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House of Representatives

The House met at 12:30 p.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. CULBERSON).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

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

WASHINGTON, DC,
March 5, 2002.

I hereby appoint the Honorable JOHN ABNEY CULBERSON 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 23, 2002, 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 not to exceed 30 minutes, and each Member, except the majority leader, the minority leader, or the minority whip, limited to not to exceed 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Florida (Mr. STEARNS) for 5 minutes.

LEAVE NO VETERAN BEHIND WAITING FOR A MEDICAL APPOINTMENT

Mr. STEARNS. Mr. Speaker, our President often proudly uses a very enthusiastic phrase committing our Nation to better education for our young people, "Let us leave no child behind," and rightly so. Children are the lifeblood of our Nation. But today, with all of the military commitments overseas, I propose another rallying cry, leave no veteran behind waiting to get a doctor's appointment.

Just as we must look ahead and nurture our children, we must look back in gratitude and take care of our veterans who have fought for freedom and democracy. Besides, investing in care for veterans is looking ahead, for timely veterans' benefits can serve as a powerful incentive in steering young people towards armed services careers.

Not a day goes by when I do not hear from a frustrated veteran who cannot get an appointment at a VA outpatient clinic or an inpatient VA bed. I suspect the same is true for most of my colleagues. For too long too few resources have been provided to the VA health care system, resulting in understaffed, underfunded facilities.

Last week Salvatore Stanzione, Assistant Executive Director of the Disabled American Veterans in Florida, presented to me some very disturbing trends. In my district and other parts of Florida, a wait of a year to see a primary care physician, and up to 16 months to see a specialist, is not unusual. Last Wednesday, Commander-in-Chief James Goldsmith of the Veterans of Foreign Wars shared that there are 37,000 veterans waiting for medical appointments in Florida. Intolerably, veterans are kept waiting for the most routine appointments, like diabetes or high cholesterol monitoring. If managed on a timely basis, these conditions are more comfortable to the veteran and less expensive to the American taxpayer.

Yesterday witnessed the bloodiest day of the Afghan War thus far. We mourn the nine American casualties of the downed Chinooks. In addition to those killed in battle, Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld reported that "There have been a number of wounded." Thankfully, he relayed that "close to half of those are already back in the battle, and of the remainder, relatively few have life-threatening wounds."

Today we ask American sons and daughters to give their blood to ad-

vance liberty and to halt terrorism, but when tomorrow comes, we show our veterans a chair in the waiting room. Especially egregious is the long wait for those who served for a long period or sustained a service-connected disability.

A Federal budget, just like that of a household or business, always faces difficult economic choices. But a household must first pay its creditors and buy grocery before it buys artwork and entertainment. This is the most basic necessity of obligation. Just like a household, America ought to first meet its obligations to those whom it owes in exchange for their service.

To exacerbate matters, the government seems to shut the door on other options for health care accessibility. Alternatives have been proposed over the years on expanding VA health care options. We have debated Medicare subvention to little avail. This Thursday, the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs and the Committee on Armed Services will again consider resource sharing between the two agencies.

Mr. Speaker, the gentleman from the First District of Florida (Mr. JEFF MILLER) knows this fight. He has not one single inpatient bed in his district. His veterans have to go to Biloxi, Mississippi, for hospitalization. Meanwhile, he has DOD facilities with available beds. Coordinating arrangements so that his veterans could use these DOD beds would solve this problem.

Mr. Speaker, we are a wartime Congress, and the Nation is in an era of renewed appreciation of soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines. Defense briefs top the headlines, and the box office movies feature current episodes on the wars in Somalia and in Vietnam. Let us embrace this mood and opportunity and commit this Congress to providing the attention and resources to the health care needs of those who have served. Yes, Mr. Speaker, let us leave

□ This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., □ 1407 is 2:07 p.m.

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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no child behind; but, similarly, let us leave no veteran behind waiting for a medical appointment.

SOCIAL SECURITY LOCKBOX

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 23, 2002, the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. DEFAZIO) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. DEFAZIO. Mr. Speaker, over the last 5 years in the House, initiated by the Republican majority, something which I supported, we took a series of votes on something called the Social Security lockbox. Originally, some of my colleagues on the Democratic side opposed this. They said it was a mere gimmick on the part of the Republican majority and an attempt to restrain the social spending of the Clinton administration, and the Republican majority had no intention of safeguarding those funds.

I did not believe that, and I voted for it. I said, it makes sense to me, with the retirement of the baby boom near upon us, we should safeguard those funds and be certain they are used only to pay the benefits for which they are intended by law.

Eight, ten times in the House of Representatives we voted for the lockbox, Social Security lockbox. Unfortunately, that was all superseded by a vote last March when tax cuts were voted on in the House, predicated on shaky economic assumptions that we would have huge and growing surpluses as far as the eye could see. So let us give the money back to the people. Of course, mostly to Americans who earn over \$383,000 a year and have estates worth more than \$5 million, but let us give it back. Over my objections and the objections of others, this rosy scenario was adopted. The Republican leadership said, do not worry, the Social Security lockbox will still be there.

