

I rise in support of the Ney-Gutierrez-Tancredo en bloc amendment that adds funding for VA medical research and for grants to states for extended care facilities for our aging veterans.

This bill before us tonight demonstrates the effect of poorly-placed priorities created when the majority voted for a budget agreement that spent too much on military largesse and tax breaks for the wealthy. We did not place a sufficiently high priority on our nation's veterans programs in this year's budget allocations. As my colleague Barney Frank observed, we are suffering from a self-inflicted wound.

In fact, this VA-HUD bill provides \$2.5 billion less than the Administration's FY 2001 budget request. We have a responsibility to keep our promises to our veterans.

As a nation, we have special obligation to our veterans. They have earned benefits that they receive from a grateful nation. The service and sacrifice, blood, sweat and tears of men and women who have served in our Armed Forces has allowed for the historic prosperity we now enjoy. Caring for our veterans is a legitimate cost of national security, yet we do not seem willing to spend an adequate amount on that care.

This year, we are spending 52% of our discretionary budget on the military but not enough on those who have already served: our nation's veterans whose funding is dependent on this much smaller appropriations bill that is before us tonight.

We are spending \$46.8 billion for veterans' health care, research, and medical facilities. Funding for military activities, including our nuclear weapons stockpile, will total some \$311 billion this year. We owe our veterans more than they are receiving.

We are spending \$22 billion more in this year's defense appropriations bill than we did in last year's; by comparison, funding for Department of Veterans Affairs medical and prosthetic research is the same in this bill before us last year's funding: a mere \$321 million.

The \$62 million for major construction and improvement of VA facilities is 5% less than we spent last year. `Minor' construction projects--those costing less than \$4 million per project--and extended care facilities are each given a third less funding than they received last year.

This budget falls half a billion dollars short of the level called for in The Independent Budget, proposed by Disabled American Veterans, Paralyzed Veterans of America, and other veterans' groups. Over the past decade, federal spending for veterans' health care has fallen dramatically short of keeping pace with medical inflation. These shortfalls have forced VA medical facilities nationwide to cut services, delay and even deny care to veterans in need.

Without adequate funding, the VA, created to meet our nation's obligation to its former defenders, will be unable to meet its obligations to veterans. It is time to acknowledge the sacrifices our veterans made and to honor our commitment to them. They answered their call to service long ago; now we must answer back by ensuring them a secure and stable future.