

develop a deeper understanding of elemental mathematical concepts.

Ms. Parks believes that letting her students be successful in front of their peers is the key to getting them to take risks to succeed. Further, she finds unique approaches to teaching and problem solving and encourages critical thinking in her students. Making learning fun, according to Ms. Parks, is the key to bringing math and science closer to students. In addition to this award, Ms. Parks has also been recognized by the Kohl Teacher Fellowship.

I am very pleased to recognize Ms. Parks today before the U.S. Congress for her hard work and dedication to the families and students of Northstar Middle School. Being one of a hundred 7th–12th grade teachers nationwide to receive the award, Michelle Parks exemplifies excellence that should be the goal of all educators in the United States. Our Nation has long been the global leader in scientific research and development. In order to maintain that edge and strengthen America's competitiveness, it is critical that we make the necessary investments to educate and train the next generation of scientists, researchers, and innovators.

As a Member of the Education and the Workforce Committee, I have introduced legislation to establish a competitive undergraduate grant program to improve opportunities for education and job training in math, science, engineering, and technology. Further, during reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, I, along with Chairman MCKEON and Representatives EHLERS and HOLT, included an amendment in the Higher Education Act that will provide additional resources and assistance for students choosing to study in these fields.

Mr. Speaker, we are deeply indebted to teachers such as Ms. Parks who are the leaders in sustaining our Nation's innovation and competitiveness with our children.

On behalf of a grateful Nation, I more importantly, on behalf of the many students who have benefited by having Ms. Parks as their math teacher, I say congratulations and thank you.

COMMENDING RICHMOND COUNTY NATIVE AND AMERICAN IDOL CONTESTANT BUCKY COVINGTON

(Mr. RYAN of Wisconsin asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. RYAN of Wisconsin. Mr. Speaker, I yield my time to the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. HAYES).

Mr. HAYES. Mr. Speaker, today I want to congratulate Rockingham, North Carolina, native and "American Idol" contestant Bucky Covington for pursuing his dream and using his God-given talent to sing. Bucky is returning home, but he quickly established himself as a rising star and a contestant to watch. It's easy to understand why Bucky's strong vocals and love for Country and Southern Rock clearly defined his success each week as Americans tuned in to the most popular show on television. Bucky will be returning home to Richmond County in North Carolina, a true idol to many for his extraordinary singing voice and the charisma he personified in front of millions as he represented his community,

family and friends. Bucky, we wish you the best, and I know that great opportunities lie ahead for you.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES FOR RETURNING VETERANS

(Mr. MICHAUD asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. MICHAUD. Mr. Speaker, the Department of Veterans Affairs has underestimated the need for mental health services for returning veterans.

The Kansas City Star recently reported that the number of troops back this year from Iraq and Afghanistan who will seek care far post-traumatic stress disorder from the VA will be five times higher than the VA projected.

Earlier this year the VA reported that it anticipated 2,900 new PTSD cases from returning veterans for fiscal year 2006. But in just 3 months, in fiscal year 2006, VA had already seen 4,700 new cases of possible PTSD.

I am very concerned that the VA will not have the staff and programs to help the new combat veterans and to meet the need of veterans from past wars. VA may be forced to ration care. This is wrong. This issue needs to be addressed.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that the article of David Goldstein from the April 30 issue of the Kansas City Star be inserted in the RECORD.

[From the Kansas City Star, April 30, 2006]
NUMBER OF TROOPS NEEDING HELP THREATENS TO OVERWHELM VETERANS ADMINISTRATION

(By David Goldstein)

WASHINGTON.—The number of troops back this year from Iraq and Afghanistan with post-traumatic stress disorder could be five times higher than the Department of Veterans Affairs predicted.

Instead of 2,900 new cases that it reported in February to a veterans advocate in Congress, the increase could be 15,000 or more, according to the VA.

At the Kansas City VA Medical Center, only nine vets from current combat were diagnosed with PTSD in 2004.

Last year, it was 58. In just the first three months of fiscal 2006, the hospital saw 72.

"It's absolutely incredible," said Kathy Lee, at the Missouri Veterans of Foreign Wars.

A former Army nurse in Vietnam who works at the hospital, Lee said, "Every single Iraq vet who comes in, I give them a list and say, 'How many of these (PTSD) symptoms do you have?' It's almost nine out of 10."

A top VA mental health official said it was difficult to predict the number of new PTSD cases because of unknown factors like the troop discharge rate and how many veterans will use the VA.

But Laurent Lehmann, associate chief consultant for mental health, disaster, post-deployment and post-traumatic stress disorder, acknowledged that 2,900 new cases "would be an underestimate." He said the VA hoped recent increases in funds and new programs "would catch" unanticipated cases.

"Are we ahead of the curve?" Lehmann said. "That's the question I don't think I can answer except to say we're going to be monitoring our heads off on this."

John Baugh, who attends a PTSD support group at the Kansas City VA Medical Center,

said many soldiers still in combat zones are suffering from the disorder.