Here we are a year later. The lockbox is crushed, robbed, torn open, and the President has proposed in his budget to spend \$1.5 trillion of the Social Security trust funds, those which were formerly intended to be placed in the lockbox, to fund tax cuts for the wealthy and other operations of the government over the next 10 years.

There is no more talk about a lockbox on the other side of the aisle with a Republican President who wants to give big tax cuts and gifts to the largest corporations and his friends. No, now they have got a new gimmick. What is it? Certificates. At taxpayer expense, we will send out to every person receiving Social Security, and, by the way, we no longer send them checks in the mail anymore because that is too expensive, but now for this special, one-time only offer, we will send out certificates to everybody currently receiving Social Security and their survivors and others receiving Social Security benefits, saying the

Social Security benefits which are being e-mailed to Americans' bank accounts, do not worry, they will keep coming. We will ensure that. These are the same people that gave us the lockbox. Now we are going to have certificates.

Mr. Speaker, how about this certificate? This is a real certificate, and this is what the majority in the House, the Republicans, have to get serious about honoring. This is an irrefutable obligation of the United States of America. Look to this line. "This bond is incontestable in the hands of the Federal Old Age and Survivors Insurance Trust Fund. Bond is supported by the full faith and credit of the United States."

The United States has pledged the payment of the bond with respect to principal and interest. But in their rush to privatize Social Security and in their rush to give tax cuts to the most wealthy, they are questioning whether or not that will be honored. In fact, Secretary O'Neill, the Secretary of the Treasury, appointed by George Bush, the President, said that this is worthless. He said, starting in 2016, when we will have to draw on the interest on these bonds, that is worthless. That means he is questioning every investor in America and around the world who thinks that U.S. Treasury Bonds are the safest haven.

I believe they are. I do not believe Secretary O'Neill when he says it is worthless. I believe he and the President and the Republican leadership here are trying to rush Congress into a hasty privatization plan which will actually accelerate the problems of Social Security in another thrust to help a few people to the disadvantage of the many.

Social Security, if we honor these bonds, with the full faith and credit of the United States Government as it says right there, Social Security is totally 100 percent capable of paying 100 percent of the benefits through the year 2038. Starting in 2038, with conservative assumptions, not the rosy scenario that the Republican majority pushed through last year for the big tax cuts, but with conservative economic assumptions, it will have about a 25 to 27 percent problem. That is 73 percent of benefits could be paid forever after 2038.

So we have to address that problem, that 25 to 27 percent problem starting in 36 years. But we do not address it by further reducing the trust fund, giving them to the wealthy in tax cuts, or privatizing the system in a way that reduces trust fund income for Social Security, because then we have created an even bigger problem.

Mr. Speaker, that is the real agenda here. They want to go after Social Security. They have already broken open the lockbox; now watch for the crack-erjack box top in the mail, the certificate that gives us a hollow promise.

PROTECT U.S. STEEL MANUFACTURERS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 23, 2002, the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. PENCE) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. PENCE. Mr. Speaker, I am a strong advocate of free trade. As an original co-sponsor of Presidential Trade Promotion Authority, I fought on the floor of this very Chamber to give this President the ability to negotiate down trade barriers because I simply believe, as a Hoosier Member of this institution, that trade means jobs from automotive and manufactured exports to agricultural exports that we grow in such abundance in the heartland of Indiana.

But the reality is that, in the arena of worldwide steel, unfair trade practices and steel dumping have actually destroyed jobs in this country and impaired our national security.

Today we learned that President Bush has decided to impose selective tariffs of up to 30 percent on foreign steel imports using section 201 of the Trade Act. I rise today to commend the President on his decision to protect the American steel industry and, more than that, to lay the foundation to protect America's national security for generations to come.

The reality is America is recovering from a mild recession, and we must ensure that our Nation and our economy continues on a full path of recovery. A thriving steel industry will significantly aid in this task. However, the steel industry has been under increased pressure from unfairly subsidized imports of foreign steel. Foreign companies and governments have undermined our domestic industry through dumping practices and eroded our own ability to manufacture steel in this country.

In response to this problem, the International Trade Commission conducted an investigation and held hearings at which I had the privilege of testifying. The ITC unanimously found that low-priced imports have seriously injured domestic steel production in the United States. Every American should understand the steel industry has been facing years of unfair competition. These unfair trade practices have already caused over 30 bankruptcies in the steel industry and cost thousands of American jobs.

Steel production is the bedrock of a viable manufacturing base, but I also would add today that it is absolutely imperative to our national security. America must not become dependent on foreign steel, as we have become dependent on foreign oil.

□ 1245

The reality is, as the caskets are slowly lowered off the transport aircraft at Andrews Air Force Base today, the Chinooks, the Black Hawk helicopters, the rifles, the artillery that are being fired at this hour in the