The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. Dreier) at 4 o'clock and 9 minutes p.m.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. WALKER. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks. The H.R. is considered that I may include tabular and extraneous material therein.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from New York? There was no objection.

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS AND HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT, AND INDEPENDENT AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2001

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to House Resolution 525 and rule XVIII, the Chair declares the House in the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union for the consideration of the bill, H.R. 4635.

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 consideration of the bill (H.R. 4635) 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, 2001, and for other purposes, with Mr. PEASE in the chair.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The CHAIRMAN. Pursuant to the rule, the bill is considered as having been read the first time.

Under the rule, the gentleman from New York (Mr. WALSH) and the gentleman from West Virginia (Mr. MOLLOHAN) each will control 30 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New York (Mr. WALSH).

Mr. WALSH. Mr. Chairman, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Chairman, it is my pleasure to bring before the full House of Representatives the bill, H.R. 4635, making fiscal year 2001 appropriations for the Departments of Veterans Affairs, Housing and Urban Development and independent agencies. So that we can move quickly, I will keep my comments brief.

First, let me just thank the distinguished gentleman from West Virginia (Mr. MOLLOHAN) for his advice and counsel throughout this discussion. Even though we have different political persuasions, I think we share almost all of the same priorities in this bill, which makes it, as one might imagine, much less difficult to bring a bill to the floor.

We do not agree on everything obviously, but I think in most cases we do. So we have enjoyed the benefit of his advice and the staff have worked very closely together. The subcommittee and the full committee worked very hard to bring this bill out.

Like most of the appropriations subcommittees, we were given a very tight 302(b) allocation. Nevertheless, we were able to make what I think are good policy and funding choices to produce a good, fair bill that deserves support.

Here are some of the highlights: this bill fully funds veterans medical care with a $1.355 billion increase over last year's record level. Last year, we increased it $1.7 billion. $1.355 billion this year for a total of over $3 billion increase in 2 years. I think that shows how important this subcommittee, this full committee, and the House take our commitments to our veterans. It provides full funding for medical research, major construction, and cemetery administration operations.

Just as important, we have begun an effort to conduct better oversight of how much medical care funding goes for medical care, per se, and how much goes to maintaining buildings and facilities. All veterans, no matter where they are located, deserve the best facilities that we can offer.

We have also included language to make sure that veterans medical receipts stay within the VA system and do not go to the Treasury as was suggested by the Administration.

Expanding section 8 contracts at HUD, we have included language to push the Department to do a better, faster job of getting funds out of Washington to the people who need them most. HUD's record in this regard is not one to be proud of. We had 247,000 section 8 vouchers go begging last year. I am sure that will be a topic for discussion in conference and in consultation with the White House. In this bill, there is no funding.

We have essentially level funded the Community Development Block Grant entitlement programs, trimming them by less than 1 percent. We have level funded or only slightly reduced most other HUD programs, making sure that HUD was not using the bank to pay for other programs as it did last year.

AmeriCorps has been zeroed out. I am sure that will be a topic for discussion in conference and in consultation with the White House. In this bill, there is no funding.

The reality is that CBO's freeze level for this budget was $76.9 billion. We have, therefore, a net increase of just $1.1 billion over last year.

I hasten to add that that increase has been totally absorbed by VA medical care, $1.355 billion over last year, a Section 8 housing increase of nearly $2 billion, and increases provided for National Science Foundation and NASA over last year's level. Nearly every other program in this bill was either level funded or reduced slightly so that we could meet these necessary increases and still stay within our allocation.