"They think that the numbers are high right now," said Baugh, 31, a former driver for an Army construction battalion in Iraq. "Wait until those guys get out and try to start functioning in the civilian world. There's going to be hell to pay."

The miscalculation on PTSD echoes last year's underestimation by the Bush administration of how many Iraq and Afghanistan veterans would need medical treatment. It had underfunded VA health care by \$1 billion, despite assurances to Congress that the department had enough money.

Congress subsequently added \$1.5 billion to the VA's budget, but money problems still loom.

"They're going to be short and they're going to be playing catch-up," Cathy Wiblemo, deputy director for health care at the American Legion, said of the VA's PTSD treatment. "They're not going to have the money, and the waiting list will grow."

PTSD is an anxiety disorder that can follow combat or other traumatic experiences. Symptoms include survivor's guilt, flashbacks, nightmares, depression and irritability. It can lead to drug abuse and even suicide.

The war in Iraq presents a higher PTSD risk than other wars, said Robert Ursano of the Department of Psychiatry at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences.

"Since it's a terrorist war, one could be under attack in any spot," he said. "There is an enduring sense of a lack of safety."

Among the half million veterans who have served in Iraq or Afghanistan, more than 144,000 have gone to the VA for health care. Nearly a third have been diagnosed with mental disorders, with nearly half of those PTSD, according to the VA.

The White House asked for \$80.6 billion in 2007 for the VA, including \$3.2 billion for mental health programs. But Rep. Michael Michaud, a Maine Democrat on the House Committee on Veterans Affairs, said the VA would need more, sooner.

"What's going to happen is unless we give added resources, they're going to have to start rationing care," Michaud said. "It's going to have to start pitting veterans against veterans."

Jeff Schrade, a spokesman for Sen. Larry Craig, an Idaho Republican and chairman of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, said Craig was unhappy over the VA's botched estimates on health care last year.

Congress now requires quarterly budget reports, which Schrade said show that VA's budgeting appears to be on track.

"What concerns us is they're seeing a lot more patients than they anticipated," he said.

The VA's contradictory estimates on PTSD surfaced in February. Prior to a Capitol Hill budget hearing, the agency replied to written questions from Rep. Lane Evans of Illinois, ranking Democrat on the House VA panel.

Asked about the need for mental health services, the VA told Evans that it expected to see 2,900 new cases in fiscal 2006, which began Oct. 1 and ends Sept. 30.

A week later, the agency issued its latest quarterly report on use of the VA by Iraq and Afghanistan veterans.

The numbers indicated it had diagnosed 4,711 possible cases just from October through December—more in the first three months than it told Evans to expect over the entire fiscal year.

VA spokesman Jim Benson said the estimate of 2,900 cases was based on earlier data. The latest quarterly numbers were still in the draft stage at the time of the hearing, he

said, and VA officials stuck with the earlier data because trying to explain “would be more challenging and perhaps more confusing.”

“The reason they felt it was OK to do that was that, although the numbers are increasing” due to more troops being discharged and seeking help, Benson said, “the rate of PTSD is staying relatively constant.”

But critics said that even if the annual PTSD rate was constant, the number of cases was rising nonetheless.

“They continue to downplay the severity and the real size of the problem,” said Paul Rieckhoff, executive director of the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America and a platoon leader during the war.

VA officials also had at the time of the February budget hearing a report from the department’s Special Committee on Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. It warned that the VA was unable handle services to new combat veterans as well as survivors of past wars, saying: “We can’t do both jobs at once within current resources.”

Most of the PTSD cases the VA sees involve veterans from earlier conflicts, primarily Vietnam.

Baugh of Kansas City won’t talk much about his Iraq deployment because it triggers bad memories. But when he returned home in 2004, he couldn’t escape them.

“I was jumpy, angry, irritated, sleeping one, two hours a night,” Baugh said. “I was totally worn out. I’d drink and drink and drink just to shut the memories down and the nightmares.”

His wife pushed him to get help. Baugh said he’ll “jump through the ceiling” if she drops a frying pan. The clattering of kids skateboarding down his street sounds just like “gunfire in the distance: kack-kack-kack-kack.”

Joshua Lansdale knows about nightmares and noises, too. A 23-year-old veteran from Kansas City, North, he spent 11 months in the Sunni Triangle as a firefighter and emergency medical technician with the Army Reserve’s 487th Engineer Detachment.

“It was a pretty hot zone,” he said. “We took a lot of mortar fire, IEDs, car bombs, saw a lot of helicopter crashes and worked the UN embassy bombing. I dragged a lot of people out of burning buildings, cars, motorcycle wrecks and explosions.”

Back home, Lansdale was diagnosed with PTSD and joined a support group at the VA hospital. He predicted that returning troops would overrun the VA.

“A third of all soldiers are seeking help,” he said. “Do we have the capability of treating all those soldiers? I don’t think we do.”

HONORING THE LIFE OF SERGEANT MIKE STOKELY

(Mr. WESTMORELAND asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. WESTMORELAND. Mr. Speaker, Sergeant Mike Stokely joined his fellow soldiers in the National Guard in Iraq, turning down a service opportunity that would have allowed him to stay home in Georgia.

