 22 miles per gallon.

SEC. 414. None of the funds appropriated in title I of this Act shall be used to enter into any new lease of real property if the estimated annual rental is more than $300,000 unless the Secretary submits, in writing, a report to the Committees on Appropriations of the Congress and a period of 30 days has expired following the date on which the report is received by the Committees on Appropriations.

SEC. 415. (a) It is the sense of the Congress that, to the greatest extent practicable, all equipment and products purchased with funds made available in this Act should be American-made.

(b) In providing financial assistance to, or entering into any contract with, any entity using funds made available in this Act, the head of each Federal agency, to the greatest extent practicable, shall provide to such entity a notice describing the statement made in subsection (a) by the Congress.

SEC. 416. None of the funds appropriated in this Act may be used to implement any cap on reimbursements to grantees for indirect costs, except as published in Office of Management and Budget Circular A–21.

SEC. 417. Such sums as may be necessary for fiscal year 2000 pay raises for programs funded by this Act shall be absorbed within the levels appropriated in this Act.

SEC. 418. 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. 419. Corporations and agencies of the Department of Housing and Urban Development which are subject to the Government Corporation Control Act, as amended, are hereby authorized to make such expenditures, within the limits of funds and borrowing authority available to each such corporation or agency and in accord with law, and to make such contracts and commitments without regard to fiscal year limitations as provided by section 104 of the Act as may be necessary in carrying out the programs set forth in the budget for 2000 for such corporation or agency except as hereinafter provided: *Provided*, That collections of these corporations and agencies may be used for new loan or mortgage purchase commitments only to the extent expressly provided for in this Act (unless such loans are in support of other forms of assistance provided for in this or prior appropriations Acts), except that this proviso shall not apply to the mortgage insurance or guaranty operations of these corporations, or where loans or mortgage purchases are necessary to protect the financial interest of the United States Government.

Mr. WALSH (during the reading). Mr. Chairman, I ask unanimous consent that the bill, title IV, sections 401 through 419, be considered as read, printed in the RECORD, and open to amendment at any point.

The CHAIRMAN pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from New York?

There was no objection.

The CHAIRMAN pro tempore. Are there any amendments to that portion of the bill?

If not, the Clerk will read.

The Clerk read as follows:

SEC. 420. Notwithstanding section 320(g) of the Federal Water Pollution Control Act (33 U.S.C. 1330(g)), funds made available pursuant to authorization under such section for fiscal year 2000 may be used for implementing comprehensive conservation and management plans.

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Chairman, I move to strike the last word for the purposes of engaging in a colloquy with the gentleman from New York (Chairman WALSH).

Mr. Chairman, I had intended to introduce an amendment, but have elected not to do so because the gentleman from New York (Chairman WALSH) has agreed to engage in a colloquy with me, and I appreciate his willingness to do so.

My amendment would have sought to extend for an additional year a provision that was included in the FY 1998 VA–HUD appropriation that states that the Federal share of grants awarded under title II of the Federal Water Pollution Control Act for publicly owned treatment works in the District of Columbia shall be 80 percent.

Currently the matching formula for water treatment projects in the District of Columbia is 80–20 because of a measure included 2 years ago by the VA–HUD chairman, at the time the gentleman from California (Mr. LEWIS). I have spoken directly with the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. SHUSTER), the Chairman of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, and he has indicated his support.

The gentleman from Pennsylvania (Chairman SHUSTER) has already indicated his willingness to work with me in devising permanent language that could be included in a clean water funding bill that the committee intends to consider shortly. I also have the support of the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. OBERSTAR), the ranking member, for extending the provision.

The 80–20 match has been indispensable to the District of Columbia Water and Sewer Authority in helping it to undertake necessary capital improvements. I intend to work with the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Chairman SHUSTER) to obtain passage of legislation to make this change permanent.

In the meantime, however, the provision that was passed 2 years ago is set to expire on December 30, 1999. Therefore, I must seek an additional 1-year extension so that important projects that WASA will be undertaking next year will not be jeopardized because of lack of funding.

I would ask the gentleman from New York (Chairman WALSH), I understand that you would like additional time to consider my request for a 1-year extension and that you would be amenable to working with me to have language included in the VA–HUD conference report. Is that the gentleman's understanding?

Mr. WALSH. Mr. Chairman, will the gentlewoman yield?

Ms. NORTON. I yield to the gentleman from New York.

Mr. WALSH. Mr. Chairman, yes, that is my understanding. I recognize the importance of this provision to the District of Columbia, and I look very much forward to working with the gentlewoman in that regard.

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Chairman, reclaiming my time, I thank the gentleman for his kind consideration.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. BOEHLERT

Mr. BOEHLERT. Mr. Chairman, I offer an amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

Amendment offered by Mr. BOEHLERT:

Page 93, line 6: strike the period and insert the following:

'', subject to enactment of legislation authorizing funds for such purpose.''

Mr. BOEHLERT. Mr. Chairman, the amendment to section 420 on page 93 regards the usage of federal funds for comprehensive conservation and management plans for our national estuaries. That is a proper role for the Federal Government. All of us recognize that.

The Clean Water Act allows EPA national estuary program grants to be used for developing plans, not for implementing them. Section 420 would allow these grants to be used for implementation for FY 2000.

Section 420 constitutes legislation on an appropriations bill in violation of clause 2 of rule XXI. However, we have talked with the chairman and ranking member and advised them that the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure is currently considering legislation to reauthorize the national estuary program. We are determined to do so, and we are moving with dispatch.

The proposed amendment would allow national estuary grants to be used for implementing plans, subject to passage of national estuary program reauthorization legislation.

I would urge its adoption. I would ask my colleagues to keep in mind that the gentleman from New York (Chairman WALSH) and the gentleman from West Virginia (Mr. MOLLOHAN), the ranking member, are both supportive, and I would ask that they affirm that support at this time.

□ 1415

Mr. WALSH. Mr. Chairman, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. BOEHLERT. I yield to the gentleman from New York.

Mr. WALSH. Mr. Chairman, I thank the chairman of the subcommittee for the excellent work that the gentleman from New York (Mr. BOEHLERT) has done in my State and across the Nation in protecting our air, water, and land. He has provided great leadership, in the tradition of the great Theodore Roosevelt also from New York State.

We see this as a friendly amendment, and I can say from our side that we are prepared to accept it.

Mr. BOEHLERT. I thank the chairman for those good words.

I would ask the gentleman from West Virginia (Mr. MOLLOHAN) also if that is his understanding.

Mr. MOLLOHAN. Mr. Chairman, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. BOEHLERT. I yield to the gentleman from West Virginia.

Mr. MOLLOHAN. Mr. Chairman, it is indeed.

Mr. BOEHLERT. Mr. Chairman, I move the amendment.

The CHAIRMAN. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from New York (Mr. BOEHLERT).

The amendment was agreed to.

Mr. WALSH. Mr. Chairman, I ask unanimous consent that sections 421 through 423 be considered as read, printed in the RECORD, and open to amendment at any point.

The CHAIRMAN. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from New York?

There was no objection.

The text of sections 421 through 423 is as follows:

SEC. 421. Notwithstanding any other provision of law, the term ''qualified student loan'' with respect to national service education awards shall mean any loan made directly to a student by the Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education, in addition to other meanings under section 148(b)(7) of the National and Community Service Act.

SEC. 422. Section 15d(a) of the Tennessee Valley Authority Act of 1933 (16 U.S.C. 831n–4(a)) is amended by striking ''30,000,000,000'' and inserting in lieu thereof ''27,000,000,000''.

SEC. 423. None of the funds made available in this Act may be used to publish or issue an assessment required under section 106 of the Global Change Research Act of 1990 unless—

(1) the supporting research has been subjected to peer review and, if not otherwise publicly available, posted electronically for public comment prior to use in the assessment; and

(2) the draft assessment has been published in the Federal Register for a 60 day public comment period.

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

Mr. Chairman, I would like to enter into a colloquy with the distinguished gentleman from New York (Mr. WALSH), chairman of the Subcommittee on VA, HUD, and Independent Agencies of the Committee on Appropriations.

I rise today to discuss with the chairman of the subcommittee the need for a veterans outpatient clinic in the Seventh District of Georgia.

Mr. Chairman, currently there are 9 outpatient clinics located throughout Georgia. The Seventh District has one of the largest veterans population of any congressional district in the State. However, it does not have an outpatient clinic.

In the State of Georgia there are more than 667,000 veterans, and the Seventh District is home to many of those. Many of the constituents in my congressional district are veterans who must drive long distances to receive treatment. In 1998, many thousands of veterans from the Seventh District had to go to the VA hospital facility on the east side of Atlanta to receive medical treatment. For those veterans in the western-most portion of the Seventh District, that trip takes a complete day, beginning early in the morning.

Establishing an outpatient clinic in the Seventh Congressional District would provide a very important service to our veterans, and would relieve pressure from the other clinics and the veterans hospital in Atlanta. It would be extremely cost effective.

Over the last year I have been in contact with the chairman about the importance of this issue, and I am pleased the committee will look into this issue in the House-Senate conference.

Mr. WALSH. Mr. Chairman, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. BARR of Georgia. I yield to the gentleman from New York.

Mr. WALSH. I thank the gentleman from Georgia for bringing this issue to the attention of the Committee, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, I understand there is a need for a veterans' outpatient clinic in the 7th District of Georgia. I would like to assure the gentleman that I will work with him on this issue toward the establishment of a clinic in that county of Georgia as we move towards conference.

Mr. BARR of Georgia. Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the commitment of the chairman.

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Chairman, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. BARR of Georgia. I yield to the gentleman from California.

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Chairman, I have heard stories like the gentleman's all over the country, I say to the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. BARR), about the needs of various districts and our veterans. They are real. I am glad that the gentleman is fighting for them.

We had a series of amendments yesterday that would have put the money in that would have allowed us to take care of that. The illogic of the position that is being argued by folks on the gentleman's side is that we have these needs but we are not going to put the money in to meet them.

So I sympathize with the gentleman and I voted to get the gentleman the money to have that outpatient clinic,

but nobody on the gentleman's side voted for the amendments that would have allowed that. So I do not understand how the gentleman can ask the chairman to take care of his needs and then not vote for the positions that would give the money to do that.

Mr. BARR of Georgia. Mr. Chairman, reclaiming my time, I would like to express my appreciation for the support of the gentleman from California.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. SMITH OF MICHIGAN

Mr. SMITH of Michigan. Mr. Chairman, I offer an amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

Amendment offered by Mr. SMITH of Michigan:

At the end of the bill before line 4, page 94, insert the following:

SEC. . Not withstanding any other provision of this Act, the amount appropriated for Environmental Programs and Management for the Environmental Protection Agency is reduced by $2,500,000 and the amount appropriated for Emergency Management Planning and Assistance for the Federal Emergency Management Agency is increased by $2,500,000.

Mr. SMITH of Michigan (during the reading). Mr. Chairman, I ask unanimous consent that the amendment be considered as read and printed in the RECORD.

The CHAIRMAN. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Michigan?

There was no objection.

(Mr. SMITH of Michigan asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. SMITH of Michigan. Mr. Chairman, the budget resolution, the authorization bill, H.R. 1550, and the FEMA director, James Lee Witt, all suggested that a $5 million appropriation to the Fire Administration be authorized in order to implement certain changes in the Fire Administration.

I would like to suggest to my colleagues that this is a compromise. The appropriators took out the $5 million. This amendment suggests that we move ahead with $2.5 million to implement these changes in the Fire Administration. The director of FEMA, James Lee Witt, has said at least with the $2.5 million they can move ahead and start making some changes necessary to help the first responders in this country.

We have 34,000 fire departments in this country. We have had very little support from the Federal Government. It has been suggested that, after all, it is already in this appropriation bill. There is a 20 percent increase in funding. The 20 percent is an increase from last year's $25 million to this year's $31 million, but they took out the $5 million for this special project.

Compare this authorization with what we have given law enforcement; for example, $1 billion for bulletproof vests in 1 year. What are we doing for our first responders? We make these first responders, 80 percent of whom are volunteers, do without any kind of support. We are now challenged in every community, in every township, in every hamlet, in every village of continuing to encourage these volunteers to perform the kinds of public service that they have been performing. Let us make some changes, and let us start giving these men and women a little support from Washington, D.C.

Since its creation in 1974, the Fire Administration has had a notable impact on communities across the country. Between 1986 and 1995, for example, fire deaths decreased 30 percent and the adjusted dollar losses associated with the fires decreased by 13 percent. Much of this decrease can be traced to research sponsored by the United States Fire Administration.

Earlier I had mentioned $1 billion to law enforcement for deaths. Last year we had about 200 deaths of law enforcement officers performing their duties. Last year we had 100 deaths of first responders, firemen trying to do their duty, and again, 80 percent of those individuals are volunteers, with little or no support.

We are talking about $2.5 billion. The $5 million was taken out. We are now talking about $2.5 million, at least starting down this road to help these first responders.

Losses from fire, I would call to the Members' attention, remain unacceptably high. During the period 1986 to 1995 period, an average of 2.1 million fires have been reported annually, and fires cost an average of 5,000 civilian deaths, 25,000 injuries, and $9.6 billion in losses each year.

