



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 109th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

Vol. 151

WASHINGTON, TUESDAY, MARCH 15, 2005

No. 31

House of Representatives

The House met at 9 a.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. PORTER).

DESIGNATION OF THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Speaker:

WASHINGTON, DC,
March 15, 2005.

I hereby appoint the Honorable JON C. PORTER to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

J. DENNIS HASTERT,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MORNING HOUR DEBATES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 4, 2005, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning hour debates. The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to 25 minutes, and each Member other than the majority and the minority leaders and the minority whip limited to 5 minutes each, but in no event shall debate continue beyond 9:50 a.m.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. SKELTON) for 5 minutes.

HOUSE DEMOCRATS SPEAK OUT ON NATIONAL SECURITY

Mr. SKELTON. Mr. Speaker, I rise this morning, along with my colleague, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. RYAN), to talk about how House Democrats feel about national security. It may seem obvious to say we Democrats support our troops and support a strong national defense, but I want to offer today a more detailed explanation of where we stand and why.

These are challenging and difficult times for our country. We are engaged

in a global war against terrorism, we have military forces deployed around the world, and we are involved in two shooting wars in Iraq and in Afghanistan. These deployments and these conflicts are putting a terrible strain on our military, on our troops, on our equipment, on our military families, on our defense budget, and on our national economy.

I believe we will overcome these challenges because we have the greatest treasure in the world, our service men and women, who are selflessly serving around the globe on behalf of this great Nation. They are the key to the war on terrorism, more than any doctrine or system. Their effort and sacrifice will make ultimate victory for us in the war on terror, and in Iraq and Afghanistan, possible.

Unfortunately, the two most people-intensive services, the Army and the Marine Corps, are last in line for funding from the Defense Department. For example, the fiscal year 2006 budget request for the Army, not counting money that may be added in the supplemental, actually declined by some \$300 million relative to last year's level.

Mr. Speaker, it is incredible to think that this administration would actually reduce funding for the Army, the service with the most people and the most equipment in Iraq and Afghanistan, in a time of war. Even if the amount for the Army is ultimately increased because of supplemental appropriations, what kind of signal does this send our troops, who are literally putting their lives on the line, when the administration asks for fewer funds for their service? Our servicemen and women deserve better.

I know I speak for all House Democrats in saying we support our troops, but what is more important for everyone to understand is that supporting the troops is more than just a bumper sticker. It means giving them the best

possible leadership, the finest training, and up-to-date and working equipment, protective armor body, and vehicle armor. We in Congress have a duty to ensure that they have all the tools they need to succeed on the battlefield.

We also have a duty to provide for their families while they are deployed in service to our great Nation. We have a duty to take care of the families of those who are killed and those who are wounded.

Mr. Speaker, we also have a duty to our citizen soldiers, members of the National Guard, members of the Reserve, who also make such extraordinary sacrifices. They not only serve our country beside their active-duty counterparts, but they also do so at considerable sacrifice back home. Because they have jobs in their communities, oftentimes they give up these jobs and ask someone else to pick up the slack created by their absence. Moreover, while they are deployed, their families are entitled to benefits, but it is often hard for families to use these benefits because so many of them do not live close to military facilities.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, we Democrats believe we have an obligation to our Veterans, whether it is allowing them to receive full retired pay in addition to VA disability compensation, allowing their survivors to receive both Social Security and Survivor Benefit Plan benefits, or allowing their survivors to receive Dependency and Indemnity Compensation in addition to VA benefits. We have an obligation to make sure they know that America appreciates their patriotism and is willing to recognize their sacrifices.

America should know that Democrats unanimously take these responsibilities very, very seriously. The supplemental appropriation bill, which we will pass later this week, will have overwhelming bipartisan support. That is evidence of the commitment that we on this side of the aisle have in supporting our troops. But I want to be

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Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.



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clear. While Democrats support a strong military and support using our military when necessary, we do not support squandering it.

My concern, Mr. Speaker, is that we are starting to see visible signs of strain in our military. I do not want to see it break. My colleague, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. RYAN), will speak to these issues momentarily.

The bottom line, Mr. Speaker, is that all Members should support our men and women in uniform, we should not deploy them wantonly, and we should give them the compensation, recognition, and tools they, as well as their families, need and deserve. I know I speak for all Democrats in saying we honor their service.

HOUSE DEMOCRATS SUPPORT OUR TROOPS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. RYAN) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, I would like to start off by thanking the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. SKELTON), our leader on the House Committee on Armed Services, for his very thoughtful remarks.

I too rise this morning, Mr. Speaker, to talk about how House Democrats feel about our national security. My colleague, the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. SKELTON), talked about how Democrats are unanimous in supporting our men and women in uniform. I wholeheartedly agree with that. The gentleman from Missouri also made the point that we are perilously close to breaking the force, and I agree with that observation too, and that is what I would like to focus on here this morning.

