or informed of the decision to bypass the Buy American Act. I spoke with a small business owner yesterday who would have gladly bid on the order for the berets if she had only been given the opportunity. What is more, she could have made the berets for almost $3 less than it is costing you and me and every taxpayer to import them from Communist China.

Also, I heard from retired Lieutenant Colonel William Luther. Colonel Luther wrote:

> Those who can act on this matter need to wake up and understand that what they are about to let happen will cost the Army and our country far more than money can ever buy.

Mr. Speaker, these are just a few of the letters that I have received on this issue, but these letters represent the feelings and sentiment of thousands who are sickened by this original decision and by the bogus resolution that the Rangers were forced to agree to. I am still greatly perplexed and extremely disappointed that this decision and the series of bad decisions that followed were allowed to stand. I hope that it is not too late for this Congress to intervene on behalf of the Rangers, small business owners and U.S. manufacturing companies before it is too late.

I along with many of my colleagues will not let this matter simply drop. We will continue to encourage the committees of jurisdiction to hold hearings so the American people can know the truth once and for all.

Mr. Speaker, I close by saying, God bless our men and women in uniform, and God bless America.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from the District of Columbia (Ms. NORTON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Ms. NORTON addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

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

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

REGARDING THE BUDGET FOR DEFENSE

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

Mr. SKELTON. Mr. Speaker, it is quite familiar to me to stand here and address the subject of military budgets. For many years, under administrations of both parties, I have pointed out where we believe the House as a body and America as a Nation were failing to set appropriate priorities in the defense budget. Often, indeed far too often, I and other Members noted that we were trying to do too much with too little. In fact, last year I asked the Budget Committee to add $12 billion for the Department of Defense.

That is why I was glad to see both candidates for President advocate increases in the defense budget. It was good news. That is the right step, regardless of one's party. If we can keep our promises to the troops and maintain an effective defense, I do not care if the money comes from Democrats, Republicans or Martians.

That is why I have to say I am disappointed with the result. President Bush's defense budget for 2002 provides about $325 billion for national security activities, nearly $311 billion of that for the Department of Defense. That is a whole lot of money, to be sure. But then you have to take out the retiree health care provisions that the gentleman from Mississippi (Mr. TAYLOR), the gentleman from Hawaii (Mr. ABERCROMBIE) and I initiated and which were passed into law last year; and then you have to adjust for inflation. When you do that, guess what? The actual increase in the defense budget is $100 million from what President Clinton proposed. $100 million.

If any of us won that much in a lottery, we would be rich. But in the Department of Defense, what does $100 million do? $100 million is a pay increase for every soldier of $1.85 per pay period. Or it is one-forty-fifth of an aircraft carrier. Or it fixes the gymnasium at West Point. Or it runs the ballistic missile defense program for 6 days. Or it is 1½ F–15 fighters. You pick whichever you like, because for that money you get only one. A $100 million increase in the defense budget is not really too much to write home about. When the President during his campaign said that help is on the way, he must have meant spiritual help, because $1.85 does not help anybody very much.

But let us be fair. President Bush wants to increase pay by more than $1.85. On February 12, he told soldiers at Fort Stewart that he would increase pay by $400 million and add in other benefits for a total of $5.7 billion. And there is $100 million to pay for that.

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Well, let us not forget the budget included a $2.6 billion increase in research and development. Not a bad idea, as such. But add that to the pay increase of $5.7 billion, and that is $8.3 billion; and you have to get that out of a $100 million stone.

I am just a country lawyer, but it seems to me if you increase spending by $8.3 billion, but have only $100 million more to do it, you have to cut something else to make the numbers work out. We do not know what is going to get cut yet. The department has not finished the first of a series of defense reviews. But what do the choices look like?

You could cut procurement, if you can find a way to keep planes designed in the 1960s and built in the 1970s in the air safely; and if you are willing to let the Navy slide below 300 ships; and if you are ready to stop the Army's acquisition of armored vehicles for its current dismounted infantry. I am not willing to do any of these things, and I hope the Pentagon is not either.

How about operations and maintenance costs? Well, if you are willing to train even less, and let your ammunition shortages grow, and cut flying hours more, and stop repairing the U.S.S. Cole, and live with the health care shortfalls, then you could cut operations and maintenance. I do not want to be the one to tell the troops that they are not going to get help to get them off food stamps, and I hope none of my colleagues would either.

Then you could cut military construction. You could, if you were ready to give up on repairing dilapidated military housing, and stop adding protection against terrorist strikes. You get the idea. There just are not any easy choices when you have only $100 million to pay a $8.3 billion bill.

That is before our tax cut. That is before increasing the budget for missile defense.

It seems to me that part of the solution would be to enact a supplemental spending bill that recognizes just how hard our troops have been working. It would at least help close the gap. But that, too, has been ruled off the table for now.

Mr. Speaker, I will admit, I was one of those who believed that whoever won the Presidency, the military would begin to get the relief it needs; and I know some of my Republican friends believed the same. I am sorry to say that it looks as if we were given false hope.

JUMP-STARTING VALUE-ADDED INITIATIVES FOR AGRICULTURE PRODUCERS

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

Mr. REHBERG. Mr. Speaker, this week, March 18 through March 24, is National Agriculture Week. Agriculture is the number one industry in my State and last week I introduced, along with the gentleman from South Dakota (Mr. THUNE) and the gentlewoman from Missouri (Mrs. EMERSON), two pieces of legislation that I believe will be very important in ag country.

The past few years have brought widespread disasters and record low prices to the agriculture economy. These harsh conditions have prompted some farmers to call for a debate on current farm policy and others to demand a better safety net for producers. While a safety net is important to producers, especially in lean years, America's farmers and ranchers do not want