Moreover, the United States has one of the highest fire death rates in the industrialized world, 15.6 deaths per million in population, higher than Australia, Japan, western Europe.

Mr. Chairman, we can and we must do better. I think this is a very modest request to move ahead with what needs to happen in the U.S. Fire Administration for them to do a better job servicing the 34,000 fire departments in our communities and the 1.2 million first responders that are trying to help their communities in protecting the environment, protecting from loss of life, protecting from loss of property.

A recent report by the blue ribbon panel made up of representatives of the fire service community spoke of a broken covenant between the Federal fire programs and the people and institutions they were created to serve. They listed 34 recommendations to improve the United States Fire Administration. At the top of the list was additional funding. This is a serious and earnest effort on the part of these stakeholders to bring about a positive change for the Fire Administration.

Mr. Chairman, the budget, the attorneys team Bill H.R. 155, and FEMA Director James Lee Wolf all suggested a $5 million appropriation to implement certain changes. Since its creation in 1974, the Fire Administration has had a notable impact on communities cross the country. Between 1986 and 1995, for example, fire deaths decreased 30 percent, and the adjusted dollar loss associated with fire decreased 13 percent. Much of this decrease can be traced to research sponsored by USFA that led to affordable smoke detectors.

Nevertheless, losses from fire remain unacceptably high. Over the same 1986 to 1995 period, an average of 2.1 million fires were reported annually, and fires caused an average of 5,100 civilians deaths, 25,000 injuries, and $9.6 billion in losses each year. Moreover, the United States has one of the highest fire death rates in the industrialized world—15.6 deaths per million in population—higher than in Australia, Japan, and most of Western Europe.

Mr. Chairman, we can and must do better, both for our citizens and for the firefighters who regularly put their lives on the line—80 percent of whom serve as volunteers. in an age where the word ''hero'' has been debased, firefighters still command the respect and thanks of the communities they serve, and rightly so. About 100 lose their lives every year in duty-related incidents.

However, a recent report by the Blue Ribbon Panel, made up of representatives of the fire-services community, spoke of a ''broken covenant between the federal fire programs and the people and institutions they were created to serve.'' They listed 34 recommendations to improve the United States Fire Administration. At the top of their list was additional funding. This is a serious and earnest effort on the part of these stakeholders to bring about positive change—to increase funding for the USFA while at the same time hold it accountable for its own performance.

The authorization that we passed overwhelmingly in this House provided this funding.

It also required the USFA to prepare a five-year plan on how the funding will be spent. It channeled new funding into the National Fire Academy for counterterrorism training for first responders and called for a review of National Fire Academy courses to ensure that they are up-to-date and complement, not duplicate, courses of instruction offered elsewhere.

This amendment restores the $2.5 million out of the $5 million requested necessary to achieve these goals.

It makes funding available to USFA through the FEMA ''Emergency Management Planning and Assistance'' account. It offsets this spending through a decrease in funding for the environmental protection Agency's ''Environmental Programs and Management'' account—a $1.8 billion account filled with earmarked programs not requested by the EPA. As Chairman of the Basic Research Subcommittee, it's important to me that we spend money on projects that meet the standards of competition and peer-review.

A sum of less than 2/10 of one percent from this account is reasonable to help this country's first responders.

Mr. Chairman, by funding the United States Fire Administration, this amendment has the potential of saving countless numbers of lives, significantly reducing physical injuries and decreasing the dollar amount of damages caused by fire and other forms of disasters. I would personally like to thank everyone from the fire service who has offered their support to me throughout this budget process. But more importantly, I would like to thank all 1.2 million first responders for their dedication and commitment to duty, and offer my best wishes for their continued success and safety.

I ask for your support on this amendment.

Mr. WALSH. Mr. Chairman, I rise in reluctant opposition to the gentleman's amendment.

Mr. Chairman, this surely is a worthy program. There is broad support certainly for fire prevention training. That is why the Committee on Appropriations increased the budget of FEMA's fire prevention training by 20 percent.

We have discussed and debated this bill for about 10 hours now, and we have seen clearly throughout the debate the difficult choices that we had. There is no other area, clearly, of this budget that has had a 20 percent increase. So it is a priority for the committee.

Mr. Chairman, the budget last year was about $25 million. This year it would be $31.4 million, under this budget, an increase of $6 million, $6 million that could have been used in any number of other programs that any number of other amendments would have affected.

FEMA had proposed an increase of over 45 percent for this budget item, but the committee could not support such an increase. The efforts of FEMA to overhaul and improve the United States Fire Administration are to be commended, but we should not smother the program with funding which may be not used effectively. How many times have we seen the Federal Government throw money at a problem, only to create more problems?

This would be a substantial increase for any budget. We need to give the agency time to implement the recommendations of the blue ribbon panel on the U.S. Fire Administration. While FEMA requested more money than this bill provides, the committee feels that slowing down the pace of implementation will be best for the program in the long run.

We remain committed to working with FEMA to implement changes in the Fire Administration, but we do not feel a funding increase of 45 percent in one year is merited.

Mr. Chairman, I would urge my colleagues to vote ''no'' on this amendment.

Mr. SMITH of Michigan. Mr. Chairman, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. WALSH. I yield to the gentleman from Michigan.

Mr. SMITH of Michigan. Mr. Chairman, I thank the gentleman for yielding to me.

Just to point out the percentages again, we had $25 million last year. The request was for $36 million. That was a 40 percent increase. We ended up with $5 million less than that. It seems that using percentages does not really reflect the contribution of the Federal Government to what is a very huge, serious contribution; again, 34,000 fire departments, over 1.2 million first responders, 80 percent of whom are volunteers, and to implement the blue ribbon committee we need that money.

Mr. WALSH. Reclaiming my time, the percentages do show a scale of increase in this budget. No matter how we cut it, a 20 percent increase in any budget is very substantial. It would be difficult, quite frankly, to manage.

Mr. MOLLOHAN. Mr. Chairman, I rise in reluctant opposition to the gentleman's amendment. In this amendment, my friend, the gentleman from Michigan, proposes to give the resources needed for the U.S. Fire Administration to implement changes called for in a recent Blue Ribbon Panel report.

The panel focused on the need to improve management activities, to appoint a Chief Operating Officer, and to establish a stronger mission statement.

Mr. Chairman, FEMA director James Lee Witt and the Fire Administrator, Carrye Brown, both support the changes recommended by the panel. Indeed, these changes are already being implemented.

Let me emphasize my very strong support for the activities of the Fire Administration. I know the gentleman from New York (Chairman WALSH) shares my desire to provide the resources needed to implement the panel's report, and I look forward to working with him to do so as this process moves forward.

However, the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. SMITH) has characterized this offset as coming from EPA's administrative account. What has not been made clear is that this account also happens to contain almost all of EPA's programmatic funding.

The cut could mean reductions in air and water protection, compliance assistance activities, pesticide registration, educational activities. As I said, this is EPA's programmatic account, and it will cut deeply, because EPA's funding is marginal in these activities. Those marginal cuts, while they may seem small, loom large when they get down to the programmatic level.

EPA is already underfunded in these areas, and this cut could impact it adversely. Therefore, I must oppose the amendment. At the same time, I want to restate my support for FEMA, for the Fire Administration, and for our country's first responders, and to working with the gentleman as this process moves forward to try to get adequate funding in this very important program.

I commend the gentleman for his efforts here, and reluctantly oppose his amendment.

Mr. SMITH of Michigan. Mr. Chairman, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. MOLLOHAN. I yield to the gentleman from Michigan.

□ 1430

Mr. SMITH of Michigan. Mr. Chairman, I thank the gentleman from West Virginia (Mr. MOLLOHAN) for yielding to me just a second just, again, to make clear that, from that account, it is a $1.8 billion account, out of that $1.8 billion, roughly one-tenth of 1 percent we are asking be transferred to an area that can tremendously help environmental needs. So it is a very small portion of that $1.8 billion.

Mr. MOLLOHAN. Mr. Chairman, it is indeed, and I acknowledge that. The point is that the gentleman is operating at the margins of accounts that are underfunded already, so it has dramatic impacts, not only programmatic, but also employment impacts at this point.

All of these accounts are underfunded in this whole bill. That is the principal purpose of opposing most of these amendments. We are operating on the margins. We need additional allocation. We need additional headroom in the caps. We need to do something with the budget resolution. These amendments are cutting accounts that cannot afford to be cut because they are already underfunded.

While it is an attractive argument to point out that the gentleman's amendment only cuts a small percentage across the board in these accounts, and that is true, it has dramatic effects because these accounts are already at the margins and unacceptably underfunded.

So, again, I hope that we get money in this bill as we move forward. I would certainly join the Chairman in working with the gentleman in ensuring that there are additional funds in this very worthy undertaking.

The CHAIRMAN. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. SMITH).

The question was taken; and the Chairman announced that the noes appeared to have it.

Mr. SMITH of Michigan. Mr. Chairman, I demand a recorded vote, and pending that, I make the point of order that a quorum is not present.

The CHAIRMAN. Pursuant to House Resolution 275, further proceedings on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. SMITH) will be postponed.

The point of no quorum is considered withdrawn.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. SANDERS

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. Chairman, I offer an amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

Amendment offered by Mr. SANDERS: At the end of the bill (before the short title), insert the following new section:

RURAL VETERANS HEALTH CARE SERVICES

SEC. __. The House supports efforts to implement improvements in health care services for veterans in rural areas.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. Chairman, this amendment expresses the Congress' support of efforts to improve rural health care delivery for our veterans, and I believe it is absolutely noncontroversial.

It is imperative that the special needs of veterans living in rural areas are recognized and that the particular problems associated with delivery of VA health care in rural areas often in face of shrinking resources are addressed.

I would like to thank the gentleman from New York (Mr. WALSH) and the

gentleman from West Virginia (Mr. MOLLOHAN), the ranking member, for what I understand is their support of this amendment.

Mr. Chairman, I yield to the gentleman from New York (Mr. WALSH).

Mr. WALSH. Mr. Chairman, I thank the gentleman from Vermont for his constructive amendment. We believe, just as he does, that rural health care services for veterans are extremely important and consider this a friendly amendment, and we are willing to accept it on our side.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. Chairman, I yield to the gentleman from West Virginia (Mr. MOLLOHAN) who is also sympathetic to this, as I understand.

Mr. MOLLOHAN. Mr. Chairman, I am very sympathetic, being from a rural area.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. Chairman, the problems facing veterans all over this country and especially in rural areas are very serious, and I think this amendment is helpful.

The CHAIRMAN. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS).

The amendment was agreed to.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. HINCHEY

Mr. HINCHEY. Mr. Chairman, I offer an amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

Amendment offered by Mr. HINCHEY:

At the end of the bill, insert after the last section (preceding the short title) the following new section:

SEC. ——. None of the funds made available in this Act may be used by the Department of Veterans Affairs to implement or administer the Veterans Equitable Resource Allocation system.

Mr. HINCHEY. Mr. Chairman, in offering this amendment, I mean to infer no criticism of the gentleman from New York (Mr. WALSH), the chairman of the subcommittee who has put this bill together under some very, very difficult circumstances and I think in many ways has done an excellent job, particularly in providing additional funds for veterans.

However, there is criticism to be offered in the way that the Veterans Administration is implementing a reallocation of existing resources. It is arguable that the resources are totally inadequate and will continue to be so after the large infusion of funds which are contained in this bill should the bill become law.

Nevertheless, VERA, in its allocation of these funds, is doing a grave disservice to certain veterans in certain parts of the country. In the initial phase of the implementation of this reallocation of resources, the veterans who are being injured the most initially are those who reside in the northeastern portion of the country. Those injuries are now spreading to other parts of the country and are being experienced by veterans in the midwest and elsewhere.

So we are calling upon the Veterans Administration in this amendment to cease and desist in the reallocation of these resources until such time as it can be adequately discerned what damages are being done and how best to use the resources that are available for veterans health care.

The VA is currently operating on the basis of a simple computer model, and that computer model does not adequately take into consideration the needs of veterans, the special circumstances that they may have, the environment in which the health care services are being delivered, and a host of other variables.

The consequence of that is that veterans in health care settings in a growing number of areas across the country are not getting the quality of care that they deserve and which the Congress wants them to have and which every American wants them to have.

Now it may be that veterans in some parts of the country have not been injured by this reallocation formula yet, but we have experienced a growing number of veterans being injured as a result of this reallocation formula over the last several years.

The initial negative impacts began to show up in the New York metropolitan area in 1996. Since then, they have spread through New England and down the East Coast and across Pennsylvania and into the Ohio region in the midwest. So if my colleagues have not yet begun to experience with their veterans the negative impacts of VERA, they need not wait too much longer, because those negative impacts will begin to express themselves almost invariably as a result of this formula, which is a blind formula totally without concern or care for the quality of health care that is being delivered in many parts of the country as a result.

So it is no less than prudent for us to intercede, to step in, and to say that this formula should not go further until we have a better and clearer understanding of its full impacts, and that we can develop a formula for allocation which will be in keeping with the needs of veterans and ensure that they get the quality of care that they deserve.