Last year Sergeant Stokely married his high school sweetheart. Then, 1 week later, he answered his Nation’s call to duty and headed to Iraq as part of the 48th Brigade.

Sergeant Stokely’s work in the Army fulfilled his lifelong dream. According to his father, Coweta County Solicitor Robert Stokely, from the time Sergeant Stokely was in middle school, he

cared more about seeing his name on dog tags than seeing his name on a driver’s license. As a rising senior high school star, he chose to spend his fleeting days of youthful freedom at a Fort Benning boot camp.

In early August of last year, Sergeant Stokely called his family from Iraq and told them that if the time came to make the ultimate sacrifice for his Nation, he was ready. Then on August 16, 2005, after having been on duty for more than 30 hours, Sergeant Stokely volunteered for another mission. Sergeant Stokely stood guard as his best friend and another soldier checked a suspicious location. An IED exploded, and Sergeant Stokely died in his best friend’s arms. It happened 3 months after his wedding day.

The father of this American hero told me, “As much as I hurt for the loss of my older son and the memories we will never have, I am thankful for the 23 years we had and a son who knew his purpose in life, and his dreams were fulfilled.”

I want to commend Sergeant Stokely and his family for his honor and service and his dedication to duty.

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OUR MEN AND WOMEN ON THE FRONTLINES OF IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN

(Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, let me just reflect on what we owe the men and women on the frontlines of Afghanistan and Iraq. I think we owe them the best equipment, the best leadership, and the best minds. So I was disturbed as I read the article in the USA Today that indicated that more soldiers were being killed in the utilization of Humvees in 2005 and 2006 than had been in the years past in the war in Iraq.

Mr. Speaker, it is important and imperative that an immediate reaction be given and an action be taken by the Department of Defense to help save the lives of our young men and women on the frontlines, the reinforcement of Humvees, new technology in body armor, new technology in head gear. Our children are dying. They are without the proper body armor and Humvees, and that is insufficient for a country of this size.

Finally, it is imperative that a full accounting be given about the dollars that have been spent in Iraq as to what they have been spent for, why they have been spent, and, of course, an accounting that shows that no corruption has taken place.

HONORING DODIE DITTMER OF THE COMMUNICATION WORKERS OF AMERICA

(Mr. BROWN of Ohio asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. BROWN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, I rise to honor my friend Dodie Dittmer of the Communication Workers of America for her 43 years of service. She started at Ohio Bell in Dayton back in 1963.

Dodie Dittmer has always been there for workers and, in the great tradition of the labor movement, always been there for her community. She was always a good soldier, a private in her humility as she was willing to pitch in on every task and a general in her leadership. She was always a good soldier in the battle for social and economic justice. For that, we are all thankful to Dodie Dittmer.

REDUCING CLASS SIZE

(Mr. MEEK of Florida asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I come to the floor today to announce that last Friday a bipartisan coalition of 20 State senators, all 14 Democrats and 6 Republicans State senators, came together to protect the people of the State of Florida as it relates to smaller class sizes.

The people of Florida in 2002 voted and approved class size limits in Florida to make sure that the State pays for smaller class sizes and not local districts. Floridians said three things: Public education is a high priority, classrooms packed with students are unacceptable, and that Floridians want tax dollars to provide a quality education for all of Florida’s children. But some State officials tried to undercut that decision made by the voters for Florida’s children.

Today, I want to enter the names of those senators and those State representatives that put forth their vote to make sure that we protect those that are in public education now in the State of Florida and those that are yet unborn. They should be commended and their names placed into the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD for future generations.

State Senators Nancy Argenziano, Dave Aronberg, Larcenia Bullard, Walter Campbell, Jr., M. Mandy Dawson, Paula Dockery, Rodolfo Garcia, Jr., Steven Geller, Anthony Hill, Dennis Jones, Ron Klein, Alfred Lawson, Jr., Evelyn Lynn, Gwen Margolis, Les Miller, Nan Rich, Gary Siplin, Rod Smith, Alex Villalobos, and Frederica Wilson.

State Representatives Bruce Atone, Loranne Ausley, Dorothy Bendross-Mindingall, Kim Berfield, Mary Brandenburg, Phillip Brutus, Susan Bucher, Edward Buller, Faye Culp, Joyce Cusack, Terry L. Fields, Anne M. Gannon, Dan Gelber, Audrey Gibson, Kenneth Gottlieb, Ron Greenstein, Bob Henriquez, Wilbert Holloway, Ed Homan, and Arthenia Joyner.

State Representatives Charles Justice, Will Kendrick, Marcello Llorente, Richard Macheck, Matthew Meadows, Frank Peterman, Juan-Carlos Planas, Ari Porth, John Quinones, Curtis Richardson, Julio Robiana, Yolly Roberson, Timothy Ryan, Franklin Sands, John Seiler, Irving Slosberg, Christopher Smith, Eleanor Sobel,