

I voted Yes on H.R. 5854, the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2013.

This bill is an important annual legislative vehicle for providing funding for our veterans' programs and military construction projects. The bill goes above and beyond to ensure that our veterans are receiving the care and services that they have earned by providing 11 percent more funding than current levels for veterans' programs. Specifically, this bill would provide 4 percent more funding than last year for health programs within the Veterans Health Administration; a 17 percent increase in funding for compensation, pension, and burial benefits; 21 percent more funding for veterans' service-connected compensation benefits and pensions; and advance appropriations for Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA) medical programs and facilities to ensure that our veterans continue to receive the care they need even in the event of legislative delays.

The VA cares for nearly 58 million veterans, family members, and survivors, and this bill ensures that Congress will care for the VA. While this bill increases spending on veterans' programs, it includes responsible spending cuts in other areas that will help to curb our national debt. Overall this package does not spend more than last year, which is accomplished primarily by reducing military construction spending by 18 percent. With our troops out of Iraq and the war in Afghanistan winding down, such funds can be better utilized by reducing the deficit or funding core domestic priorities like VA programs.

The bill was approved by a vote of 407 – 12.