Statement by Vice Chairman Ralph Norman (R-S.C.)
Markup of H.R. 6398

Vice Chairman Norman: Thank you, Chairman Smith, for the opportunity to speak on behalf of my bill, H.R. 6398, the Department of Energy Veterans' Health Initiative Act.

My bill authorizes partnership between the Department of Energy (DOE) and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to advance research focused on artificial intelligence, big data science and the high priority health care needs of the VA.

Because of the millions of veterans that have received care overtime, the VA hosts one of the world's largest and most valuable health and genomic data repositories.

In order to learn from this data and provide better health care for veterans, the VA needs access to more advanced computing capabilities, expertise and infrastructure than is currently available in the agency.

DOE is a world leader in high performance computing, and is well suited to meet this need. With its national laboratory system, DOE has a unique set of cutting-edge research capabilities—like six of the world's ten fastest supercomputers—designed to solve a variety of complex big data challenges in the physical sciences.

The interagency partnership authorized in my bill combines DOE's big data science expertise with VA clinical and population science expertise in order to solve critical health challenges for veterans, while promising to advance big data science tools for American researchers.

This partnership—called the Million Veterans Program–Computational Health Analytics for Medical Precision to Improve Outcomes Now or MVP-CHAMPION program—will use DOE supercomputers to analyze VA health data, looking for patterns and symptoms to improve treatment for heart disease, traumatic brain injury and cancer.

The bill also requires the Department to establish data enclaves to securely store and transmit data provided by the VA, making sure privacy and security are maintained for veterans involved in the program.

In addition, this legislation establishes a pilot program within DOE to implement a cross-cutting research initiative in artificial intelligence, data analytics and computational research.

This program will help DOE scientists gain fundamental knowledge and improved understanding of big data analytics tools in order to address big data challenges.

These tools will both help improve the existing DOE-VA partnership, and will advance DOE mission goals in nuclear security, energy technology development and innovative science research.

Ultimately, the goal of this legislation is for the DOE national laboratories to provide the VA with information it can use to improve health care services for veterans. The access to the breadth, depth and complexity of the VA dataset will also advance the next generation of data science tools.

The Department of Energy Veterans' Health Initiative Act promises to improve veterans' health care and advance DOE capabilities in computer science.

Our veterans should have access to better health care services and our scientists should remain on the cutting edge of big data analytics and advanced computing.

Once again, I would like to thank Chairman Smith and the 13 other Science Committee members who cosponsored this legislation for supporting my bill. I encourage my colleagues to support this bill, and I yield back the balance of my time.

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