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

Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to rise today along with the gentleman from New York (Mr. HINCHEY), who has just spoken, to offer this amendment to suspend the Department of Veterans Affairs VERA formula.

We are joined by the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH), the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. FRANKS), the gentleman from New York (Mr. GILMAN), the gentleman from New Hampshire (Mr. BASS), the gentleman from New York (Mr. QUINN), the gentlewoman from New York (Mrs. KELLY), and the gentlewoman from New Jersey (Mrs. ROUKEMA) in offering this amendment today.

This amendment is about fairness, about treating all veterans equally regardless of where they live. After all, these veterans, all veterans served our country together, not from any particular region or particular State.

When VERA was implemented in April of 1997, without, I believe, adequate public discussion and education among veterans throughout the country, it began shifting funds away from some areas of the country such as the Northeast to other regions like the South and West. The VA claimed it was moving the money to where the veterans are. In the process, the VA left many of our veterans behind.

Why should a veteran in one part of the country receive better services than a veteran in a different part of the country simply because of where they chose to live?

VERA is destructive public policy. The program redirects money from areas where existing elderly populations, with increasing needs for care, to areas with developing veterans population that have similar needs. In the end, this program has done nothing more than pit veterans in one region of the country against veterans in other parts of the country.

Let me tell my colleagues what VERA has meant for veterans in my congressional district. VERA has meant that security stations in the psychiatric ward in Lyons VA Medical Center are often empty or undermanned. VERA has meant fewer doctors and nurses working more overtime to care for patients at Lyons and East Orange Medical Centers. VERA has led to the closure of the Lyons emergency room and the severe cutback in services in pharmaceutical help.

For the past 2 years, my area, VISN 3 in New York and New Jersey, has taken the biggest cuts under VERA. But New Jersey has the second oldest veterans population in the Nation after Florida. The veterans in my State are often older, sicker, and poorer than veterans that live elsewhere in the country.

I know this from having visited these veterans time and time again at these hospitals. The Lyons VA Hospital treats over 250 aging vets in its nursing home, many of whom are confined to wheelchairs. Further, every bed in the Alzheimer's unit is filled. I have visited these patients and can say that each one of these men deserve a great deal of care and rightly so.

Finally, Lyons has several inpatient units for treating posttraumatic stress disorder and other serious mental illnesses. This care is far more complex and far more expensive than outpatient treatment sought by many veterans in other parts of the country.

But it is not just my area, VISN 3, that is treated unfairly under VERA. Last year, under the formula, seven Integrated Service Networks, or VISNs, lost money. Parts of Massachusetts, New York State, New Jersey, New York, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Colorado, Montana, Utah, Wyoming, parts of California and Nevada.

Even with a record $1.7 billion increase for veterans medical care in this

appropriations bill under discussion today, some VISNs, and the veterans who live there, will receive no additional funding while other regions will receive large funding increases.

During our subcommittee's hearing in April, I asked Secretary West how much VISN 3 would receive if Congress increased the President's budget request by $1.5 billion. He could not answer me then. But in a written response, the VA admitted that for VISN 3 to break even in fiscal year 2000, we would have to increase the President's level by $2.4 billion.

Further, according to the VA's own numbers, VISN 3 will lose $40 million in fiscal year 2000 even with the $1.7 billion increase. As a result of VERA, VISN 13, which includes Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota will lose over $8 million. While veterans in these States will be denied services and face restricted access to care, veterans in other parts of the country will benefit from the increased allocation, up to $129 million.

Our amendment to suspend the implementation of VERA is on target because it will give Congress the time to evaluate the program's consequences on the quality of health care for all veterans. It is our duty and responsibility to fully explore the impact of VERA on veterans medical care and to ascertain the fairness of the formula and what distribution of funds under VERA actually means for patient care.

VERA is not the answer to the VA's funding problems. As I stated earlier, all VERA has done since it was implemented has been to create regional battles for diminishing funds.

Mr. MCNULTY. Mr. Chairman, I move to strike the requisite number of words.

Mr. Chairman, I rise in strong support of this amendment for the reasons that have been outlined by my other colleagues, especially the gentleman from New York (Mr. HINCHEY).

I come from Albany, New York, home of the Samuel S. Stratton VA Medical Center. I have seen the adverse impacts of this program in my community: Fewer services to veterans, fewer jobs for health care workers at that particular facility.

But let me just address the more global concern that I have. Have we lost all of our priorities around here? Do we not realize that we would not have the privilege of going around bragging about how we live in the freest and most open democracy on the face of the earth had it not been for the men and women who wore the uniform of the United States military through the years. Have we forgotten that?

My brother died in the service. He did not have a chance to come back and take advantage of benefits to veterans. He came back in a casket. But think about all the others who put their lives on the line, came back disabled, and need help, especially in their later years.

□ 1445

Think of all those who just served and took the chance that they might lose their life so that they could defend what we stand for here in the United States; yes, the freest and most open democracy on the face of the earth; the beacon for freedom for people all around the world.

I will never forget as long as I live being in Armenia on their independence day. I traveled throughout the northern part of that country, and I watched people stand in line for hours to get in for that privilege to vote for the first time ever. And then when they finished voting, they would not even go home. They had these little banquets at every polling place celebrating what happened. But what was most uplifting about it all was to be with them the next day in the streets of Yerevan as they celebrated and danced and shouted and sang ''Long live free and independent Armenia.'' And then they said, ''The example of what we want to be like is the United States of America.'' That is what they said. And on that particular day I was never more proud to be an American.

We should be proud to be Americans today and be proud of the people who went before us and put their lives on the line so that we could be enjoying all the blessings that we enjoy today. And we are failing in that regard. I ask my colleagues to think about that as they contemplate this amendment and support our veterans by supporting the Hinchey amendment.

Mr. NETHERCUTT. Mr. Chairman, I move to strike the requisite number of words.

Mr. Chairman, I listened to the last Speaker make his points about serving our veterans. I think defeat of the Hinchey amendment serves our veterans as intended by the Congress and by those who are subject to movement in this country. The veterans populations that are moving out of the northeast and going elsewhere, to the south and the west, would be disserved by this amendment. So I rise in opposition to the Hinchey amendment. This would block continued implementation of the VERA system, a change that would cripple the VA.

An identical amendment was offered last year. It failed in this House by a vote of 146 to 285. The House has spoken on this issue previously, and it has been against the position taken by the author of this amendment and those who support it.

On April 1, 1997, Mr. Chairman, the VA began to implement the VERA system, which allocates health care resources according to the numbers of veterans in each of the 22 regional VISNs, the Veterans Integrated Service Networks. The Hinchey amendment would jeopardize health care in the majority of VA networks by blocking continued implementation of this system. Before VERA, funds were allocated according to the historical usage of VA facilities adjusted annually for inflation. When veterans migrated to the west and the south, funding continued to be concentrated in the northeast.

The VERA system directly matches workloads with annual allocations, taking into account numbers of basic and special care veterans, national price and wage differences, and education and equipment differences. More efficient networks have more funds available for local initiatives and less efficient networks have an incentive to improve. Some regions do see a substantial change in their health care allocations under VERA, but all VA network administrators agree this reform is crucial to the sustainability of VA programs.

Last August, the General Accounting Office reviewed the VERA system in response to congressional direction in last year's VA bill. Overall, VISN 3 and VISN 4, and the VA nationally, have increased the numbers of veterans served. Increased the numbers of veterans served. As measured by patient satisfaction, access to care also has improved, according to surveys. The report notes that the two VISNs, 3 and 4, increased veterans access to care despite reductions in the buying power of their allocations by increasing the efficiency of their health care delivery system. That is the issue here. That is how the system is intended to work.

The GAO also concluded that greater oversight of the system is required. And that is good also. But the goals of VERA, to reduce inequities and allow the VA to serve more veterans, are being met.

This amendment proposes to prohibit funding for the VERA allocation model, creating a significant question about what model the VA would use instead. Presumably the authors of the amendment would support a return to the allocations of 1996. Compared to fiscal year 1999, allocations of such an adjustment would mean 17 of the 22 VISNs would lose money. Some areas would be particularly devastated by such a reallocation. The Pacific Northwest, my district, my region, would be cut by 16 percent; the Southeast by 14 to 16 percent; the Southwest would be cut 17 percent.

To restore funding to these 5 VISNs at fiscal year 1996 levels, all other 17 VISNs would take an approximate hit totaling $220 million. If VA was forced to recompute allocations according to the old model, the cuts would be even more severe. The two VA medical centers I represent would see their budgets cut by more than $9 million this year if we restored the old formula. What does that do to my veterans? I respect the comments about other veterans, but this hurts veterans no matter what. Such a bigger hit would cripple the vast majority of VISNs across the country.

I believe we should encourage the VA to continue moving forward with this successful initiative. We should oppose the Hinchey amendment. And if my colleagues are from any of these other

States, Southwest, South or West, they should oppose this. Because it is essentially saying go back to the old system and perpetuate inefficiency in some of these veterans areas.

So where the veterans are going, the veterans are receiving money for their health care, and that is appropriate. If there are fewer veterans in the Northeast and more veterans in the South and the West, the South and the West ought to get more allocation to help the veterans' health care needs of those regions.

I have the greatest respect for the authors of this amendment and those who have spoken in favor of it, but freezing the existing system or changing it dramatically, as I think this amendment would, is a disservice to veterans nationally. It may argue in favor of the veterans in that region, but it hurts the veterans nationally. I urge my colleagues to oppose this amendment as the House has done in the past.

Mr. FRANKS of New Jersey. Mr. Chairman, I move to strike the requisite number of words.

Mr. BASS. Mr. Chairman, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. FRANKS of New Jersey. I yield to the gentleman from New Hampshire.

Mr. BASS. Mr. Chairman, I rise in strong support of the Hinchey-Frelinghuysen amendment.

Mr. Chairman, before I begin, let me say that I don't doubt the sincerity of any Member's commitment to our veterans. The increase in veterans health care and service funding that this appropriation provides is truly historic. I commend Chairman WALSH and the members of the subcommittee on their work and dedication to the budget resolution's priorities.

Earlier this year, each Member should have received the 1999 VERA allocations book. It states on page 9 that ''A major premise of VERA is that networks receiving relatively fewer funds will adjust by becoming more efficient—not by reducing services or numbers of veterans served.''

If you consider that many of the networks in the Northeast and the Midwest are already among the most efficient providers of veterans care in the country, then you can clearly see the problem with this premise. For these networks, there is no way to adjust without reducing services or numbers of veterans served.

The facts are clear. The quantity and quality of the health care services in the Northeast and Midwest have declined. These veterans deserve better.

VERA was supposed to improve care, not harm it. VERA was supposed to tailor the allocations to each of the 22 networks based on the region's labor costs, veteran population, patient classification, facility condition, and other factors. Instead, it has led to a veteran against veteran, region against region competition. It has to stop.

Since fiscal year 1996, VISN 1, the network for all of New England, has faced an 8 percent reduction in resource allocations. During the same time, Congress has increased the total allocation by over 5 percent.

Congress and the VA should work together to find a better method of providing this critical care and determining resource allocations. I urge support for this amendment.

Mr. FRANKS of New Jersey. Mr. Chairman, reclaiming my time, I rise today as a cosponsor of the Frelinghuysen-Hinchey amendment.

The Veterans Equitable Resource Allocation is anything but what its name implies. VERA is indeed not equitable. In fact, it has had a disastrous impact on veterans health care in New Jersey. VERA was intended to direct the VA health resources to the areas of the highest veterans population. However, the VERA equation fails to calculate the level of care required by the patients.

VISN 3, of which my district is a part, has the second oldest veteran population in the United States. Clearly, these veterans have a greater need for medical care and pay the highest health care costs of all veterans, yet they will suffer from across-the-board cuts to their programs. Even with a $1.7 billion increase over the President's budget, VISN 3 will lose $40 million. Meanwhile, VISN 8, in Florida, which has legitimate needs, will receive an increase of $129 million. Mr. Chairman, that does not sound like equity to me.

Not only is the level of support provided to New Jersey veterans unfair, it is jeopardizing their health condition. Lyons as well as East Orange Hospital Centers have closed their pharmacies. There have been round after round of RIFs in both New York and New Jersey veteran hospitals. VERA has been a failure when measured against the health care needs of our veterans.

I urge my colleagues to support the Frelinghuysen-Hinchey amendment. Send the Veterans Administration back to the drawing board on this proposal. America's veterans deserve no less.

Mr. BALDACCI. Mr. Chairman, I move to strike the requisite number of words.

Mr. Chairman, I rise today in support of this amendment offered by my good friend, the gentleman from New York (Mr. HINCHEY) and the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. FRELINGHUYSEN), to support the reconsideration of VERA. This issue of VERA concerns many lives in the State of Maine as it pertains to veterans in particular but their families throughout the State also. I ask today that the House recognize the adverse effects of the VERA and how it appears to be having an adverse effect on many of my constituents and the constituents of many others in this body.

