

an early stage in the process. They need to get the rules and regulations out faster than 15 months from now.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. Chairman, for the first time in 4 years, I will not offer an amendment to this bill to block the implementation of the May 2003 Office of Management and Budget Circular A-76 regulations for contracting out work that is performed by Federal employees around the country.

The difference this year, Mr. Chairman, is that Chairman KNOLLENBERG and Ranking Member OLVER agreed to my request to include satisfactory language in the bill that is before us. I want to thank them for addressing this issue this year.

Both Federal Government employees and private contractors had serious legitimate concerns and complaints about the A-76 competitive sourcing process. The amendment I offered in past years essentially required OMB to go back to the drawing board and develop a uniform competitive sourcing process that addresses everybody's concerns. Despite strong objections and veto threats from the White House, we had spirited debates in the three previous appropriations cycles on the Van Hollen amendment, and each year the House approved the amendment with bipartisan majorities.

We passed the Van Hollen amendment for the last 3 years because we recognized that the contracting out process was unfair. That was evidenced by the fact that we passed a number of bills to change the contracting out process on an ad hoc basis in numerous Federal agencies, including Defense, Homeland Security, Interior and Agriculture. But the result was a patchwork of inconsistent regulations. The Van Hollen amendment was intended to replace that patchwork of inconsistent regulations with a uniform set of rules fair to all. It did not get rid of the competitive sourcing rules. In essence, it required OMB to go back to the rules that were in place before May 2003 until it fashioned a new set of rules that make sense for everybody.

In fiscal year 2005 the Senate approved language similar to the Van Hollen amendment, but even though both Houses approved similar language it did not survive a closed-door TTHUD conference. Last year, in fiscal year 2006, the Senate approved language that was widely viewed as acceptable to the White House, however begrudgingly, and that language survived the conference and was signed into law. That language provided funding for A-76 competitions that allowed Federal workers to present their own most efficient organization, MEO, bid in a competitive sourcing competition, and required private contractor bids to provide for a minimum cost differential, MCD, savings of at least 10 percent or \$10 million over the MEO bid. While these public-private competition requirements did not address all of the concerns of Federal employees pertaining to appeal rights, these requirements were considerable improvements in the competitive sourcing process.

But now, Mr. Chairman, we are in a brand new fiscal year cycle and once again we need to address critical matters related to the contracting out process. We should not have to do this every year in the appropriations process, Mr. Speaker, but we will repeat this debate year after year until Congress takes definitive action and authorizes competitive sourcing regulations that are fair to Federal employees and private contractors.

This year is somewhat different, however. This year, Chairman KNOLLENBERG and Ranking Member OLVER have had the foresight to include competitive sourcing language in the base fiscal year 2007 appropriations bill that mirrors the MEO/MCD language that was signed into law last year. Therefore, there is no need to offer the amendment I have offered in the past.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, the TTHUD appropriations bill on the floor today includes forward-looking language pertaining to A-76 competitive sourcing that precludes the need to offer my amendment again this year. I look forward to working with the leadership of the Appropriations Committee and with the authorizers on the House Committee on Government Reform in the future to devise a permanent fix to the A-76 process that is fair to Federal workers and private contractors and that provides American taxpayers with the efficient, cost-effective and quality services they demand and deserve.

Mr. HOLT. Mr. Chairman, I rise today to express my disappointment that the Departments of Transportation, Treasury, and Housing and Urban Development, the Judiciary, District of Columbia, and Independent Agencies appropriations bill for fiscal year 2007 does not fully fund the Help America Vote Act, HAVA.

HAVA was passed in the wake of the 2000 election, and authorized almost \$4 billion to improve the administration of elections in this country. The 2004 election was a strong indication that there is much work yet to be done in the area of election reform in this country. And yet here we are, fast approaching Federal elections which are to be the first ones that take place under virtually all of HAVA's requirements, and hundreds of millions of dollars in funds authorized under the bill remain unappropriated.

Although the appropriations bill before us includes almost \$17 million in funding for the Election Assistance Commission, EAC, which is nearly \$3 million more than was appropriated to the EAC for fiscal year 2006, it still provides no funding whatsoever to help States meet their voting system requirements—especially the disability and language access requirements—under title III of the act. HAVA authorized \$3 billion in so-called “requirements payments,” and has to date appropriated only \$2.328 billion. States across the Nation are struggling to meet HAVA's voting system requirements, and \$672 million in authorized funds remain unappropriated. And not one dime of that amount has been requested in the President's fiscal year 2007 budget nor provided for in this appropriations measure.

HAVA also authorized \$100 million to promote access to the polls for disabled voters, of which only \$44 million has been appropriated to date, and \$40 million for protection and advocacy systems, of which just under \$17 million has been appropriated to date. I understand that the Labor and Health and Human Services appropriations bill to be reported out of committee today will include approximately \$11 million in funding for the former accessibility grants, and approximately \$5 million in additional funding for the latter protection and advocacy systems. However, these new appropriations still leave a total of approximately \$63 million in authorized disability access payments unappropriated.

There are certainly many important demands upon us, but I ask you, Mr. Chairman,

what is more important in a democracy than the fairness and integrity of the electoral system. I rise today to register my disappointment that the measure before us provides no funding to help States meet their title III requirements under HAVA, and to urge my colleagues to work with me when the Departments and Labor and Health and Human Services appropriations bill comes to the floor next week to fully fund HAVA's disability access payments.

Mr. GENE GREEN of Texas. Mr. Chairman, I rise in support of H.R. 5576, the appropriations act for the Departments of Transportation, Treasury, and Housing and Urban Development.

I want to note two important Houston-area projects that received funding in this legislation: METRO Solutions and the Harrisburg grade separation.

The \$2.5 million for METRO is a very small amount compared to our need for transit investment in Houston, particularly for light rail.

However, we are very grateful for this amount, because in previous years members of our Houston delegation blocked any funding in this bill for Houston light rail.

We will never know how many millions went to other projects around the country because our delegation was not united behind a plan.

Thankfully, this situation has now changed, and we have a commitment from our delegation to pursue \$1 billion over 10 years for Houston light rail.

Unfortunately, it does not look like we will be able to meet that commitment. As a result, the process at the FTA is taking on much greater importance.

METRO must cut through the red-tape at FTA and get approval for their project and a full funding grant agreement if the Northside Line and East End Line are going to be a reality.

We are going to need all the funding we can get if we want to upgrade the BRT to light rail as quickly as possible to meet the expectations of the voters in the referendum.

The other important project for Houston is the Harrisburg Grade Separation. The bill contains \$300,000 to get this project started in the design phase.

East End Houston has entirely too many inconvenient and unsafe grade crossings, and a grade separation at Harrisburg will provide easy access and prevent rail/auto/truck accidents for area residents.

We have just started construction on our Manchester grade separation, so it is fitting that we are starting at the beginning of the process for another very important intersection.

This project will fit in well with the effort to reorganize the freight rail system for Harris County and surrounding counties, because the most relief from freight rail traffic needs to be in the areas with the most impact.

Mr. Chairman, I want to thank the chairman and ranking member of the subcommittee and the full committee for their work on this bill and also thank our Houston area appropriator, JOHN CULBERSON for his help, particularly with the METRO funding.

Mr. OLVER. Mr. Chairman, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. KNOLLENBERG. Mr. Chairman, I yield back the balance of my time.

The CHAIRMAN. All time for general debate has expired.