The Medicare program pays approximately $20.5 billion annually to treat tobacco-related illnesses; the Veterans Administration pays in excess of $1 billion per year. The Department of Defense pays $1.6 billion per year. The Indian Health Services pays $300 million a year. In addition, tobacco-related health within the Medicaid program nearly $17 billion a year, of which Federal taxpayers pay nearly $10 billion. Overall public and private payments for tobacco-related care totaled nearly $50 billion in 1997.

Mr. Chairman, to remove VA appropriations for the tobacco litigation hurts our veterans. It is our duty to provide as many dollars as possible for our vets, especially since our government encouraged tobacco use and tobacco addiction in our service personnel, not only during World War II but during the Korean War.

Mr. Chairman, I am reading a book now about the Chosin Reservoirs and the heroes that Korean War, particularly Chinese and North Korean, and in instances after instance, when the temperature, was well below zero, often times the only thing they had were cigarettes. Those cigarettes were provided by our government.

Those Korean War veterans are up in years. We should be able to provide for them to be treated in our VA hospitals, and again, not just by the dollars we appropriate, but by the dollars that we can generate from litigation because of their addiction and the diseases that they have because of that.

Again, this amendment is supported by the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Disabled American Veterans, Paralyzed Veterans, and AMVETS; and I think Mr. Chairman, particularly this year, less than 2 weeks ago, we talked about it at our Memorial Day services all over the country, in recognizing our veterans’ contribution that in this year, particular, they are recognizing Korean War veterans that the Waxman-Hansen-Meehan amendment should be adopted, and we should remove this provision.

I would hope that no matter what appropriations bill we come to, that we would not tie the hands of the Justice Department to say, no, we need to have tobacco-related lawsuits. Again, it is not our decision it, is up to the judges to decide. The Justice Department is seeking $4 billion a year treating tobacco-related illnesses.

The Justice Department is seeking recovery of these funds, as well as injunctive relief to stop the companies from marketing to children and engaging in other deceptive and illegal practices. They need to be able to have the resources for that suit. Now, the beneficiaries of that suit would be the Departments of Health, Education and Welfare, or the Health Care Financing Administration, who has spent so much money on Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement for tobacco-related illnesses.

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This amendment would say that the Veterans Administration cannot move this money to the Justice Department to prosecute these cases. The idea, the reason, the motivation is so that this suit cannot go forward.

The Veterans Administration spends $4 billion a year treating tobacco-related illnesses. We passed a law, the Medical Care Recovery Act, that says that any costs recovered by the Justice Department would be returned to the Veterans Administration. They desperately need that money. Why would we not seek that money from what is the source, the cause of much of that suffering and death?

This rider is wrong. It should not be included. It should be cut out. The veterans have been afflicted by.

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