The Togas VA facility in Maine serves almost all Maine veterans and has felt the impact of stringent funding levels, which is referred to as region VISN 1. There have been more veterans seeking health services from VA Togas since VERA has been instituted, not fewer. But because of VERA, the resources are continuing to squeeze the VA's health care services. There has not been any study in regards to the rural impact of VERA and what it has done not just to Maine but other parts of rural America and its impact on veterans and veterans' health care.

Maine veterans expressed a significant level of anxiety about the present and future level of care at the Togas facility. And when we have asked our veterans to sacrifice, and to make the ultimate sacrifice by possibly laying down their lives down in defense of our country with the guarantee of health care for themselves, and then to be put into a situation where we are continuing, over a gradual period of time, of taking away those resources and not giving the veterans the health care protection that we had promised them when they had made their commitment to serve their country, I think gets at one of the underpinnings and foundation that has made America strong. We have to reinforce that and make sure we maintain our commitment to veterans.

My district is overwhelmingly rural, with many veterans finding that they cannot receive certain services in Maine. And asking a veteran to travel across the strait is enough of a burden, but many veterans are forced to travel to Boston, the hub of a network serving New England States for health care services. Mr. Chairman, in my State there is 22 million acres of land, over 3,500 miles of a rock-bound coast. In some parts of Maine there is more wildlife than life. And in that State, where it takes 5 to 7 hours to cover from one end to the other, asking veterans to then travel further downstate, enduring many long hours of travel, being away from their family and friends for support, I think is unconscionable. And I am very concerned that this VERA system may exacerbate this situation and it may not be helping the veterans, as we have seen in our experiences in Maine and throughout the country, as evidenced by the speakers here on both sides of the aisle in support of this amendment.

Mr. Chairman, I would ask the House to support this amendment.

Mr. GILMAN. Mr. Chairman, I move to strike the requisite number of words.

(Mr. GILMAN asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. GILMAN. Mr. Chairman, I rise today in strong support of the amendment being offered by my colleagues, the gentleman from New York (Mr. HINCHEY) and the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. FRELINGHUYSEN), to prohibit any funds from being used to implement the Veterans Equity Resource Allocation system known as VERA.

VERA was created to correct a perceived inequity in the manner in which veterans' health care dollars were being distributed across our Nation. While a noble effort, VERA was fundamentally flawed in that it did not look at the type of care being delivered

to veterans in given regions. Furthermore, it also failed to consider the effect of regional costs of providing health care in its calculations.

Under VERA, the watchword was efficiency; deliver the most care at the least cost. That sounds wonderful if the subject under discussion is outpatient care. But by forcing a one-size-fits-all solution to the problem, VERA has unfairly penalized those VISNs that provide vital services, such as substance abuse treatment, services for homeless veterans, mental health services, and spinal cord injury treatments. Under VERA, these services are all deemed too expensive and inefficient.

VERA was also implemented at a time when the VA's budget was essentially flatlined. Thus, VISN directors were not provided additional funds to offset the cost of annual pay raises for their VA staff as well as annual medical inflation costs.

□ 1500

This was not a problem for those directors of VISNs that received money under VERA. However, for those directors in VISNs like our VISN 3 in New York, that were losing money under VERA, this was a double hit that crowded out additional funds needed for other vital services.

Mr. Chairman, it is commendable that the subcommittee was able to find an additional $1.7 billion for our veterans' medical care. Yet, thanks to VERA, none of that money will find its way to the Northeast where it is vitally needed. Instead, it is going to be spent in those VISNs that have already seen increases in funding due to VERA.

Mr. Chairman, this is wrong and it is inequitable. The veterans of the Northeast, who are older, sicker, and less mobile than their counterparts in the Sunbelt, should not be unfairly penalized for where they choose to live.

This amendment starts to correct this problem by terminating VERA, a well-intentioned but poorly executed system that blatantly discriminates against those veterans who reside in the Northeast.

Accordingly, Mr. Chairman, I urge our colleagues to support the Hinchey-Frelinghuysen amendment to bring adequate health care to our veterans.

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

Mr. Chairman, let me say, I rise in opposition to the amendment. Frankly, what would happen here is we are turning back the clock. They would be distributing funds where veterans are not located. The whole idea was to actually have the funds go where the veterans are located.

In Public Law 104–204, it was mandated that the VA medical care funds should be equitably distributed throughout the country to ensure that veterans have similar access to care regardless of the region where they live.

Responding to that directive, the VA developed the Veterans Equitable Resource Allocation system, which we call ''VERA.'' In essence, this simply calls for distributing funds fairly based upon geographics, based upon the number of patients which VA medical centers in that region have treated.

The VERA system recognizes that there is a variability within the VA health care system. It makes simple adjustments for variations in labor costs. So the opponents to this say it has not made these variable adjustments for labor costs, it is already in VERA. It is also for research and education. So all the factors are already in here.

When I hear my colleague from New York say the people in the North are less mobile than the people down South, now, that is not true. The people down South have the same problems as the people up North. The fact is that there are more of them.

This amendment from my good friend would bar VA from distributing fiscal year 2000 funds under a system designed to achieve equity and reward efficiency. The amendment does not answer the key question, and this is a key question: What would he replace with VERA?

Presumably, its proponents want VA to reinstitute a truly inequitable system. So what they are asking for by supporting the Hinchey amendment is an inequitable system, not based upon geographics where all the veterans are going. They are ignoring population changes.

There is not one person that is for the Hinchey amendment that cannot tell me there has not been a population redistribution to the South. Patient utilization and hospital efficiency.

So this simply takes into effect all the factors of labor cost and research and education and basically puts the funds where geographically they should be located.

If this amendment passed, we are talking about chaos in the system. Its proponents aim to bail out the one network which would have less funding in fiscal year 2000 than fiscal year 1999. To cure that problem, their amendment would create problems for veterans in virtually every region of this country.

So, my colleagues, it is important to appreciate that, under VERA, VA has maintained a reserve fund, a reserve fund to alleviate special financial problems which individual networks encounter. No one has talked about this reserve fund.

So I say to the gentleman from New York (Mr. HINCHEY) he can go to get that reserve fund and get some of the funds there to help the individual hospital. So I encourage him and others to pursue a remedy for this network, if needed, through the reserve fund. Go to the reserve fund that was set up under VERA to handle the problems that my colleague and people from New York and New Jersey are talking about.

Do not unravel a system that is working, a system that is working for the veterans of this country, and the funds are now going where the veterans are going and it is geographically distributed.

Mr. HINCHEY. Mr. Chairman, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. STEARNS. I yield to the gentleman from New York.

Mr. HINCHEY. Mr. Chairman, I thank the gentleman for yielding.

First of all, I want to answer the question of my colleague. What we would replace it with is an equitable system, something that is fair and reasonable.

The problem is that we have in VERA a system that is inequitable and unfair. It is not that I do not want to recognize the fact that the population of veterans in Florida is growing. Of course we do. And we want all of those veterans to be taken care of.

I elicit the sympathy of my colleague for the veterans in New York and New Jersey and Pennsylvania and Rhode Island and Maine and Ohio. I appreciate the sympathy of my colleague for the veterans in Florida. Share that sympathy with other veterans in other parts of the country.

Mr. STEARNS. Mr. Chairman, reclaiming my time, the point is the geographic location, that the veterans are coming to the South more than the North. The funds have been distributed on that basis, as well as labor cost, research, and education; and we have set up a reserve fund.

My question to my colleague, which he can answer on his own time, is why does he not go to the reserve fund and try to get his money for these individual problems rather than creating chaos by eliminating a system that a blue ribbon commission has looked at. This is a far-reaching analysis to come up with this redistribution of the funds for the veterans in the geographic locations that need them.

The basic problem is, which we both agree, is that we need more funding for the veterans, and on that I can agree with my colleague.

Mrs. KELLY. Mr. Chairman, I move to strike the requisite number of words.

(Mrs. KELLY asked and was given permission to revise and extend her remarks.)

Mrs. KELLY. Mr. Chairman, I rise today in strong support for the Hinchey amendment.

Under the Veterans Equitable Resource Allocation plan, I have witnessed the effects of a $226-million cut to the lower New York area veterans network.

After careful study of VERA, I have come to the conclusion that it is flawed. These flaws permeate VERA's methodology, its implementation, and the VA's oversight of this new spending plan.

It is unfortunate that the VERA plan imposed upon our VA facilities is not one that provides proper funding to VA facilities but one to steal from Peter to pay Paul or to take from some VA facilities to give to others.

The gentleman was referring to the reserve fund. In fact, in the Northeast,

in VISN 3, that fund has had to be made available to the New York State area for the last 2 years because we keep running out of money in New York.

Before us today we have the VA-HUD Appropriations bill that contains the largest ever increase in medical care funding, $1.7 billion. And for this we have an excellent committee to thank.

Unfortunately, under the VERA program, even with this increase in size, the New York-New Jersey area will not see one dime of additional funding. In fact, according to the director of our VA network, we will in effect take a cut of $124 million.

This $124 million includes the mandated $40.6 million VERA cut, the rising cost of medical inflation that runs at 2 percent a year in our area, and the new mandate for hepatitis C coverage.

Let me speak to that point for a moment. I work here every day to provide new essential services to our veterans, such as the hepatitis C coverage, and to give many men and women who work in our VA hospitals a reasonable cost-of-living increase. But if we are going to do this, we must provide the funding necessary. Without any funds to cover these costs, the only option is to cut other services or reduce the quality of care provided.

It is wrong for us to pass new mandates on our VA hospitals without providing them the funding necessary to properly implement them. Please join me in returning common sense to VA funding methodology and vote for this amendment.

While VERA is supposed to promote more efficient and effective delivery of care, I am seeing the exact opposite occur at our veterans hospitals in my area. The staff is wonderfully caring and committed, but the VA is not supporting them, lowering their morale and making their jobs all the harder.

I beseech my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to support the Hinchey amendment and make the necessary investment into veterans hospitals in order to keep our promise of our care for our veterans. The veterans of this Nation gave their best for us. Now we need to do our best for them.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Chairman, I move to strike the requisite number of words, and I rise in opposition to the Hinchey amendment.

Mr. Chairman, VERA, as it is called, corrects historic geographic imbalances in funding for VA health care services and ensures equitable access to care for all veterans.

Long ago, Mr. Chairman, our Nation made a commitment to care for the brave men and women who fought the battles to keep America free. These are our Nation's veterans. Please take note when I say, ''our Nation's veterans.'' They are not Florida's veterans or Arizona's veterans or New York's veterans. They are our veterans, and we as a Nation have a collective responsibility to honor the commitment we make to them.

When they volunteered to fight for America's freedom, no one asked these veterans what part of the country they came from. It simply did not matter. Unfortunately, when they came home, veterans found out that where they live matters a great deal. Until the passage of VERA, a veteran's ability to access the VA health care system literally depended upon where he or she happened to live.

Since coming to Congress, and I am sure this is true for most of us, I have heard of veterans that were denied care at Florida VA medical facilities. In many instances, these veterans had been receiving care at their local VA medical center. However, once they moved to Florida, the VA was forced to turn them away because the facilities in our State simply did not have the resources to meet the high demand for care.

This lack of adequate resources is further compounded in the winter months when Florida veterans are literally crowded out of the system by individuals who travel south to enjoy our warm weather.

It is hard for my veterans to understand how they could lose their VA health care simply by moving to another part of the country or because a veteran from a different State is using our VA facilities.

Congress enacted VERA for a very simple reason, equity. No matter where they live or what circumstances they face, all veterans deserve to have equal access to quality health care. Since VERA's implementation, the Florida Veterans' Integrated Service Network, VISN, has treated approximately 44,410 more veterans. The Florida network estimates that it will treat a total of 285,000 veterans by the end of fiscal year 1999.

The Florida network has also opened 12 new community based outpatient clinics since VERA's implementation. It plans to open additional clinics in the near future. None of this could have happened without VERA. We have to ask ourselves, what happens if VERA is not implemented?

The failure to move forward with an improved and fair funding allocation system would mean that the VA would miss a unique opportunity to revitalize its way of doing business. The negative impact would be felt most by veterans who would not be treated in areas that are currently underfunded. Failure to implement VERA will waste taxpayers' dollars because a rush to the funding practices of the past will mean that some VA facilities will receive more money per veteran than others to provide essentially the same care.

The author of this amendment argues that veterans of New York are not being treated equitably. The VERA system already takes regional differences into account by making adjustments for labor costs, differences in patient mix, and differing levels of support for research and education.

With the $1.7 billion increase in VA health care included in H.R. 2684, VA facilities in the metropolitan New York area will receive an average of $5,336 per veteran patient. This means that these facilities will receive an average payment for each patient that is 16.11 percent higher than the national average.

On the other hand, the Florida VISN will receive $4,481 per patient, an average payment which is 2.49 percent below the national average. How is this inequitable to New York's veterans?

If the Hinchey amendment passes, continued funding imbalances will result in unequal access to VA health care for veterans in different parts of the country.

I urge my colleagues to vote against the Hinchey amendment.

Mr. SHAW. Mr. Chairman, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. BILIRAKIS. I yield to the gentleman from Florida.

