

New York (Mr. WALSH) and the gentleman from West Virginia (Mr. MOLLOHAN) and the entire appropriations committee. I urge a yes vote on this rule and the conference report.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time, and I move the previous question on the resolution.

The previous question was ordered.

The resolution was agreed to.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

#### 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 on the conference report to accompany H.R. 2620, and that I may include tabular and extraneous material.

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

There was no objection.

#### CONFERENCE REPORT ON H.R. 2620, DEPARTMENTS OF VETERANS AFFAIRS AND HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT, AND INDEPENDENT AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2002

Mr. WALSH. Mr. Speaker, pursuant to House Resolution 279, I call up the conference report on the bill (H.R. 2620) 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, 2002, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the conference report is considered as having been read.

(For conference report and statement, see proceedings of the House of November 6, 2001, at page H7787.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. 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. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to present for consideration of the House the conference report on H.R. 2620, the VA-HUD and Independent Agencies Appropriations Act for 2002.

In the interest of time, I will try to be brief. I would like, however, to begin by saying that this is a good bill. I think the fact that we had a unanimous vote on the rule is symbolic of what is to come. Like those presented in each of the past few years, it is very much a solid, bipartisan effort of the House and Senate. In this regard I

would like to express my sincere appreciation to the gentleman from West Virginia (Mr. MOLLOHAN), as well as to our very able Senate colleagues, Senators MIKULSKI and BOND.

While we clearly had differences and many difficult decisions on several aspects of the bill as passed by each body, the conference report nevertheless represents a true collaboration of effort and an honest negotiated compromise. Again, I am grateful to my colleagues for their candor, perseverance, and friendship.

With the House's indulgence, I would like to take a few minutes to briefly outline the highlights of the proposal. First and foremost, the conference report is within the 302(b) allocation for budget authority and outlays. The bill's discretionary spending is \$85.4 billion in new budget authority, which is an increase of just over \$2 billion above the budget submission and some \$2.9 billion over last year's bill.

I would note for the House that this level of discretionary spending includes emergency spending for \$1.5 billion for FEMA for disaster relief requirements.

We have tried as best we can to spread the proposed increases throughout the bill: discretionary veterans programs overall are increased by over \$1.4 billion compared to 2001. This follows on some very substantial increases in the last 2 years, with \$1.05 billion of the increase going to medical care and the remainder spread to research, processing veterans' compensation, pension and education claims, operating our national cemeteries, and increasing necessary construction at VA facilities by over \$160 million over last year.

Housing programs have increased in HUD by over \$1.67 billion compared to 2001, with increases in the housing certificate program, public housing operating subsidies, the HOPWA program, HOME investment partnerships, the housing for the elderly and disabled programs, and the disabled program is a significant increase, and the lead hazard reduction program. It is important to note that this proposal also includes some very difficult but I believe extremely important and highly defensible changes in policy direction which are represented by reductions in the Public Housing Capital Fund and the Drug Elimination Grant Program. Neither of these programs is serving the best interests of the people they were intended to serve, and it is our job to take whatever steps are necessary to remedy the situation.

In the case of capital funds, it meant getting tougher on public housing authorities to spend the dollars intended for the residents of public housing authority. There are literally hundreds of millions of dollars worth of code violations and hazards not getting fixed.

In the case of the Drug Elimination Grant Program, it meant taking an

honest look at whether HUD is the best entity to run this type of program.

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Based on HUD's track record, we did not believe that it was. Instead, this bill increases funding in the operating fund so that all PHAs will see an increase. They then have the discretion to use those funds as they see fit.

The Environmental Protection Agency's funding increases some \$586 million over the budget request, and \$74 million above last year. This proposal continues to provide a strong research program as well as increased resources for the many State categorical grants, including section 106 water pollution grants, section 103 and 105 air pollution grants, and the new BEACH grant program. The Clean Water SRF program has been funded at \$1.35 billion and the Safe Drinking Water SRF has received \$850 million. These are substantial commitments. However, they are dwarfed by the need that is out there in combined sewer overflow projects throughout the country.

FEMA's operating programs increase by nearly \$135 million over the 2001 funding level and we have provided \$2.1 billion in emergency and non-emergency dollars for disaster relief. I should also mention that \$150 million has been provided for the new firefighter grant program which, as my colleagues can imagine, is a very, very popular and competitive program.

NASA's programs will receive a net increase of \$508 million over last year, and we have proposed several structural changes in the agency's account structure to provide them greater programmatic flexibility and the committee, better oversight capability.

Finally, I am proud to say that we have raised the overall funding for the National Science Foundation by just over \$316 million to a total program of \$4.789 billion. That is an increase of 8.2 percent compared to last year. Doing a little research myself, 10 years ago that budget was half, so that the National Science Foundation budget has doubled in the past 10 years. The bulk of this increase will go to improve available resources for National Science Foundation's core research programs, bringing the total research program to nearly \$3.6 billion, while the remainder would be spread to major research, construction and equipment, education and human resource programs, and salaries and expenses for NSF's capable staff.

I would like to add that I personally would have liked to do more here, as I know my colleague, the gentleman from West Virginia (Mr. MOLLOHAN), would. However, to do so only could have been done at the expense of other very important programs found in other agencies throughout the bill. Having said that, given the increase proposed by the administration of 1