Extended global deployment is straining our forces. Fifteen hundred American troops have been killed in Iraq so far, despite the President's claim a year ago that our mission was accomplished. The implications of these decisions and these remarks is that our recruiting is suffering. The Marine Corps missed its recruiting goal for January. The Army missed its goal for January and February. Items not funded in the Marine Corps request include \$13.9 million for recruiting.

It also goes without saying that the war in Iraq and Afghanistan is using up our equipment at an accelerated rate. Current projections are that it would take the Army at least 2 years to recapitalize its current equipment. Unfunded requirements include: In the Army, \$443 million for small arms; \$544 million for the Stryker armored vehicle. The Marine Corps list includes \$145 million for ammunition; \$104 million for light armored vehicles.

Mr. Speaker, these are the very things that our troops need most in Iraq and Afghanistan, yet they have been relegated to the Services' unfunded priority list.

The Air Force, Mr. Speaker, is projecting a \$3 billion deficit in its operations and maintenance budget for fiscal year 2006. Navy leaders directed their regional commands to absorb a \$300 million reduction in base operating funds as a result of the war costs. The Army's shortfall in base operating support is projected to be \$1.2 billion.

Mr. Speaker, forcing the military services to absorb costs of this magnitude is important for several reasons. The budget request for our military services is not adequate for war and general operation. We are about to pass a 2005 supplemental and we will need a 2006 supplemental.

Democrats believe the administration should be honest with the American people about the real cost of the war. Is the administration doing everything it can to address equipment shortages, personal protective gear and the armored vehicles for the troops? Figures in this budget suggest that the Department of Defense may be robbing Peter to pay Paul.

Does the administration have a plan for success in Iraq and to pay the costs of this war? Repeated supplementals is no way to go about doing this country's business. We would not have to make such difficult decisions with regard to our troops' safety if Republicans had not insisted on tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans.

Administration witnesses have not been able to tell us what the benchmarks for success are in Iraq. They do not know when Iraqis can protect themselves. They cannot describe how they intend to integrate the Sunni, Shia, and Kurd factions into those security forces. They cannot describe the new government's plan to ensure inclusion of these groups into the body politic. They cannot tell us when essential services will be fully restored. They cannot tell us how much Iraqi oil revenue is helping to pay the cost of providing security in Iraq, which was promised to us before we went into this war. It has been 2 years since we invaded Iraq, and we should, by now, have a strategy for success.

House Democrats support our troops. We work to ensure they have the equipment and training and to ensure that they succeed in Iraq and Afghanistan. We support taking care of their families here in the States while they are deployed. We cannot do that in a smart, cost effective way that protects the taxpayers without a plan for success in Iraq and honest budgeting for the military departments here at home.

We also need to mention the veterans. The pending budget resolution proposes \$798 million in cuts to mandatory programs. It is unconscionable, I say to my colleague from Missouri, that we are going to have all these troops coming back to the United States and not have the veterans benefits that they need, deserve, and that they have earned.

NATIONAL BIKE SUMMIT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. BLUMENAUER) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, we come to the well of the House often to speak of weighty and contentious issues. This morning, I speak on an important but a lighter note, because this week we have hundreds of cyclists from all over America who are coming to Capitol Hill as part of the National Bicycle Summit.

Fifty-seven million Americans ride bicycles every year. Thirty-three million rode bikes in the last month. And on a daily basis there are approximately one-half million bicycle commuters.

The bicycle industry is an important part of our economy. There are over 6,000 bicycle shops, 2,000 companies that deal with bicycle manufacturing, and tens of thousands of employees. There is a large and emerging industry of bicycle tourism. Yet there is a significant area of difficulty that the cyclists will bring to Capitol Hill pleading their case. Half the Americans are not satisfied with their cycling environment. And although cycling makes up about 7 percent of the total trips, it represents a disproportionate number of the fatalities, and it receives less than 1 percent of Federal funding.

There are significant areas where bicycling could make a difference, not just in terms of transportation. We find in the area of increasing focus on our health habits a growing concern about obesity. Public health officials agree that everyone should have 30 minutes of physical activity every day, and children need an additional 20 minutes, at a minimum, of vigorous activity several times a week, yet 78 percent of our children fall short of this goal.

Well, those of us in Congress can give some good news to the bicycle advocates we will be meeting with. The near unanimous passage of the transportation legislation last year continues the legacy of transportation funding in enhancing the community infrastructure. We have seen, under the ISTEA and the most recent legislation, the overall funding raised from less than \$5 million a year in 1988 to over \$423 million in 2003.

There is an opportunity to enhance the cycling environment with the important Safe Routes to School program that will be able to fund and plan routes that allow our children to be able to walk and bike safely to school. There are other opportunities that we might talk to our friends about. I have introduced, with my colleague, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. FOLEY), the Bicycle Commuter Act to extend transportation commuter benefits for those who bike to work. There is the Conserve by Bike program, wherein the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. OBERSTAR) is seeking to explore additional ways to understand and communicate