Mr. SHAW. Mr. Chairman, I would like to associate myself with the remarks of the gentleman from Florida (Mr. BILIRAKIS).

The only inequity that the people from New York will suffer would be, if this amendment passes, when they move down to Florida, then they will see what the inequity is.

The mathematics is very clear. I hope my colleagues will listen to the gentleman from Florida. This is just a question of fairness, of basic fairness, and it is a question I think that all of us should ask for ourselves. Are the veterans who live in the Sunbelt entitled to less than those who stayed in the more populated areas that have not grown?

□ 1515

Mr. WALSH. Mr. Chairman, I move to strike the requisite number of words.

Mr. Chairman, I would just like to offer a modest proposal. We have obviously a very controversial amendment here. We have spent about half an hour discussing it so far. This has taken at least as much time as any amendment, and I understand there are very deep and passionate interests on the part of all Members.

What I would like to suggest, in the interest of time and expediency, we have the opportunity to finish this bill fairly soon. As a matter of fact, when this debate is concluded, there will be a vote on the amendment of the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. SMITH) and on, I presume, the Hinchey amendment. Then we would come back after that and conclude the debate on the remaining amendments.

Mr. Chairman, I ask unanimous consent that the Members who are interested in discussing this limit their time to 3 minutes as opposed to the 5-minute rule.

The CHAIRMAN. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from New York?

Mr. MCCOLLUM. Objection, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Objection is heard.

Mrs. THURMAN. Mr. Chairman, I move to strike the requisite number of words.

Mr. Chairman, as my colleagues on the floor can see, this is a very important issue in Florida. I think the entire Florida delegation is down here to speak on this issue. I might say that I think the reason we feel so passionately about it is because many of us were on the other end of this issue not but 5 years ago, 4 years ago, where our veterans were coming into our offices telling us that they could not get into the VA hospital; they could not get the health care that had been promised to them. So by the very nature, this has risen to be such a huge issue.

Now, on top of that, since the VERA has been implemented, I have to say people come in and say for the first time they are actually not having to wait for as long as they have.

Secondly, I would also like to point out that we have done what I think has been a masterful job in Florida in using even the amount of small resources that we have gotten, in the fact that we are not building huge VA hospitals anymore. What we are doing is we are doing outpatient clinics. We are actually going into these communities. We are actually having these veterans be served right in their own back yards, not 100 miles away, not 200 miles away, which in some cases is the way they did it. It was very cumbersome and very difficult.

With these additional dollars and, quite frankly, we could still use some more if we wanted to get into this, that we, in fact, believe that we have done a very good job with the smaller number of resources that we do have.

This whole VERA was really done on the fact because there were scarce resources, and the fact that over the years that every facility was getting just the same amount every day, or every year through the budget, they would get a 2 percent increase, a 3 percent increase, and there was nothing, nothing, to talk about the population changes that were happening in this country.

In fact, what we have noticed and what has been increasingly in Florida is the veterans population. So VERA basically just did a very simple allocation and said, if we can imagine this, that we ought to take health care for our veterans and follow where the patients are. That is all we are doing, is following where the patients have come.

So hopefully we are getting this point across to our constituencies here in Washington, and let my colleagues know that those veterans who have come from their States and have moved into our State are now finally being taken care of.

We appreciate what the Congress has done in the past. Please let us not turn this clock back. Please let us not have the situation where we have to go to those veterans that we all cherish and know what they gave up for us to go back and tell them that the system is not going to work again, that we are going to rearrange these numbers again and not based on the right reasons but all on the wrong reasons.

So with that, I would hope that we defeat this amendment.

Mr. MOLLOHAN. Mr. Chairman, I ask unanimous consent that in the interest of time, to ensure that every speaker has the opportunity for a full 5 minutes of debate on their part and at the same time being concerned about the amount of time this amendment is taking, if we could not agree on a time certain to end debate.

Mr. Chairman, I ask unanimous consent, just looking around, I would think the Members I see on the floor who I think are interested in this debate that we would end all debate by 10 minutes until 4:00, or some such time that we might agree on.

The CHAIRMAN. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from West Virginia?

Mr. MCCOLLUM. Mr. Chairman, reserving the right to object, maybe that is the best way to do it. If we could make that 4:00, I think there are about six of us here at this point in time, that would work about right. That would be 30 minutes, if that is agreeable.

Mr. MOLLOHAN. Mr. Chairman, I think that would give everybody on the floor an opportunity to speak. If there would be no objection to that, I would agree to 4:00.

The CHAIRMAN. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from West Virginia that debate on the Hinchey amendment conclude at 4:00?

There was no objection.

The CHAIRMAN. The Chair will continue to recognize Members under the 5-minute rule.

Mrs. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Chairman, I move to strike the requisite number of words.

Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to be here today to speak out on this important subject. There has been an ongoing lack of agreement between certain regions of the country on veterans and equitable funding. This particular problem has been cleared up by Congress. We all know what the problems were before the McCain and Graham bill that came up with this equitable formula, and I say it is equitable because the model is composed or computed in such a way that the VA's funding methodology is no longer based on traditional patterns. It is based on an assessment of what is done there. It is based on certain facets, and it is tailored to the price index that reflects the unique characteristics of these particular areas. So these veterans' networks, each of them has a separate and distinct characteristic and that is the background of the VERA funding model.

The implementation of VERA, as we all know, took place in 1997. Halfway through the fiscal year, everything was done to allocate resources in an equitable manner. The networks were funded at approximately one half of the 1996 level, plus a 2.75 percent increase. For fiscal year 1998, 13 VISNs received increases over funding levels for fiscal year 1997. Nine networks received less funding.

As with the previous year, a 5 percent limitation cap was imposed on the amount that any VISN, that any network, could be reduced below 1997 levels. So regardless of what we are hearing today, Mr. Chairman, not any of the VISNs have been hurt that tremendously so that we should not stick to our VERA formula.

I am calling for a defeat of this amendment because the medical care appropriated budget which comes to this subcommittee for 1999 provides a modest increase over fiscal year 1998 to $220 million, or 1.3 percent. For the 1999 fiscal allocations, the maximum amount, maximum that any VISN network was reduced below 1998, was, again, just 5 percent. The VA has emphasized that these networks receiving relatively fewer fundings will adjust, and they will adjust because the money is going where the veterans are. Wherever the veterans go, according to the VERA formula, that is where the money goes.

The older veterans come to Florida; not only Florida. That is one of the States they go, but I am here to say that we have a good formula. We do not need to change it because of traditional patterns. It is not the fault of Florida that the older veterans and the sicker veterans come to Florida.

We are here today to say that the basic care of veterans is being taken care of adequately by the VERA formula. So is the complex care. So is the geographic price adjustment. There is a differential here that makes this adjustment fair to the Northeast as well as the South, and it is based on labor costs that is paid by the VA facilities, as they compare to the VA national average.

These figures are not just pulled out of the sky, Mr. Chairman. There is that differential that is based upon labor costs.

Also, they make allocation adjustments for labor that is based on the most recent data that the VA can put together. So in 1999, it even looks better for VERA in terms of adjusting the formula.

This VERA formula is fair. It is equitable. It is based on substantive data. It is not based on historical funding patterns as to who received the money 15 to 20 years ago. It is not based on politics. Congress initiated this formula, and I would like to say to my colleagues, please defeat the Hinchey amendment for fairness for all the veterans of this country.

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Chairman, I move to strike the requisite number of words.

Mr. Chairman, I rise in very strong support of the Hinchey-Frelinghuysen amendment. I am very proud to be one

of the cosponsors of it, which simply calls for a 1-year moratorium on the VA's implementation of the Veterans Equitable Resource Allocation formula, and as Members know by now, hearing it so often, VERA. The moratorium will give Congress and the administration the time needed to make adjustments in the VERA formula that was instituted in 1997 so that veterans in certain geographical areas and age groups are no longer shortchanged by this funding mechanism. Quite simply, we simply need to put E, the big E, equity, back into VERA. Regrettably VERA paints veterans services with a broad brush leaving very little, if any, room for significant examination waiting costs associated with health care. VERA is a mathematical formula that essentially calculates how much a VA network will receive based on the raw number of veterans and whether their health care needs are basic or complex. The formula fails, utterly fails, to take into account the age and perhaps most importantly the specific type of illnesses faced by the various veterans populations.

For example, in New Jersey, our veterans are the second oldest group of veterans in the Nation, if we quantify it by State. As we all know, with age comes a plethora of health care problems, many of them more costly to treat. In our network alone 52 percent of veterans are over the age of 65 compared to 44 percent on the average, and I heard even earlier that many of these people, and they do, many of our veterans do move south and end up living in Florida. They happen to be the healthier ones, those who have the means as well as the health to go down to Florida, often by driving, and to have either a second home there or to actually up stakes and move there.

The sicker ones and the poorer people, the more indigent, stay in New Jersey and New York and they seek to use the services of the VA. They are the ones who cannot move. So it is not just age. It is also their costs, their situation. We have an explosion of things like cancer in our State. Those folks are not moving to Florida. They are seeking to get their health care right at their Veterans Administration, and now they are finding the VA has to do more with less.

Mr. Chairman, it is a 1-year moratorium we are asking for. This has only been in place since 1997. It is not working.

□ 1530

I happen to be the vice chairman of the Committee on Veterans Affairs. We have looked at this. I have sat with, for hours, with VA officials both in-State as well as down here, and I am totally dissatisfied with their answers, and I think I find it regrettable that some of my friends from Florida are standing up and saying it is okay down here. We are losing, and poor, indigent and very sickly veterans are the ones that are the net losers. We are not going to stand by and allow it, and I hope that the gentleman from New York (Mr. HINCHEY) and the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. FRELINGHUYSEN) amendment gets passed.

Mr. Chairman, it is a matter of equitable and fairness, and again we are asking for a 1-year moratorium so we can fix it.

Mr. Chairman, I urge support for the amendment.

Mr. Chairman, our amendment today calls for a one year moratorium on the VA's implementation of the Veterans Equitable Resource Allocation Formula—VERA as it is known for short. The moratorium will give Congress and the Administration the time needed to make adjustments in the VERA formula that was instituted in 1997 so that veterans in certain geographical areas and age groups are no longer shortchanged by this funding mechanism. Quite simply, we need to put the ''e''—equity—back into VERA.

Regrettably, VERA paints veterans services with a broad brush leaving very little—if any—room for significant extenuating costs associated with health care. VERA is a mathematical formula that essentially calculates how much a VA network will receive based on the raw number of veterans and whether their health care needs are basic or complex. The formula fails to take into account the age and perhaps most importantly, the specific types of illnesses faced by the various veterans populations. For instance, in New Jersey, our veterans are the second oldest group of veterans in the nation if you quantify by state. As we all know, with age comes new health care problems, many of them more costly. In the New Jersey part of our network alone, 58% of veterans are over the age of 65. Compare this with a nationwide average of 44%. However, the VERA formula makes no allowance for this disproportionate representation of aging veterans. A veteran's decision to stay in New Jersey or the Northeast for that matter, should not mean that their VA health care network is forced to do more with less. Veterans should not be forced to wait for weeks on end to see a primary care doctor or specialist as has been the case with increasing frequency in my state as a result of VERA.

Similarly, VERA fails to specifically weigh the type of medical treatment required in the varying networks.

For instance, the VA has mandated treatment of veterans with Hepatitis C. In New Jersey alone, the VA is treating 12 to 15 veterans per month who have tested positive for Hepatitis C, with a treatment cost of $15,000 per patient. Failing to take into account that we have a high rate of Hepatitis C in our network as well as a high rate of AIDS cases, VERA punishes New Jersey and the larger network that we are in, for treating all veterans, not just those who use the VA for an annual physical or for prescription drugs, but those with serious, ongoing chronic illnesses.

Our veterans served our country in her time of need; we should not forget them now simply because where they chose to spend their ''Golden Years'' does not nicely mesh with the VA's own bureaucratic formula. While VERA is well intentioned, the fact of the matter is that it pits veterans against each other merely on the basis of their geography.

In the 4th Congressional district of New Jersey, which I have the privilege to represent, veterans have felt the effects of VERA first hand. Faced with budget cuts due to the VERA formula, the network administrators who oversee Central and Northern New Jersey first responded with a knee jerk solution: elimination of the specialty services at the VA's clinic in Brick, New Jersey.

Needless to say, this decision immediately mobilized the veterans of Ocean and Monmouth Counties, who joined me in fighting these cuts. These specialty services, whether they be rheumatology or podiatry, free our veterans from being forced to spend valuable hours traveling great distances to see a specialist for the care they desperately need. Through my continued efforts to get the VA to ''think outside the box,'' we have managed to restore specialty services to the Brick Clinic. This is a battle however that we should not have had to wage. Our veterans deserve their health care. It should be reasonably accessible, period. They should not be held hostage to VERA as they are now.

There is simply no question that the VERA formula brought on the Brick Clinic's ongoing financial challenges. Furthermore, we are faced with at least a $36 million cut in our VA network in the upcoming fiscal year, so it is hard to see how threats to specialty services will not resume over the next several months. I ask my colleagues: where is the equity in a cut to Central and Northern New Jersey's network when our veteran population is aging rapidly and will need more, not less, specialty services?

