

said he supported the military. President Reagan kept his promises. However, under the President in office during the 1990s, the military budget was again severely cut.

Once again my friends who remained in the military could feel the renewed respect and help for the military when President George W. Bush took office. Not only has the military been much better equipped and supplied, but also the Republican-controlled Congress has been increasing veterans' benefits. In fact, since Republicans took control of Congress there has been a 58 percent increase in veterans funding.

Just as the vast cuts during the Carter administration depleted and drained the strength of the U.S. military, during the 1990s the White House bragged of vast cuts in government when, in fact, the only true cuts were in military personnel. As a result of those cuts during the 1990s, George W. Bush's administration found itself, just as President Reagan had, battling to rebuild military strength.

We in this Republican-controlled Congress have done that and continue to do that along with some other friends. If yesterday's speeches were heartfelt, and there truly is a desire among Senators across the aisle to strengthen the military, to protect those who are protecting us and to keep and help our courageous veterans, I say, with arms open wide, Welcome to the Republican agenda.

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The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. STRICKLAND) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. STRICKLAND addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

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#### KEEPING PROMISES TO VETERANS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. EDWARDS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Speaker, for the past 14 years, I have had the privilege of representing the largest U.S. Army installation in the world, Fort Hood, an installation that has sent over 40,000 brave American soldiers to fight in Iraq. That is why I am so deeply offended and shocked that the Under Secretary of Defense in this administration, the Under Secretary of Defense for personnel and readiness, Dr. Chu, was quoted in today's Wall Street Journal as saying, in reference to programs funding military retirees and veterans, "The amounts have gotten to the point where they are hurtful. They are taking away from the Nation's ability to defend itself."

I am appalled, Mr. Speaker, and I believe veterans and military retirees all across this country have a right to be offended that the Under Secretary of Defense in this administration would say that the very men and women who

risk their lives and sacrifice greatly to defend our Nation are responsible for hurting our Nation's ability "to defend itself." It is a wrong statement.

The truth is that veterans have kept their promises to our Nation and now our Nation has a moral obligation to keep its promises to those who have served our Nation in uniform. The truth is, Mr. Speaker, that respecting the sacrifices of our veterans in responsible ways with quality health care and decent benefits is not only the right thing to do, because our veterans have earned those benefits, it is the smart thing to do.

As someone who has represented 40,000 soldiers over the last 14 years, I can tell you that when we break our promises to yesterday's service men and women we call veterans, today's service men and women are going to pay attention. The fact is, in a voluntary military force, we cannot bring the best and brightest into our military if we do not keep our promises made to our veterans.

My good colleague and friend from Texas, the previous speaker, talked about the 58 percent increase in veterans funding during this administration. That is part of the facts. The rest of the story is that much of those increases came from the leadership of Democrats and Republicans here in this Congress. The fact is that over the last couple of years we have added well over \$1 billion, now approaching \$2 billion in funding for veterans health care that the administration did not ask for.

The fact is that we are spending too little, not too much on our veterans and military retirees. The truth is that last year's budget for veterans health care did not even keep up with inflation. So, in effect, we had a real cut in veterans health care spending during a time of war. What happened to the principle of shared sacrifice during a time of war?

I find it outrageous and offensive that Secretary Chu blamed veterans for trying to undermine our Nation's security, when just as easily this administration, along with Dr. Chu, could suggest perhaps we reduce a little bit of that \$124,000-a-year tax break that the administration and the Republicans in Congress have given to people in America making over \$1 million a year.

Maybe before we start blaming military widows for undermining our Nation's security, maybe before Dr. Chu starts criticizing veterans and military retirees who risked their lives in Vietnam and Iraq, Korea, Iwo Jima and Normandy, maybe they should look at their own policies that have provided tax breaks for Members of Congress, tax breaks for people making over \$1 million a year that, in my opinion, make a farce out of the quintessential American value and principle of shared sacrifice during a time of war.

I would hope Dr. Chu will quickly retract his outrageous attack on our Na-

tion's finest, those men and women who have served our country so admirably in uniform.

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Mr. Speaker, I would hope that the administration before the sun sets another day will say that Dr. Chu's statement does not reflect administration policy. I hope that the Republican leadership in the House joins with me in a bipartisan effort to criticize this outrageous and wrong attack on America's military veterans and retirees.

The fact is we should be saluting our veterans, especially during a time of war, not criticizing and attacking them. The fact is that we spend much too little in keeping our promises to our servicemen and women who have retired, not too much.

I hope we can see this kind of statement relegated to the back pages of mistakes made by administration officials. Together the leadership of this House should fight for veterans benefits in the months ahead, although I would say, Mr. Speaker, I am concerned that the House leadership recently fired rather than saluted the Republican chairman of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs in the House because he had stood up for veterans. Our veterans have stood up for us, let us stand up for them.

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The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BURGESS). Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from New York (Mrs. MALONEY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mrs. MALONEY addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

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#### ONGOING WAR IN IRAQ

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. MEEHAN) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. MEEHAN. Mr. Speaker, tonight I would like to address the most urgent issue facing our Nation today, the ongoing war in Iraq.

I recently returned from a congressional delegation trip to Iraq with the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SAXTON) and several of our colleagues on the House Committee on Armed Services. Meeting with our servicemen and women in Iraq made me appreciate their service and their courage even more. My trip also reinforced my conviction that America needs an exit strategy from Iraq, and that is what I would like to discuss tonight.

It has been nearly 2 years since we invaded Iraq and removed one of the world's most brutal regimes; but 2 years later, America's Armed Forces are confronting a far more resilient enemy, a growing insurgency that has plunged Iraq into violence and chaos.

The elections are drawing closer. The peace and stability seem to be moving