

have worked on this bill very, very well, because the House will sometime today or tomorrow make a historic commitment to every man and woman in uniform, those serving now and those that have served in the past. I think that is great for the United States of America at a time where we have a war on two fronts.

I just shook Holly Petraeus' hand here in the Capitol today, the spouse of General Petraeus, David Petraeus, perhaps the greatest military general in the modern era of the United States of America.

These threats are real, the enemy is vicious. Our challenges are many. And we do come together today on this bill. I am grateful for that. I wish it was being considered in another way because this rule is not in keeping with the traditions and the history of this committee and the House.

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

Mr. HASTINGS of Washington. Mr. Speaker, just for purposes of trying to plan the time, could I inquire of my distinguished colleague how many speakers she has left.

Ms. CASTOR. Mr. Speaker, I am prepared to close after the gentleman from Washington has made his closing statement.

Mr. HASTINGS of Washington. I thank her for that information, and am pleased to yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Florida (Mr. KELLER).

Mr. KELLER of Florida. I thank the gentleman for yielding. I rise today in support of this veterans funding bill. This is a great victory for 400,000 central Florida veterans because it provides \$220 million for a new VA hospital in Orlando. What does this mean for our central Florida vets? As a result of this hospital, our Orlando area vets will no longer have to travel 2 hours to Tampa. They will no longer be living in the largest metropolitan area in the United States without a VA hospital. Instead, they will have a brand new state-of-the-art 134-bed hospital and access to world class physicians and researchers working in partnership with the new UCF Medical School. Our vets deserve it.

We didn't get here by accident. The critical turning point began on September 10, 2003. That is when the VA CARES Commission held their hearing in central Florida to determine what cities if any in America would get a new VA hospital, since one hadn't been built in 30 years. I testified at that committee and pleaded that a new one be built in Orlando because of the large number of veterans we had and their lack of access to care. The VA CARES Commission agreed. This decision was ratified by the VA Secretary and then ratified by Congress.

Today, Congress takes the biggest step forward in funding this project. Although we have already provided \$75 million toward this project, this new funding of \$220 million is quite significant because it's \$100 million more

than the President asked for and is the largest single investment so far in this new project.

Where do we go from here? We ask our Senate colleagues to act, and we finish the job. We will work together on a bipartisan basis, Republicans and Democrats, to complete this worthwhile project.

I'd like to close just by saying that this has been very much a team effort. I would like to thank my Democratic and Republican colleagues on both sides of the aisle.

Ms. CASTOR. I would also like to join with my colleague from Florida (Mr. KELLER) in saluting Chairman OBEY and the other members of the Appropriations Committee and the Military Construction-Veterans Affairs Subcommittee because as that new VA hospital goes to Orlando, it will relieve a great deal of pressure in Tampa, in my hometown, at the Haley VA Center, the busiest VA Center in the country, and the Bay Pines Medical Center in St. Petersburg.

So I thank the gentleman for expressing his opinion on this, and I join with him.

With that, I will reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. HASTINGS of Washington. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Oklahoma (Mr. LUCAS).

Mr. LUCAS. Mr. Speaker, I come to the floor today in support of H.R. 6566, the American Energy Act, an all-of-the-above plan that tackles the current energy crisis we are facing in this country. A well-known Oklahoman has recently alerted us to the fact that we spend \$700 billion a year on foreign oil. That is \$700 billion. That number is staggering and should be enough for any American to sit up and take notice and know that something has to change.

The American Energy Act paves the way to decrease our reliance on foreign oil by increasing the production of American-made energy. It not only allows for oil exploration both in the Arctic coastal plain and offshore, a move that 73 percent of Americans support, according to the latest CNN poll. It also eliminates the obstacle to the construction of new oil refineries and nuclear power plants.

Now, we all know that increased production of traditional forms of energy, such as oil and natural gas, is only the first step. The American Energy Act also addresses the future of American-made energy by promoting research and development of renewable and alternative energy sources.

One of the best components of this bill is the permanent extension of the tax credit for alternative energy production. Oklahoma is the ninth largest producer of wind energy, and we look forward to continued growth in that industry. I know that extending the production tax credit on wind energy will send the right message to wind producers that the American government

is ready to work with them to expand upon this already successful alternative energy source.

The Speaker recently was quoted as saying that her refusal to bring legislation aimed at increasing American energy to the floor for a vote was an effort to "save the planet." While I appreciate the gentlewoman from California's feelings that she has a moral obligation to promote conservation, what about her obligation to the American people, living here and now, who are forced to choose between driving to work and putting food on the dinner table?

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The time of the gentleman has expired.

Mr. HASTINGS of Washington. Mr. Speaker, I yield the gentleman 30 additional seconds.

Mr. LUCAS. It's irresponsible to adjourn for 5 weeks without passing a meaningful legislation to reduce the skyrocketing gas prices Americans are forced to pay. Now is the time for America to take its place in the forefront of energy development by utilizing the vast natural resources we have in this country.

I ask all of my colleagues today, stand up, demand a vote on the American Energy Act. Do something for our folks back home.

Ms. CASTOR. Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to yield 4 minutes to the distinguished Chair of the Appropriations Committee, the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. OBEY).

Mr. OBEY. Mr. Speaker, I simply want to respond to one theme that we have heard here in the last 20 minutes or so. We have heard complaints about the "outrage" that is being perpetrated by the passage of this rule because it is alleged that this rule closes up consideration of this bill and in fact prevents Members from offering legitimate amendments.

Let me point out this rule does one thing and one thing only. It simply says that if a Member wants to offer an amendment, that that Member should notice the House 1 day ahead of time in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD so that we do not legislate by ambush. The only thing that is required for an amendment to be considered on this floor is that it be printed in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD the day before it is considered so that no Member of the House is blind-sided by any amendment.

We believe that the bill managers on both sides of the aisle have a right to know in an orderly way which amendments are going to be offered to bills. We also believe that any individual Member who happens to have a project in his district which is going to be challenged by another Member, that that Member has the right to notice of that challenge. And we believe that every single Member of this House has a right to know ahead of time what they are going to be called upon to vote on by way of amendments. So this rule simply says any amendment is in order so long as it was printed the day before.