

Motion to Recommit to MilCon-VA— requiring the bill be revised to include immediate funding for caregivers and other medically necessary care for all disabled veterans, paid for by eliminating earmarks for pork projects not requested by the Commander in Chief.

The motion to recommit would send the MilCon-VA appropriations bill back to the appropriations committee and require the bill to be revised to include immediate funding for caregivers and other medically necessary care for all disabled veterans, paid for by eliminating earmarks for pork projects not requested by the Commander in Chief.

The text of the motion states:

Mr. Coburn moves to recommit the bill H.R. 3082 to the Committee on Appropriations of the Senate with instructions to report the same back to the Senate with changes to reprioritize spending within the bill in to order to provide sufficient funding to ensure coverage of medically necessary care and payment of caregivers for all disabled veterans, including but not limited to, those who fought in World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, Operation Desert Shield, Operation Desert Storm, the Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom, and any combat zone in the War on Terrorism and that such funding for veterans' assistance should be paid for with reductions in spending for earmarks for less urgent projects and other unnecessary programs not requested by the Commander in Chief.

H.R. 3081 appropriates \$133.7 billion for military construction for the Department of Defense and funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs for FY 2010, 9.43% increase over last year's level. Agencies and programs funded in the MilCon-VA bill also received \$7.2 billion in emergency spending in FY 2009 through the Stimulus and the supplemental. Not including the overseas contingency operations funding, and looking at discretionary spending only, the bill is a 5.3% increase over last year's level.

Despite this increase, there is **no funding** included for the payment of stipends or provision of medical care for caregivers of wartime disabled veterans. In the committee report, the Appropriations Committee states instead that the VA should study the issue:

Caregiver Assistance.—The Committee recognizes many veterans, including veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, receive care from family members for extended periods of time. These family members undertake this responsibility without pay and at great personal sacrifice. The Committee is aware of evidence suggesting seriously wounded, ill and injured patients have increased chances of reaching their maximum level of recovery when family members are a key component of providing care. With regard to family caregivers, the Committee believes **additional information would be helpful** in assessing the best methods of providing long-term care for the most seriously injured veterans, as well as the support for family members who become the primary care providers for this group of veterans. **The Committee directs the VA to conduct a study to assess patient outcomes of veterans receiving a majority of their care from a family caregiver**, including the effect such care has on the veteran's ability to recover to the maximum extent possible and the non-economic impact on family members providing such care.

Although the MilCon-Va appropriations bill does not provide any actual funding for caregivers' assistance, some in the Senate are trying to pass a separate bill (S. 1963) that would *authorize* (but not actually provide the funding for) new programs to provide assistance to caregivers of post-9/11 disabled veterans. CBO estimates that implementing the bill would cost about \$3.7 billion from 2010 to 2014. The authorization legislation does not pay for this new spending by reducing wasteful or duplicative programs, meaning this bill is yet another bounced check that will be paid for by future generations of Americans.

This motion to recommit would immediately provide assistance (not just an empty promise of funding in the future) for the caregivers of *all* veterans, not just those after 9/11, and would do so by requiring the appropriations committee to defund earmarks and other programs that were not requested by the President or the Department of Defense. The Appropriations Committee knows best where the funds are available in the bill and which programs can afford to take a small cut in order to fully fund providing care for all of our nation's disabled veterans.

The motion to recommit would be a significant improvement over the authorization bill by:

- a) Provide care immediately for veterans and caregivers
- b) Be paid for out of existing funds and programs

- c) Apply to all disabled wartime veterans in need, not just those after September 11, 2001

Possible Reductions to pay for the Care of our Veterans

The Milcon-VA appropriations bill includes 96 military construction earmarks costing \$633 million. Two-thirds (63 of 96) of the earmarks are for projects in states of appropriators and the state of Nevada.

Homeowner's Assistance Program - \$350M (above President's Request)

In the military construction section of the bill, the committee included a \$350 million increase for the Homeowners Assistance Program. This program, which reimburses military homeowners who realize a loss when they sell their homes due to a military ordered move or a BRAC event, received \$555 million in emergency funding in the stimulus act, which remains valid for obligation until September 2010. The Army has stated it will not be able to spend all of this funding.

VA Health Care for Non-Service Connected Disabled Veterans - \$533M

The committee appropriated \$533 million to grant health care eligibility to hundreds of thousands of non-disabled veterans for VA health care. In 2009, Congress provided the Department \$375,000,000 above the budget request to begin **a gradual expansion of health care eligibility for non-disabled veterans earning modest incomes**. VA began this expansion by allowing enrollment for non-disabled veterans whose incomes exceeded the current VA income threshold by up to 10%. The VA's budget request for fiscal year 2010 includes planned expenditures of \$533,000,000 to support the addition of 266,000 new enrollments and plans to add 500,000 more enrollees by 2013.

While health care for veterans of modest incomes who cannot gain health insurance may be needed, it speaks to the priority of the committee when they fund benefits for veterans who were not hurt as a result of their service instead of benefits for extremely disabled veterans that were injured due to war.

Many in the Senate spent much of last week speaking on the Senate Floor about the urgency with which the Senate should consider and pass the Veterans Caregiver Benefits Act. I hope these colleagues will join me in supporting providing immediate support to the veterans by prioritizing the care of our

veterans over parochial projects for special interest groups and bloated government programs.

Quotes on the Urgency of Providing Veterans Caregiver Benefits

“To say that we should do nothing for these people [caregivers] is to make a mockery of this Veterans Day”

-Senator Durbin, Senate Floor, November 9, 2009

“Each day that this measure is delayed, this means that vital benefits for veterans are delayed.”

“I would say that we cannot now turn our backs on the obligation to care for those who fought.”

-Senator Akaka, Senate Floor, November 6, 2009

“How can a member of the Senate deny our veterans better care?”

-Senator Begich, Senate Floor, November 6, 2009

“It is essential that Congress act on this comprehensive measure [to provide caregiver benefits] without further delay,” “Thousands of disabled veterans with serious medical conditions and the family members who care for them are counting on this additional support.”

-Letter from 13 veterans service organizations to Senator Harry Reid, November 2, 2009

I do not object to the goals of the authorization bill and believe we have an obligation to meet the needs of all of our nation’s wounded veterans. I do, however, oppose *any* increase in federal spending that is not paid for and increases the debt burden on our children and grandchildren. As such I am offering this motion to recommit to responsibly pay for the cost of meeting the needs of veterans across the country, who have dedicated their lives to fighting for our freedom.

Last year Congress has added more \$1 trillion to the national debt, which is approaching \$12 trillion, and Congress is planning now to increase the debt limit yet again.

This irresponsible borrowing and spending is bankrupting our country and needs to end.

Our veterans have sacrificed for our nation and now it is time for Congress to make some sacrifices too. If we expect our brave men and women to put their lives at risk, certainly members of Congress can put their political careers at risk by making tough choices to pay for new spending.

With over \$300 billion in wasteful or mismanaged funding contained in the annual federal budget, there are many lower priority programs that could be consolidated, cut, or eliminated in order to pay for this legislation and support our disabled veterans and their caregivers.

It speaks volumes about the misplaced priorities of the Senate that Congress would increase its own budget by \$250 million, earmark billions of dollars in pork projects for campaign contributors, and waste days debating trivial bills like tourism promotion, but not take the time to seriously address the concerns of veterans and taxpayers.