I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting this important amendment.

Mr. PASCRELL. Mr. Chairman, I move to strike the requisite number of words.

Mr. Chairman, I rise today to voice my strong support for the Hinchey-Frelinghuysen amendment, and I urge my colleagues to do the same. The amendment is simple. It suspends the VERA program. What we need to do is to go back to the drawing board and come up with a program that is fair to all veterans.

If what the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH) has just enunciated can be documented, this is an embarrassing situation, Mr. Chairman, for the veterans and those of us who think we are helping to provide for those veterans in the State. VERA has selective memory and selective facts when they determined where the dollars are going to help our veterans. How horrible that the veterans find themselves in what we are calling here and defining as a sectional war. It almost reminds me of the debate on transportation that was in this hall, these halls. I remember that distinctly. Many of our veterans are not even registered. Most veterans do not even know what their benefits are.

Mr. Chairman, that is indeed an embarrassing situation.

So while the age of vets is different in the State of New Jersey and while the type of illness is different in the State of New Jersey, in the tri-State area I might add, what we need to do is take a look at this program very, very carefully. Congress will provide $1.7 billion more for veterans medical care,

yet for many veterans services they will be cut and medical providers will be reduced because many parts of the Northeast and Midwest will loose.

To those veterans who cannot move to Florida, I could not believe what I heard before to be very frank with my colleagues. With all due respect, the veterans equitable resource allocation program which re-directs money from one region of the country to another region of the country to pay for veterans who live in other parts of the country to me needs to be totally examined. God, if our veterans do not deserve better, who do?

The fact is that the VERA system is not equitable to all veterans. The amendment sends the message that VERA is not working, and it is not. The VA should develop a truly equitable plan.

Members of the military put themselves at great risk to protect American interests around the world. In return for this service the Federal Government made a commitment to both active duty and retired military personnel to provide certain benefits regardless of age, regardless of where they lived. Our veterans helped shape the prosperity our Nation currently enjoys. It is our duty to ensure that commitments made to those who serve are kept.

The VERA system is simply not working. I urge my colleagues to support this important amendment because it brings equity to all veterans and not just the select.

Mr. FOLEY. Mr. Chairman, I move to strike the requisite number of words.

Let me just first rise in opposition to the well-intended amendment by the gentleman from New York (Mr. HINCHEY) and my colleagues from New Jersey and others who definitely are on the side of the veteran; we realize that. Let me also suggest to my colleagues that Florida is not the bastion of wealth that is being assumed in this amendment, that somehow only the poor remain in their respective home States and only the wealthy move to Florida. We have veterans of every economic level. I urge my colleagues to come to my district and see the veterans firsthand. They are moving though in record numbers to the Sunbelt; there is no question about it. Every census, we get additional Members of Congress; every census, we get a different ratio of distribution of the formulas because people are moving in record numbers. And there is no difference with veterans.

So I want to strongly urge we continue the formula currently established in law, that we look at ways to satisfy the concerns the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH) and others have raised, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. FRELINGHUYSEN), because they are genuine. They want to care for the people who served this country, and all of us together today should not be about debating States particularly, but how do we make certain that each and every budget and fiscal appropriation first looks at the veterans who served this country, dedicated their lives and now have merely asked to be treated in a dignified manner that they deserve?

So again I want to urge my colleagues to carefully consider this, oppose the gentleman from New York (Mr. HINCHEY), and let us continue to debate the critical needs of veterans.

Mr. MCCOLLUM. Mr. Chairman, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. FOLEY. I yield to the gentleman from Florida.

Mr. MCCOLLUM. Mr. Chairman, there has been a lot of discussion about the veterans population in Florida. As the gentleman well knows, that about 61 percent of those who are treated are service connected. It is a very, very high number. And, in fact, I think we are second maybe only to Maine in the entire country in regard to that. So there has been some misunderstanding here today.

Our funding under VERA has increased since 1997 by 14 percent in Florida, but the workload has increased by 30 percent. In fiscal year 1995, VISN–8, which is the area that serves Florida, the VA office treated 225,000 veterans in fiscal 1999, will treat about 295,000, and it will go up to 300,000 in fiscal year 2000. I think that it is very clear that we need VERA to work.

Now maybe some technical problems with it, but this amendment should be defeated. It is wrong, and I know how hard the chairman has worked on trying to increase the VA budget in this bill, and it is modestly there, not as far as the gentleman from Florida and I would like, but it is there to some extent. I am disappointed though that the NASA budget has been cut so severely, and it makes this bill extremely difficult for me to support because NASA is extremely important to Florida and the Nation as well. And I find it is not his fault, not the chairman's fault, not even the subcommittee's fault. But I find it very difficult that the way the appropriations language is set out in these committee structures, we cannot trade off with other areas where the gentleman and I would think we ought to have savings rather than taking it out of NASA which absolutely is critical for the future of this Nation.

I also believe that we have a very serious matter in all respects with everything under this legislation, but above all we must keep VERA the way it is. The Hinchey amendment, while well meaning, is absolutely destructive, trying to let the moneys flow where the veterans go, and they are flowing to our State. Mr. Chairman, we are the only State with an increasing veterans population, we are now the second largest in the Nation. And we are going to get even larger in the coming years, and if we do not have the formula that is currently in law, there is no way that the veterans populations that are moving to the State of Florida in increasing numbers can be possibly served, are not even going to be served adequately as it is. We are well behind in every other respect.

So I very much appreciate the gentleman from Florida for having yielded, Mr. Chairman, and I strongly oppose this amendment

Mr. FOLEY. Reclaiming my time, I want to reiterate we have had a substantial caseload increase in the veterans facility in my district, but I also wanted to single out the gentlewoman from New York (Mrs. KELLY) who has also been a strong strident advocate for veterans in her district, and while we disagree on the policy here, I do respect her standing up for veterans.

Mrs. ROUKEMA. Mr. Chairman, I move to strike the requisite number of words.

Mr. Chairman, I rise today in strong support of this amendment and want to commend the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. FRELINGHUYSEN) and the gentleman from New York (Mr. HINCHEY) for what they have done here today in presenting this opportunity. And I have got to tell my colleagues this is not about discriminating by adopting this amendment. We are not proposing to discriminate against anyone, we are doing quite the opposite. We are proposing that we create a formula, have a period of time here to create a formula that is fair to every veteran in every State of the Union. That is what this amendment is about.

Mr. Chairman, I am shocked and appalled that we are, under VERA, presently discriminating against those veterans who served their country nobly and discriminating against them based on which State they live in. We have got to end this travesty, and we have got to do it today with this amendment.

Now my colleagues have heard some of the numbers here, but speaking again for New York and New Jersey, but also for 22 other States that are dramatically cut. Do my colleagues hear that? It is not normally New York and New Jersey. There are 22 other States dramatically cut under this VERA formula. But in terms of New York and New Jersey, we have the biggest cut. We are reduced $40 million.

Not only did we not gain a penny out of the $1.7 billion, but we were cut $40 million. Okay?

Now how does that get evaluated? How fair is that? How equitable can it possibly be? New Jersey has one of the oldest veterans populations, and if not the highest, one of the highest of the special needs veterans. I do not understand how anybody can support this kind of discrimination for our region of the country.

Now we have a lot of other things that we could say here, but let me in the interests of time draw another conclusion here.

The bottom line is that VERA is unacceptable, we must use this time period to correct it, and this amendment permits that correction. And might I say, and I do not know that anyone has

referenced this, but I will include this in my statement in the RECORD as an insert here, that even the GAO congressionally mandated study of August 1998 indicated in at least three areas, if not more, that there were oversights in funding to Northeast veterans, and they have indicated areas where VERA did not allocate resources necessarily properly, and I want that to be included here.

So let me say as firmly as possible we cannot discriminate against these wonderful men and women who have served their country. We have got to correct that inequity and correct that discrimination, and we can do it here today with the Frelinghuysen-Hinchey amendment.

Mr. Chairman, I rise today in strong support of this bipartisan amendment. This amendment will stop implementation of VERA, the VA's allocation formula, and sent it back to the drawing board so the VA can create a funding formula that is fair to every veteran in every state.

VERA IS UNFAIR

VERA unfairly pits veteran against veteran for the desperately needed health care services depending on which state they live in. I am appalled that we are discriminating against vets who served their country. Under VERA, seven different Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISNs) encompassing 22 states, including New Jersey and New York, lost money because of VERA in FY 1999.

Let me give you an example of how unfair VERA truly is. In this year's bill, we will increase spending on veterans' health care by $1.7 billion. This is a goal that many of my colleagues and I have worked on for years. Our veterans desperately need the added funding.

But let's examine what happens when the $1.7 billion is distributed according to VERA. Veterans from New Jersey and New York will not see a single penny of the $1.7 billion. In fact they will have their funding reduced by $40 million!

How is this fair? How is this equitable? New Jersey has one of the oldest veterans' populations and the highest number of special needs veterans. The funding reduction caused by VERA is taking a tragic toll on the veterans of New Jersey and the Northeast.

HEALTH SERVICES IN NEW JERSEY ARE BEING REDUCED

To save money, the VA has cut back on numerous services for veterans and instituted various managed care procedures that have the impact of destroying the quality of care the veterans receive. For instance, the VA has reduced the amount of treatment offered to those who suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and reduced the number of medical personnel at various health centers.

As a result of these cuts, there has been erosion of confidence between veterans and the VA. I can not describe the anger and pain I see in the faces of veterans in my district because of the reduction in health services. This erosion threatens to destroy the solemn commitment that this nation made to its veterans when they were called to duty.

We can not allow the VA to use VERA to save money by destroying the health care of veterans in New Jersey. We can not allow the VA to use VERA to use managed care to reduce quality. And we can not allow the VA to use VERA to close veterans' hospitals just because they are within sixty miles of each other.

CONCLUSION

The bottom line is: VERA is unacceptable and must change to a fairer more equitable system. This amendment permits this correction.

Although the GAO study to study VERA found that overall access to veterans' health care has improved they did find some glaring conclusions that need to be examined. The study cites:

Although VA has made progress in improving the equity of resource allocations nationwide among the networks, it has done little to ensure that the networks fulfill the Veterans Equitable Resource Allocation (VERA) system's promise as they allocate resources to their facilities;

Although GAO prepared an overall assessment of access to care, difficulties in working with the data cast doubt on whether VA can perform timely and effective oversight;

Without such information, it is difficult for them to say conclusively whether VA has improved veterans' equity of access to care and whether veterans have not been adversely affected by the many changes under way to reduce costs and improve productivity;

Because of these oversights funding to northeast veterans is being cut.

Let me state as firmly as possible: There can be no compromise when it comes to veterans' health care. The promise made to veterans must be kept. We must do everything in our power to ensure that veterans receive the best health care possible.

Defending the Constitution of the United States on foreign soil is the greatest duty the nation can ask of its citizens. Our veterans answered the call to duty and performed it to the highest standard. We must keep our pomise to our veterans regardless if they live in Florida, Texas, Maine or New Jersey. I believe a veteran is a veteran, period. The VA must have the same view. I strongly urge you to support this important amendment.

Mr. Chairman, I insert the following:

Without the $1.7 billion increase, the following VISNs would lose money in FY00:

22 States lose significantly:

VISN 1 (New England)—$28 million;

VISN 3 (New Jersey/New York)—$40 million;

VISN 7 (Georgia, Alabama, South Carolina)—$18 million;

VISN 11 (Michigan, Illinois, Indiana)—$17 million;

VISN 12 (Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin)—$16 million;

VISN 13 (Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota)—$21 million;

VISN 14 (Nebraska, Iowa)—$13 million;

VISN 15 (Missouri, Illinois, Kansas)—$21 million;

VISN 22 (California, Nevada)—$33 million.

Source: VA.

Mr. QUINN. Mr. Chairman, I move to strike the requisite number of words.

Mr. Chairman, I rise in support of the amendment today, and I want to thank my colleagues for the work they have done on this. I also wanted to begin by thanking the gentleman from New York (Mr. WALSH), the chairman of the subcommittee, for the tremendous job under difficult circumstances that he has done with the overall bill.

I am a member of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Mr. Chairman, and a Member who has a VA Medical Center in his district in Buffalo, New York, and also a Member who has together with other northeastern Members here sat down and talked with the Secretary of the VA some 2 or 3 months ago. The simple fact is that veterans are suffering, and while the VERA proposal was put together to provide more equitable funding for our veterans and their health care around the country, the opposite has occurred. It clearly has not done what it set out to do.

Mr. Chairman, I think all of us in this chamber are more pro veteran than anybody else, and this should not become a question of regionalism, it should not become a question of geographics; it should be a fairness question, and my colleagues, the gentleman from New York (Mr. HINCHEY), the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. FRELINGHUYSEN), the gentlewoman from New York (Mrs. KELLY) and others who offered the amendment are talking about fairness. It is a fairness question. We are not trying to pit geographic regions against each other.

This strikes at the heart of fairness, and I rise in support of it. I believe we need to cake care of all of our country's veterans, and this is the way to do it, and we will support the amendment, and I ask my colleagues to do the same.

