

**DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS MEDICAL FACILITY
AUTHORIZATION ACT OF 2006 -- (House of Representatives -
September 13, 2006)**

Mr. *FORTUÑO*. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of the Veterans Affairs Medical Facility Authorization Act. This bipartisan proposal, which I am honored to cosponsor with Chairman **BROWN** and Ranking Member **MICHAUD**, would authorize major medical facility projects and major medical facility leases for the Department of Veterans Affairs for fiscal years 2006 and 2007.

As Puerto Rico's sole representative in Congress, I want to thank Chairman **BROWN** and Ranking Member **MICHAUD** for agreeing to include section 9 of this bill. This section recognizes the need for medical facility improvements in San Juan, Puerto Rico. I request that the Secretary of Veterans Affairs take steps to explore all options for addressing these concerns, including the option of a public/private partnership to construct and operate a facility that would replace the current Department of Veterans Affairs medical center in San Juan, Puerto Rico. The San Juan VA Medical Center is a 319-acute-care-bed facility with documented condition deficiencies.

In October of 2002, a decision was made to develop a two-phased strategy for the San Juan VA Medical Center: phase one, a new six-story tower with 314 beds; phase two, a main building renovation that will include asbestos abatement, sprinklers, utility improvements, and would correct seismic deficiencies.

On April 14, 2006, an \$84.05 million construction contract was awarded for phase one. The building is expected to be completed in May 2009. The existing facility has approximately 630,845 gross square feet, and the proposed new tower would provide an additional 250,000 feet. However, the CARES review determined that San Juan, based on current and projected workload, requires a total of 1,283,547 gross square feet to efficiently service our veterans. The current two-phase plan still falls

[Page:
H6458]

far short of the requirements identified under CARES by nearly 402,702 gross square feet.

[Time: 13:15]

Given the documented substantial facility deficiencies, I am concerned about the U.S. taxpayers continuing to fund expensive renovations in San

Juan which will ultimately fail to meet the capacity needed to handle the predicted workload.

For this reason, this bill requires that no later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to the Committee of Veterans' Affairs of the House and the Senate a report identifying and outlining the various options available to the Department for replacing the current Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Puerto Rico.

Mr. Speaker, Puerto Rican veterans have served with honor and distinction in the Armed Forces of the United States in all wars and conflicts since 1917. Currently, over 9,000 of our men and women are active in our Nation's war on terrorism. Puerto Ricans have always responded to the call of defending our Nation, ranking number sixth in per capita contribution in Army, Reserve, and National Guard, fourth in the Reserve deployments when compared to units, and four Medals of Honor in Korea.

In closing, I would like to once again thank Chairmen **BUYER** and **BROWN**, Ranking Members **EVANS** and **MICHAUD**, and committee staff for their report and their fine work.