Mr. Chairman, I rise in strong support of the amendment.

As a member of the Veterans, Affairs Committee and as a member who has a VA medical center in his district I have seen first hand the effects that this VERA model has had on veterans in the Northeast.

Mr. Chairman, the simple fact is, our veterans are suffering.

Due to this VERA plan VA hospitals are unable to provide quality healthcare to our veterans because the funds are not there for them to provide the care.

I have witnessed first hand the effects of this VERA plan.

Veterans in my district have expressed to me how they are denied appointments and have to wait in long lines before a doctor at the VA will see them.

These VA medical centers are understaffed and underfunded, again, a direct result of the VERA system.

VERA was established to provide more equitable funding for veterans healthcare around the country.

It clearly has not done that.

Mr. Chairman, our veterans in the Northeast need help—the VERA system as it exists today is unfair.

I am not against veterans in the sunbelt or the Southwest.

I am pro-veteran, I would hope that my colleagues who are from those areas just mentioned would see the need for a fairer VERA system.

We need to take care of all of our country's veterans.

They deserve it.

Mr. BEREUTER. Mr. Chairman, this member rises today in strong support of the Hinchey/Frelinghuysen amendment which would

prohibit funds in the bill from being used by the Department of Veterans Affairs to implement or administer the Veterans Equitable Resource Allocation (VERA) system.

From the time the Administration announced this new system, this Member has voiced his strong opposition to VERA and has supported funding levels of the VA Health Administration above the amount the President recommended. The new VERA system has had a very negative impact on Nebraska and other sparsely populated areas of the country. The VERA plan provides the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical care funding to regions across the country and employs an allocation formula that ties funding for each of the 22 geographic regions to the numbers of veterans they actually serve. While the VERA formula produced a very modest one percent increase in funding for this fiscal year, last year the VERA formula produced a 5 percent decrease, which resulted in $13.5 million less funding distributed to VA programs in my state of Nebraska, resulting in the fact that Nebraska is still receiving significantly less veterans funding than it did only two years ago.

All members of Congress should agree, Mr. Chairman, that the VA must provide adequate facilities for veterans all across the country regardless of whether they live in sparsely populated areas with resultant low usage numbers for VA hospitals. The funding distribution unfairly reallocates the VA's health care budget based on a per capita veterans usage of facilities. Because of this formula, we have already been faced with the closure of a major VA medical facility in my district. While it is true that the number of veterans now eligible to be served at the Lincoln VA Hospital and other VA facilities in the state have decreased over the past years, we still have an obligation to provide care to these people who served our country during our greatest times of need. There must be at least a basic level of acceptable national infrastructure of facilities, medical personnel, and services for meeting the very real medical needs faced by our veterans wherever they live. The decrease in quality and accessibility of medical care for veterans who live in sparsely populated areas is completely unacceptable. There must be a threshold funding level for VA medical services in each state and region before any per-capita funding formula is applied.

In closing Mr. Chairman, this Member urges his colleagues to support the Hinchey/Frelinghuysen amendment.

Mr. BOYD. Mr. Chairman, I rise today to state my opposition to the Hinchey amendment because of the impact it would have on veterans across the country and in my home state of Florida. The Hinchey amendment would prohibit the Veterans Equitable Resource Allocation (VERA) that was implemented in 1997 from taking effect in fiscal year 2000.

The intent of VERA was to guarantee that veterans who have similar economic status and eligibility receive the same medical services regardless of where they live. Prior to VERA, veterans health care was based on historic use patterns even though growing numbers of veterans are leaving the Northeast and moving to warmer parts of the country. This movement has resulted in a dramatic increase in the number of veterans moving to Florida and seeking medical care there. This rising volume of patients was overwhelming veterans medical facilities in the district I represent and without VERA hundreds of veterans who sought care in my district would have been turned away without receiving it.

Many of my colleagues oppose VERA because they believe it does not provide a fair distribution of veterans medical care. However, the General Accounting Office (GAO) has already studied this issue extensively. In a study released in 1998 the GAO determined, ''VERA has improved the equity of resource allocation to networks because, compared with the system it replaced, it provides more comparable levels of resources to each network for each high-priority veteran served.''

Unfortunately, many of my colleagues are attacking a byproduct of the problem facing our veterans instead of focusing on the problem itself. The heart of the problem facing our nation's veterans is not VERA, it is the lack of funding provided by the Republican budget. VERA is a fair and equitable way to distribute funding for veterans medical care but there simply is not enough money to meet the growing need.

Over the next ten years the Republican budget declines sharply from the fiscal year 2000 level while veterans health care costs will increase over 20 percent. These two facts are irreconcilable and if the veteran's budget is not adjusted fights like this will only intensify unless we all realize the Republican budget is simply inadequate. In closing, I urge my colleagues to reject the Hinchey amendment and address the real problem facing our nation's veterans, the inadequate funding allocation provided by the Republican budget.

Mr. PAYNE. Mr. Chairman, I rise in strong support of the amendment offered by Representative HINCHEY and my colleague from New Jersey, Representative FRELINGHUYSEN.

The so-called Veterans Equitable Resource Allocation (VERA) is anything but equitable. In fact, it is having a devastating effect on our New Jersey veterans. The men and women who loyally answered the call to military service in our nation now feel forgotten. The dramatic reduction in funding as a result of the VERA program has resulted in eliminated services, reduced personnel and long waits for medical attention.

Many of our states' veterans are older; in fact, New Jersey's 750,000 veterans are the second oldest in the nation. Medical needs are much greater for the aging veterans population. Many require nursing home care or special attention for age-related conditions.

Mr. Chairman, the veterans of my state of New Jersey supported our nation when we needed them. Let's not turn our backs on them at a time in their lives when they need our support. I urge my colleagues to vote in favor of the Hinchey-Frelinghuysen amendment.

Mr. ALLEN. Mr. Chairman, I rise in support of the Frelinghuysen/Hinchey amendment to prohibit the VA from expending funds to implement the Veterans Equitable Resource Allocation (VERA) formula for distribution of health care funds in fiscal year 2000.

Last year, during debate on the VA–HUD appropriations bill, I spoke on the negative impact of VERA on the VA's ability to meet the needs of veterans in the Northeast. Since then, the situation has gotten worse, not better for the 150,000 veterans in Maine. Veterans in my state depend on the Togus VA hospital in Augusta for their health care. Togus is located in VISN 1. Last year, the VISN 1 budget shrunk by more than three percent. Despite this bill's $1.7 billion increase in the fiscal year 2000 VA health care budget, VISN 1 would only receive a $9 million increase. Such an increase would still be $15 million less than fiscal year 1998 funding. Moreover, Togus had a $5.5 million shortfall in fiscal year 1999.

These cuts have forced Togus to reduce staff, causing severe strains on quality and timeliness of care. A reduced budget means longer wait times and more veterans who must travel further for care out of the region.

Mr. Chairman, we have severely disabled veterans who must drive hours to Togus. They are forced to wait long periods of time for care because doctors' appointments are backlogged. Veterans are suffering and the staff is upset because they cannot provide the quality of care they have in the past.

The VERA formula needs to be reexamined. The cost of rural health care delivery is higher than in more populated and urban areas, and yet that is not considered in the current funding formula.

Mr. Chairman, this Congress' fixation on the huge tax cut for the wealthy is endangering funding for veterans programs, for housing and for other domestic programs. We must get our priorities straight, and keep the promise to the veterans in this country. Support the Frelinghuysen/Hinchey amendment.

The CHAIRMAN. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from New York (Mr. HINCHEY).

The question was taken; and the Chairman announced that the noes appeared to have it.

Mr. HINCHEY. Mr. Chairman, I demand a recorded vote.

The CHAIRMAN. Pursuant to House Resolution 275, further proceedings on the amendment offered by the gentleman from New York (Mr. HINCHEY) will be postponed.

Ms. WATERS. Mr. Chairman, I move to strike the last word.

Mr. Chairman, the debate that has been going on for the last 2 days on VA HUD appropriations bill has been an interesting and engaging one, and I could not allow this debate to be ended without making some observations about what has taken place here.

Mr. Chairman, at a time when the economy is doing well and many people are benefiting from the well-performing economy, there is still many people who are left behind, and they need and deserve the support of their government. Too many farmers and seniors wait for years to receive HUD rental assistance because they have nowhere else to turn.

In the city of Los Angeles, over 160,000 persons are on the waiting lists for section 8 housing. The elderly, veterans, persons with disabilities, and the working poor make up the group on the section 8 waiting list. Unless we provide additional resources to fund section 8 and elderly housing, this number will continue to grow.

Two disturbing practices are becoming common place among those without affordable housing. One is referred to as must-share units. In a must-share unit several families share one housing

unit. It is not uncommon to walk into one of these units and see three families living in a three bedroom home each with a padlock on the door to their bedroom and sharing kitchen and bathroom facilities.

Second are illegal garage conversions. Here people run a water line and possibly some electricity into a garage and moves in a family. Tens of thousands of these make-shift homes are cropping up all over California. It should be noted that persons living in must-share units, as well as illegal garage conversions are the working poor, people who go to work every day and are doing things that the government asks of American citizens.

This bill negatively affects the most vulnerable American citizens. Of the 12.5 million very low-income rented households living in severely substandard housing are paying more than one half of their income for rent 1.5 million are elderly, and 4.5 million are children. The number of adults with disabilities living in such circumstances is between 1.1 and 1.4 million.

In the face of record need for affordable housing for our seniors, children, veterans and the working poor, Congress is set to worsen an already difficult predicament. This VA–HUD bill cuts $515 million in public housing programs alone, 250 million from the community development block grants, 10 million from the housing opportunities for people with AIDS program, 3.5 million from grants to historically black colleges and universities, and 1.9 million from the economic development initiatives.

□ 1545

As a result of these cuts, my home State of California will receive $151 million less than the amount requested by HUD. Specifically, the 35th District of California that I represent will receive $4.6 million less than the amount requested by HUD.

There is no fat to trim from the Department of Housing and Urban Development's budget. Every penny is needed.

Mr. Chairman, I would ask for a ''no'' vote on this appropriations bill. I ask for a ''no'' vote because it is absolutely shameful and unconscionable that we would be putting at risk the most vulnerable of our society, at a time when this economy is functioning so well.

We have a need for housing out there and help for people who simply will be on the streets without our assistance. It is unconscionable that we would have the waiting list for Section 8 that we have.

I want to tell you, even though it may be California, that space, with people living in garages, some without running water, it is your area next. We have growth in this population. Of course, we are in the Sun Belt and we may have more growth than some other areas, but you will witness it too. If you but go around your districts, even those districts that are high-income districts, you have low-income areas in your districts. Many of you have poor areas that you do not even recognize in your districts. Even if you do not see it in your districts, you are still stepping over the homeless on some of the major thoroughfares in America.

I ask for a ''no'' vote on this bill. It is the wrong thing for us to do.

SEQUENTIAL VOTES POSTPONED IN THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

The CHAIRMAN. Pursuant to House Resolution 275, proceedings will now resume on those amendments on which further proceedings were postponed in the following order:

The amendment offered by the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. SMITH) and the amendment offered by the gentleman from New York (Mr. HINCHEY).

The Chair will reduce to 5 minutes the time for any electronic vote after the first vote in this series.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. SMITH OF MICHIGAN

The CHAIRMAN. The pending business is the demand for a recorded vote on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. SMITH) on which further proceedings were postponed and on which the noes prevailed by voice vote.

The Clerk will designate the amendment.

The Clerk designated the amendment.

RECORDED VOTE

The CHAIRMAN. A recorded vote has been demanded.

A recorded vote was ordered.

The vote was taken by electronic device, and there were—ayes 69, noes 354, not voting 10, as follows:

[Roll No. 399]

AYES—69

Armey	Hayworth	Peterson (MN)
Barcia	Hefley	Peterson (PA)
Barr	Herger	Pickering
Bartlett	Hilleary	Pitts
Bonilla	Holden	Pombo
Brady (TX)	Hostettler	Radanovich
Burton	Hoyer	Rohrabacher
Coble	Hunter	Ryun (KS)
Crane	Jenkins	Sabo
Danner	Johnson, Sam	Salmon
DeMint	Kingston	Schaffer
Dingell	Larson	Sensenbrenner
Duncan	Latham	Sessions
Emerson	Lucas (OK)	Shadegg
English	Martinez	Sherwood
Everett	McCarthy (NY)	Shimkus
Fowler	McIntosh	Smith (MI)
Gekas	Mica	Sweeney
Gibbons	Ney	Tancredo
Goode	Nussle	Thornberry
Goodlatte	Oberstar	Tiahrt
Goodling	Pascrell	Walden
Hayes	Paul	Weldon (PA)

NOES—354

Abercrombie	Barrett (NE)	Bilirakis
Ackerman	Barrett (WI)	Bishop
Aderholt	Barton	Blagojevich
Allen	Bass	Bliley
Andrews	Bateman	Blumenauer
Archer	Becerra	Blunt
Bachus	Bentsen	Boehlert
Baird	Bereuter	Boehner
Baker	Berkley	Bonior
Baldacci	Berman	Bono
Baldwin	Biggert	Borski
Ballenger	Bilbray	Boswell
Boucher	Hastings (FL)	Myrick
Boyd	Hastings (WA)	Nadler
Brady (PA)	Hill (IN)	Napolitano
Brown (FL)	Hill (MT)	Neal
Brown (OH)	Hilliard	Nethercutt
Bryant	Hinchey	Northup
Burr	Hinojosa	Norwood
Buyer	Hobson	Obey
Callahan	Hoeffel	Olver
Calvert	Hoekstra	Ortiz
Camp	Holt	Ose
Campbell	Hooley	Owens
Canady	Horn	Oxley
Cannon	Houghton	Packard
Capps	Hulshof	Pallone
Capuano	Hyde	Pastor
Cardin	Inslee	Payne
Carson	Isakson	Pease
Castle	Istook	Pelosi
Chabot	Jackson (IL)	Petri
Chambliss	Jackson-Lee (TX)	Phelps
Chenoweth	Jefferson	Pickett
Clay	John	Pomeroy
Clayton	Johnson (CT)	Porter
Clement	Johnson, E. B.	Portman
Clyburn	Jones (NC)	Price (NC)
Coburn	Jones (OH)	Quinn
Collins	Kanjorski	Rahall
Combest	Kaptur	Ramstad
Condit	Kasich	Regula
Conyers	Kelly	Reyes
Cook	Kennedy	Reynolds
Costello	Kildee	Riley
Cox	Kilpatrick	Rivers
Coyne	Kind (WI)	Rodriguez
Cramer	King (NY)	Roemer
Cubin	Kleczka	Rogers
Cummings	Klink	Ros-Lehtinen
Cunningham	Knollenberg	Rothman
Davis (FL)	Kolbe	Roukema
Davis (IL)	Kucinich	Roybal-Allard
Davis (VA)	Kuykendall	Royce
Deal	LaFalce	Rush
DeFazio	LaHood	Ryan (WI)
DeGette	Lampson	Sanchez
Delahunt	Lantos	Sanders
DeLauro	Largent	Sandlin
DeLay	LaTourette	Sanford
Deutsch	Lazio	Sawyer
Diaz-Balart	Leach	Saxton
Dickey	Lee	Scarborough
Dicks	Levin	Schakowsky
Dixon	Lewis (CA)	Scott
Doggett	Lewis (GA)	Serrano
Dooley	Lewis (KY)	Shaw
Doolittle	Linder	Shays
Doyle	Lipinski	Sherman
Dreier	LoBiondo	Shows
Dunn	Lofgren	Shuster
Edwards	Lowey	Simpson
Ehlers	Lucas (KY)	Sisisky
Ehrlich	Luther	Skeen
Engel	Maloney (CT)	Skelton
Eshoo	Maloney (NY)	Slaughter
Etheridge	Manzullo	Smith (NJ)
Evans	Markey	Smith (TX)
Ewing	Mascara	Smith (WA)
Farr	Matsui	Snyder
Fattah	McCarthy (MO)	Souder
Filner	McCollum	Spence
Fletcher	McCrery	Spratt
Foley	McDermott	Stabenow
Forbes	McGovern	Stark
Ford	McHugh	Stearns
Fossella	McInnis	Stenholm
Frank (MA)	McIntyre	Strickland
Franks (NJ)	McKeon	Stump
Frelinghuysen	McKinney	Stupak
Frost	McNulty	Talent
Gallegly	Meehan	Tanner
Ganske	Meek (FL)	Tauscher
Gejdenson	Meeks (NY)	Tauzin
Gephardt	Menendez	Taylor (MS)
Gilchrest	Metcalf	Taylor (NC)
Gillmor	Millender-McDonald	Terry
Gilman	Miller (FL)	Thomas
Gonzalez	Miller, Gary	Thompson (CA)
Gordon	Miller, George	Thompson (MS)
Goss	Minge	Thune
Graham	Mink	Thurman
Granger	Moakley	Tierney
Green (TX)	Mollohan	Toomey
Green (WI)	Moore	Traficant
Greenwood	Moran (KS)	Turner
Gutierrez	Moran (VA)	Udall (CO)
Gutknecht	Morella	Udall (NM)
Hall (OH)	Murtha	Upton
Hall (TX)	Nadler	Velazquez
Hansen	Napolitano	Vento

Visclosky Waxman Wilson
Vitter Weiner Wise
Walsh Weldon (FL) Wolf
Wamp Weller Woolsey
Waters Wexler Wu
Watkins Weygand Wynn
Watt (NC) Whitfield Young (FL)
Watts (OK) Wicker

NOT VOTING—10

Berry Pryce (OH) Towns
Cooksey Rangel Young (AK)
Crowley Rogan
Hutchinson Sununu

□ 1609

Mr. MCHUGH, Ms. BERKLEY, and Mr. SCARBOROUGH changed their vote from ''aye'' to ''no.''

Messrs. COBLE, ROHRABACHER, ARMEY, BURTON of Indiana, SHERWOOD, and HOYER changed their vote from ''no'' to ''aye.''

So the amendment was rejected.

The result of the vote was announced as above recorded.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

The CHAIRMAN. Pursuant to House Resolution 275, the Chair announces that he will reduce to a minimum of 5 minutes the period of time within which a vote by electronic device will be taken on the amendment on which the Chair has postponed further proceedings.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. HINCHEY

The Chairman. The pending business is the demand for a recorded vote on the amendment offered by the gentleman from New York (Mr. HINCHEY) on which further proceedings were postponed and on which the noes prevailed by voice vote.

The Clerk will designate the amendment.

The Clerk designated the amendment.

RECORDED VOTE

The CHAIRMAN. A recorded vote has been demanded.

A recorded vote was ordered.

The CHAIRMAN. This is a 5-minute vote.

The vote was taken by electronic device, and there were—ayes 158, noes 266, not voting 9, as follows:

[Roll No. 400]

AYES—158

Ackerman Delahunt Holt
Allen DeLauro Houghton
Andrews Doyle Hulshof
Bachus Ehlers Jackson (IL)
Baldacci Engel Johnson (CT)
Barcia English Jones (OH)
Barrett (NE) Evans Kanjorski
Barton Ewing Kelly
Bass Fattah Kennedy
Bereuter Forbes Kildee
Berman Fossella Kilpatrick
Biggert Frank (MA) Kind (WI)
Blagojevich Franks (NJ) King (NY)
Boehlert Frelinghuysen Kleczka
Bonior Ganske Klink
Borski Gejdenson Kucinich
Boswell Gekas LaFalce
Brady (PA) Gilman LaHood
Camp Goodling Larson
Capuano Graham Latham
Castle Green (WI) LaTourette
Chabot Greenwood Lazio
Conyers Gutierrez Leach
Costello Hinchey Levin
Coyne Hoeffel Lipinski
Crane Hoekstra LoBiondo
Davis (IL) Holden Lowey
Luther Pallone Sherwood
Maloney (CT) Pascrell Shimkus
Maloney (NY) Payne Shuster
Manzullo Peterson (PA) Skelton
Markey Petri Slaughter
Martinez Phelps Smith (MI)
Mascara Pitts Smith (NJ)
Matsui Pombo Spence
McCarthy (NY) Porter Stabenow
McGovern Quinn Stupak
McHugh Ramstad Sweeney
McNulty Reynolds Terry
Meehan Riley Tierney
Meeks (NY) Rivers Toomey
Menendez Roemer Traficant
Moakley Rothman Upton
Mollohan Roukema Velazquez
Murtha Rush Visclosky
Nadler Ryan (WI) Walsh
Neal Sanders Waters
Ney Sawyer Waxman
Nussle Saxton Weiner
Oberstar Schakowsky Weldon (PA)
Obey Sensenbrenner Weller
Olver Serrano Weygand
Owens Shays

NOES—266

Abercrombie Dixon Kuykendall
Aderholt Doggett Lampson
Archer Dooley Lantos
Armey Doolittle Largent
Baird Dreier Lee
Baker Duncan Lewis (CA)
Baldwin Dunn Lewis (GA)
Ballenger Edwards Lewis (KY)
Barr Ehrlich Linder
Barrett (WI) Emerson Lofgren
Bartlett Eshoo Lucas (KY)
Bateman Etheridge Lucas (OK)
Becerra Everett McCarthy (MO)
Bentsen Farr McCollum
Berkley Filner McCrery
Bilbray Fletcher McDermott
Bilirakis Foley McInnis
Bishop Ford McIntosh
Bliley Fowler McIntyre
Blumenauer Frost McKeon
Blunt Gallegly McKinney
Boehner Gephardt Meek (FL)
Bonilla Gibbons Metcalf
Bono Gilchrest Mica
Boucher Gillmor Millender-
Boyd Gonzalez McDonald
Brady (TX) Goode Miller (FL)
Brown (FL) Goodlatte Miller, Gary
Brown (OH) Gordon Miller, George
Bryant Goss Minge
Burr Granger Mink
Burton Green (TX) Moore
Buyer Gutknecht Moran (KS)
Callahan Hall (OH) Moran (VA)
Calvert Hall (TX) Morella
Campbell Hansen Myrick
Canady Hastings (FL) Napolitano
Cannon Hastings (WA) Nethercutt
Capps Hayes Northup
Cardin Hayworth Norwood
Carson Hefley Ortiz
Chambliss Herger Ose
Chenoweth Hill (IN) Oxley
Clay Hill (MT) Packard
Clayton Hilleary Pastor
Clement Hilliard Paul
Clyburn Hinojosa Pease
Coble Hobson Pelosi
Coburn Hooley Peterson (MN)
Collins Horn Pickering
Combest Hostettler Pickett
Condit Hoyer Pomeroy
Cook Hunter Portman
Cox Hutchinson Price (NC)
Cramer Hyde Radanovich
Cubin Inslee Rahall
Cummings Isakson Regula
Cunningham Istook Reyes
Danner Jackson-Lee Rodriguez
Davis (FL) (TX) Rogers
Davis (VA) Jefferson Rohrabacher
Deal Jenkins Ros-Lehtinen
DeFazio John Roybal-Allard
DeGette Johnson, E. B. Royce
DeLay Johnson, Sam Ryun (KS)
DeMint Jones (NC) Sabo
Deutsch Kaptur Salmon
Diaz-Balart Kasich Sanchez
Dickey Kingston Sandlin
Dicks Knollenberg Sanford
Dingell Kolbe Scarborough
Schaffer Stump Vitter
Scott Talent Walden
Sessions Tancredo Wamp
Shadegg Tanner Watkins
Shaw Tauscher Watt (NC)
Sherman Tauzin Watts (OK)
Shows Taylor (MS) Weldon (FL)
Simpson Taylor (NC) Wexler
Sisisky Thomas Whitfield
Skeen Thompson (CA) Wicker
Smith (TX) Thompson (MS) Wilson
Smith (WA) Thornberry Wise
Snyder Thune Wolf
Souder Thurman Woolsey
Spratt Tiahrt Wu
Stark Turner Wynn
Stearns Udall (CO) Young (FL)
Stenholm Udall (NM)
Strickland Vento

NOT VOTING—9

Berry Pryce (OH) Sununu
Cooksey Rangel Towns
Crowley Rogan Young (AK)

□ 1620

Mr. CUMMINGS, Mr. DOOLITTLE, and Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON of Texas changed their vote from ''aye'' to ''no.''

Mr. VISCLOSKY and Mr. NEY changed their vote from ''no'' to ''aye.''

So the amendment was rejected.

The result of vote was announced as above recorded.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

Mr. BERRY. Mr. Chairman, due to circumstances beyond my control, I was unable to be present for rollcall votes 390 through 400.

If I had been present, I would have voted ''yes'' on rollcall No. 390, ''yes'' on rollcall no. 391, ''No'' on rollcall No. 392, ''yes'' on rollcall No. 393, ''yes'' on rollcall No. 394, ''yes'' on rollcall No. 395, ''no'' on rollcall No. 396, ''yes'' on rollcall No. 397, ''yes'' on rollcall No. 398, ''yes'' on rollcall No. 399, and ''no'' on rollcall No. 400.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. GREEN OF WISCONSIN

Mr. GREEN of Wisconsin. Mr. Chairman, I offer an amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

Amendment offered by Mr. GREEN of Wisconsin:

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

SEC. . None of the funds appropriated by this Act may be used to terminate inpatient services at the Iron Mountain Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Iron Mountain, Michigan or to close that facility.

Mr. GREEN of Wisconsin. Mr. Chairman, I intend to withdraw this amendment after entering into a brief colloquy with the gentleman from New York (Mr. WALSH), the chairman of the subcommittee, regarding the Iron Mountain VA Medical Center in Iron Mountain, Michigan.

I have drafted this amendment because I am greatly concerned that the VA considered and is considering closing and reducing this facility and service to the point where veterans will not be able to receive the care they need or so richly deserve.

There are currently 72,000 veterans in northern Wisconsin and the upper peninsula of Michigan who are eligible for care at this facility. This facility provides important and unique services to the veterans throughout this region.